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Tober, Linda Mae

RELIGION AND RELIGIONS: A STUDY IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

*Vanderbilt University*

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RELIGION AND RELIGIONS: A STUDY  
IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

By

Linda Mae Tober

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Date:

|                            |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| <u>Edmund Farley</u>       | <u>Nov. 22, 1982</u> |
| <u>John Clouner</u>        | <u>Nov. 22, 1982</u> |
| <u>W. Jackson Foster</u>   | <u>Nov. 22, 1982</u> |
| <u>Charles H. Hambrick</u> | <u>Nov. 22, 1982</u> |
| <u>Robert C. Hooper</u>    | <u>Nov. 22, 1982</u> |

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This work is the culmination, of sorts, of a longstanding interest in and puzzlement with the phenomenology of religion. It is also the beginning of a task which seeks to uncover the contributions of Husserl's phenomenology to our understanding of religion.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: RELIGION AND RELIGIONS AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

#### Introduction

The aim of this work is to describe and critically assess the method of the phenomenology of religion and its manner of approach to the question of the relation between the multiplicity of cultural forms and traditions which are religions and the nature or essence of religion. This is the issue of religion and religions.

This issue emerges as a problem in investigations of that large complex of data which describes the materials of the various religions taken together. It is the question of whether or not there is anything underlying this data which can be identified as religion, and which is not simply an arrangement of the common elements of the many religions. In the work of the phenomenology of religion, in particular, this issue becomes an important methodological problem as this movement has attempted to discern the fundamental structures of religion and describe the nature of homo religiosus by means of analysis of the materials of the various religions.

In order to address this issue, however, it is necessary to first describe the way in which the phenomenology of religion is a movement, to describe its distinctive methodological features. But to describe these features is, in a sense, to constitute the phenomenology of

religion as a movement; to consider a variety of works, the common methodological assumptions and perspective of which are seldom brought into self-conscious clarity. The effort to uncover the method of the phenomenology of religion not only leads to a diversity of literature, but also shows the specific importance of the intellectual context of the beginning of this movement. This is the historical thesis of the work which follows. In order to understand the method and work of the phenomenology of religion as a movement, one must look to its predecessors as those who first elucidate the issues which provide the impetus for the emergence of the phenomenology of religion, and at the same time, set the limits for its reflections. In other words, the claim here is that the method of the phenomenology of religion needs to be approached in the context of its beginning, as a reaction to and development of the work of its predecessors, in order to expose those underlying presuppositions which have been employed without examination and which circumscribe the specific practice of this movement.

The predecessors of the phenomenology of religion are those scholars who first sought to establish the study of religion as an independent discipline, those scholars who inaugurated Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft.<sup>1</sup> In their work is found the struggle to give expression to the boundaries within which the general issue of the

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<sup>1</sup>Specifically, these scholars are F. Max Müller, P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, and C. P. Tiele. Their work, taken together, presents the founding efforts of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft. Below, in Chapter II, an analysis of the specific approach and sense of the foundation of this emerging science is provided as background and context for description and critical discussion of the method of the phenomenology of religion.



relation between religion and religions can be addressed. And these boundaries remain as those within which the work of the phenomenology of religion takes place. Specifically, there is the effort to establish the study of religion independently of the kinds of commitments and presuppositions which attend theological and philosophical reflection. This intention generally describes the context within which Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft attempts to lay a foundation for inquiry into the nature of religion. And this same intention continues to inform the phenomenology of religion's efforts to elucidate a method for descriptions of homo religiosus and the structures of religion. The effect of this intention for both the founding efforts of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft and the work of the phenomenology of religion, is to limit the understanding of the capacities of reflection and to locate discussions of the nature of religion within a narrowly prescribed realm.

It should be noted, though, that the fundamental link between the phenomenology of religion and the presuppositions of the founding work of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft is not an element in the self-understanding of the phenomenology of religion. Rather, this movement sees itself as a criticism and redirection of the approach of its predecessors... Taking the work of these scholars to be infused with "positivistic" conceptions of historical and cultural evolutionism, the phenomenology of religion claims to approach the question, What is religion?, in a new and more adequate way. Instead of uncovering broad similarities and common elements among the world's religions as in the practice of the comparative efforts of Allgemeine

Religionswissenschaft, this movement seeks to go beneath all extrinsic theoretical biases in order to describe the ways in which religion is a dimension of human existence, showing the irreducibility of religious phenomena and the unique character of religious experience. Yet as the work of the phenomenology of religion is examined, we see that what this movement accomplishes is to make radical certain of the unnoted assumptions of its predecessors, turning them into crucial elements of its own method. The discovery and analysis of this fundamental connection between the founding efforts to establish the study of religion as a discipline and the work of the phenomenology of religion shows the distinctive character of phenomenology taken as a method in the study of religion.

Or, in other terms, the consideration of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft here is an attempt at a kind of archaeology of the phenomenology of religion and its specific goal of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> We will look to the forerunners of this movement as predecessors, as those who established the theoretical context in which the ideas and method of the phenomenology of religion takes shape and in which its task is fixed. The claim is that by showing the underlying and unrecognized connection between the phenomenology of religion and its predecessors we will gain new insight into the method of this movement as well as insight into the way in which the issue of religion and religions comes to be a problem.

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<sup>2</sup>This sense of the term is borrowed from Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

### The Meanings of the Term Religion

As attention is directed to the work of the phenomenology of religion, several senses of the meaning of the term religion are encountered. In the first place, there is a general sense of religion which stands in contrast to the associated complex of meanings and claims which constitute individual religions. And religion, in this same general sense, is also considered over and against the specific data of the many religions which are taken to be the manifestations of religion. In contrast, religion itself is understood to be a mode or dimension of human existence. This is what is meant by the phenomenology of religion's efforts to focus its attention on homo religiosus and by its aim to elucidate the essence of religion, not viewed simply as a recurring cultural form or stage in the history of human cultures, but as a structure of human experience.

When this movement attempts to set forth the method appropriate to this task, however, another sense of the meaning of religion is discovered. In the practice of the phenomenology of religion, religion is approached as if it were a common structure running through the data of religions. That is, as a term for a distinguishable kind of historical-cultural phenomenon. This sense of the term seems to emerge by way of discussions of the notion of evidence required for unprejudiced inquiry. Such evidence is taken to be located in the materials or data of religions as uncovered by the historical sciences and, finally, the phenomenology of religion sees its own elucidation of the essence of religion as the completion of the work of the history of religions. This ambiguity, if not confusion, in the meaning

and uses of the term religion persists throughout the literature of this movement.

The root of this ambiguity, once again, can be found in the approach of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft where we also discover several senses of the meaning of religion. First, there is the sense in which religion is taken to be a feature or capacity of human being, thus laying the foundation for the possibility of the determinant forms of religious experience. But at the same time religion is also considered as the aggregate of the many religions, the various data of religions. The way in which these meanings of the term are used point to a paradox of foundation (discussed in Chapter IV) in Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft which also implicitly operates in the phenomenology of religion. It is this paradox which leads to the heart of the methodological problem of religion and religions in the work of the phenomenology of religion. The goal which this movement seeks to attain is description of the essence of religion as a dimension of human experience. Yet the method of this movement is one which limits itself to examination and arrangement of the data of religions. The problem, then, becomes how can we move from analysis of the data of religions to description of that dimension of human experience which is religious? Or, how can religions yield religion?

The Phenomenology of Religion and  
the Phenomenology of Husserl

In order to address this question, and in order to pursue our investigations of the phenomenology of religion beyond its link with Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft to its fundamental methodological

features, we will rely on some insights of Husserlian phenomenology. This effort is not so much to place the philosophical program of Husserl over and against the phenomenological method which is practiced in the study of religion as it is to explore the kinds of contributions philosophical phenomenology might offer a phenomenology of religion. To this end, attention will be directed to certain features of Husserl's phenomenology as a way of uncovering further the assumptions and commitments of the phenomenology of religion. In a way, this is the crucial step in any phenomenological inquiry, that of the critical clarification of all unexamined presuppositions. This is one reason for the turn to the predecessors of the phenomenology of religion in the first place, and this is why we look to Husserl's phenomenological philosophy for insight into the requirements for a phenomenology of religion.

Through a phenomenological reflection on the phenomenology of religion an assessment of the possibility of this movement to achieve its goal within the limits this movement sets for itself will be made. Further, certain themes of Husserl's phenomenology will be employed in order to expose the assumptions of the phenomenology of religion regarding the capacities and value of reflection and to point out the need for, and way to, a new foundation for inquiry into the nature of religion. The ensuing work, then, is an attempt to provide a phenomenological critique of the phenomenology of religion, a constructive analysis of the method of this movement and its approach to the question of religion and religions.

### Prolepsis of this Work

The work which follows attempts to understand and begin to address this question of religion and religions and, as such, is a part of the traditions of the phenomenology of religion. But it is also a critique of that tradition as the effort here is to uncover and question this movement's presuppositions and method in order to recommend a way to a foundation for phenomenological inquiry into the nature of religion.

This study begins with consideration of the foundational inquiries of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft and their relationship to the method of the phenomenology of religion. Through our examination of the method of the phenomenology of religion and its connection with the assumptions of its predecessors (Chapters II and III), we discover the crucial role of comparative method as it is taken to be both that which provides a foundation for inquiry into the essence of religion and a method of practice.

The emergence of this distinctive role for comparative method is traced to the attempt to avoid the theoretical distortions engendered by the aims of theological thinking and philosophical reflection, and, in the phenomenology of religion, the avoidance of "reductionistic" theories of the human sciences. This turn to comparative method signifies a certain devaluing and suspicion of the capacities of reflection in general and, specifically, a limiting of discussions of the nature of religion to a narrowly prescribed realm. Finally, it is the outward and the observable--the materials of religions as uncovered by the historical sciences--which is taken to be the evidential basis for

all descriptions of the nature of religion. Given this approach, we discover the phenomenological method practiced by this movement which is limited to the morphological and typological arrangement of the materials of the various religions.

Having uncovered and described the basic methodological features of the phenomenology of religion, a further step is taken toward uncovering the fundamental presuppositions of this movement as we focus upon the relationship between the valuation of the "facts" of religions and the possibility of describing the nature of religion as a dimension of human existence. Here (now in Chapter IV) a tension between the general understanding of essence and the priority given to historical research is examined. There is a paradox of foundation already present in the reflections of Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft and pervading the work of the phenomenology of religion.

Although there appears to be an attempt to provide a foundation for inquiry into the essence of religion through analysis of the nature of human being (i.e., a description of a religious a priori), when we examine what are considered to be the necessary requirements for a "neutral" and unprejudiced inquiry what seemed to be a philosophical prolegomenon instead turns out to be the outcome of comparative-historical research. So the phenomenology of religion, again through a demonstrated link with certain crucial assumptions of its predecessors, is shown to be in the untenable position of attempting to provide a foundation for its work in its own practice.

This analysis of the method and assumptions of the phenomenology of religion leads (in Chapter V) to a reconsideration of the possibilities

of this movement's efforts to describe homo religiosus. As the empiricist commitments and implied "non-rationalism" which underlie the phenomenology of religion's work are exposed, it becomes clear that, given the limits of this movement's methodological decisions, its task and goal is inevitably frustrated. The phenomenology of religion, finally, is seen to participate in a general crisis of thought which attends the human sciences, and which serves to bring into doubt the possibility of describing the nature of religion at all.

If it is possible to take up the task of the phenomenology of religion, we must proceed in a new way, considering in a new light the issue of religion and religions. Husserl's phenomenological method, and especially the possibilities of eidetic phenomenology, shows that the appropriate role of a phenomenology of religion is not that of "completing" the work of the historical sciences, but that of providing a foundation for the "history of religions." Exploring the various implications of this insight, this study is concluded (in Chapter VI) with a statement of the methodological requirements for a phenomenology of religion.



## CHAPTER II

### ALLGEMEINE RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT

#### AS PREDECESSOR TO THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

##### Introduction

The intent of this chapter is to consider how the precursors of the phenomenology of religion have laid the foundation for the work of this movement. Specifically, the aim of this analysis is to show those attitudes which enabled the founders of the "general science of religion"<sup>1</sup> to conceive of its subject matter as the material for a discipline. The following general description of the contours of the

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<sup>1</sup>Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft will be translated here as "general science of religion" or "science of religion." Sometimes the general terms, "history of religions" or "comparative study of religions," are used to describe the discipline of the study of religion. These terms have the advantage of eliminating misleading connotations often associated with the use of the word science. But they do not express the efforts of at least the "founding fathers" of the study of religion to establish a discipline marked by independence of subject matter and rigorous method, i.e., as a science. For discussion of the use of these terms cf., among others, Joachim Wach, "Development, Meaning and Method in the Comparative Study of Religions" in Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 3-26; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions in America," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa eds., The History of Religions (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 1-30; Mircea Eliade, "Chronological Survey: The 'History of Religions' as a Branch of Knowledge" in Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. 216-232; Philip H. Ashby, "The History of Religions," in Paul Ramsey, ed., Religion (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 1-49; Hans H. Penner and Edward A. Yonan, "Is a Science of Religion Possible?", Journal of Religion, 52 (1972): 107-133.

general science of religion will be made explicit through an examination of the works of three seminal figures in this discipline: F. Max Müller, C. P. Tiele, and P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye. The work of these scholars provide a portrait of the founding of the general science of religion, and are of central concern not only to an understanding of the development of the study of religion as a discipline but also to our efforts to understand the central assumptions of the phenomenology of religion.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of the general science of religion is most often traced to the publication of Max Müller's Introduction to the Science of Religion in 1873, P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye's Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte in 1887, and C. P. Tiele's Elements of the Science of Religion in 1899.<sup>3</sup> These works signaled the "discovery" of homo religiosus, or the uncovering of the fundamental significance of religion as a general and distinctive area of human existence. It is this "discovery" which gave birth to the general science of religion, a science emancipated from the philosophy of religion and from theology

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<sup>2</sup>For extended treatments of the development of the discipline and discussion of the importance of the work of Müller, Tiele, and Chantepie, see Eric J. Sharpe, Comparative Religion (London: Duckworth, 1975); H. Pinard de la Boullaye, L'Etude comparee des religions (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesnes, 1929); L. H. Jordan, Comparative Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905); J. Waardenburg, ed. Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion, Religion and Reason 3 & 4 (2 vols.; The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1973).

<sup>3</sup>F. Max Müller, Introduction to the Science of Religion, Vol. XIV Collected Works of the Right Hon. F. Max Müller (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899); P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte (2 vols; Freiburg: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, Paul Siebeck, 1887); C. P. Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897-1899).

which promised to uncover new methods of inquiry appropriate to the distinctive character of its subject matter. And it gave rise to a vision such as that expressed by Eugene Burnouf:

This present century will not come to an end without having seen the establishment of a unified science whose elements are still dispersed, a science which the preceding centuries did not have, which is not yet defined, and which, perhaps for the first time, will be named science of religions.<sup>4</sup>

As the general science of religion was said to be a distinct area of interest, there was a concomitant demand to elucidate a method of study which would be appropriate to this area of study. The effort was not merely to say that any region of study demands certain kinds of methodological reflections, but that this particular region, the study of religion, is not one which can somehow take over the methodologies of the natural or historical sciences. This is the sense in which the study of religion was said to be sui generis. The general science of religion attempted to sketch not only the specific region which it intended to consider but also to develop those concepts and procedures which would enable one to adequately approach the nature of phenomena taken to be in the "spiritual" as well as "physical" world. These methodological reflections were aimed in two directions. Although the general science of religion intended to consider the whole range of religious manifestations, it was also maintained that there was something which held together these various manifestations and enabled them to constitute a science. This something is religion.

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<sup>4</sup>Eugene Burnouf, La Science des religions cited and trans. by Joachim Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions, p. 2.

However, the general science of religion also asserted that one could not arrive at religion, describe its nature, apart from consideration of its various forms. The conclusion was that the emerging science of religion was to find its basis neither in theological nor philosophical reflection, and that this science was to be characterized by neutrality and objectivity.<sup>5</sup>

For the science of religion to assert that it is distinguished from theology means not only that it is to serve no specific dogmatic purpose, but also that the science of religion is not to find its place in Theological Encyclopedia as an introduction to historical, practical, or systematic theologies, i.e., a science of religion is not to serve the function of natural theologies. If it were, the locus of the study of religion would be changed such that it would no longer be a scientific discipline, but either be a preliminary work of the theological sciences, or stand in opposition to theological inquiry. The presupposition of those who attempted to establish this science, however, was that there is a unity of religion in the variety of its forms, and that this unity could not be understood aside from inquiry into the structures

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<sup>5</sup>Wach understands the use of the term "science of religion" to indicate the separation of this discipline from the philosophy of religion and especially from Christian theology. (Comparative Study of Religions, pp. 3-4); Sharpe (Comparative Religion, pp. 26-32) makes this point also noting that the science of religion was to be freed from all a priori theories and particularly from any conception of Christian theology based upon revelation. This, he indicates, is due to the promise of the methods of induction and, specifically, to evolutionary conceptions of the sciences. On this matter see also, E. R. Goodenough, "Religionswissenschaft", Numen VI, 2 (1959): 77-95, who claims that a science of religion must accept the methods of the natural sciences and divorce itself from any understanding of religion based on theological interpretations of revelation.

and common elements of the forms. This was not simply an anti-theological or atheistic position.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the assertion was meant to indicate that theology could not provide an adequate foundation for a scientific enterprise. This was because it was assumed that theological reflection was fundamentally based upon claims to authority or to revelation. Whether or not one would agree with such an evaluation of theological thinking, it is certain that the general science of religion intended to establish itself outside of the theological circle.<sup>7</sup>

The second way in which the study of religion as a science intended to assert its distinctive character was by separating its own work from that of philosophy. The study of religion was not taken to be a philosophic enterprise because it was held that although religion itself was to be an object of study, it was not because this object could be perceived by means of an essential intuition. Rather, it could be made manifest only through the accomplishments of the

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<sup>6</sup>In fact, Müller states that the result of the work of the science of religion will be a strengthening of the Christian religion. In the Preface to his collected papers Müller writes: "The Science of Religion may be the last of the sciences which man is destined to elaborate; but when it is elaborated, it will change the aspect of the world, and give new life to Christianity itself." F. Max Müller, Chips from a German Workshop (4 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), vol. 1: xix.

<sup>7</sup>The separation between theology and the science of religion on these grounds continues to be expressed by contemporary exponents of the science of religion, especially by those who understand its work as parallel to that of the natural sciences. See, for example, Th. P. van Baaren, "Science of Religion as a Systematic Discipline: Some Introductory Remarks," and especially, H. G. Hubbeling, "Theology, Philosophy and Science of Religion and their Logical and Empirical Presuppositions," both in Th. P. van Baaren and H. J. W. Drijvers, eds., Religion, Culture and Methodology (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1973), pp. 35-56, and pp. 9-34, respectively.

historical disciplines. It was to be by means of comparative analysis of the varieties of religions, the forms of religions which are its expression, that the common elements and structures of religion could be described. What this indicated was a particular prominence given to historical, ethnographical, and anthropological data, to the "facts" of religions, since it was held that these kinds of materials were capable of revealing the structures of religion, and thus its essential unity. Philosophy, in this context, was understood to be a speculative discipline which began with a priori statements and proceeded to erect systems upon them. Such a procedure was seen as wholly inadequate for a foundation of a genuine science which was to consider the experience of the religious, experience which could be adequately described only in terms of actual historical occurrence.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>This is not to say that the founders of the science of religion considered themselves wholly unrelated to philosophical thinking. It is far from the case. Müller published a translation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason in 1881 and his own work is greatly indebted to a certain reading of Kant. Tiele states that there is a "philosophical character" to the study of religion indicating a certain deductive aspect which characterizes the science of religion. (Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I: 18.) And Chantepie asserts that the science of religion has become a possibility only since religion was recognized as an object of philosophic study apart from Christian revelation. This he attributes to the work of Schleiermacher, Kant, and especially Hegel. (P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, Manual of the Science of Religion [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891], pp. 3-4.) However, the fathers of the science of religion claimed that philosophical reflection could not provide a basis for the science of religion since, by its nature, philosophy tended to be speculative. As such, it was not able to pay adequate attention to the "outward manifestations" of religion, to the facts of religions, on the most fundamental level. What these people objected to was the claim of philosophy to understand the nature of religion, and thus provide the foundation for scientific inquiry. According to the founders of the science of religion, another kind of inquiry, a different method, had to be uncovered in order to establish the study of religion on firm ground.

This is basically the position of the general science of religion in its inception. Neither philosophy (understood as speculative reason) nor theology (taken as existential judgment) is capable of describing the nature of religion, since both ignore the wide variety of the facts of its occurrence. While it was understood that theology is directed toward a particular form of religion, its goal is to testify as to the power of that form in the transformation of human existence. As such it is not able to show the religious content of that form--as it is a general possibility of human existence. And while philosophy recognizes religion as a general possibility of human beings, it does not attend to the specificity of the occurrence of religions.

For the general science of religion to investigate the nature of religion while taking into account the particularity of its historical incidence, a different method of inquiry needed to be adopted. It is the role of comparative analysis, the bridge between historical inquiry and a priori theories, which provided the key for the foundation of a general science of religion.<sup>9</sup> To speak of comparative method as the

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<sup>9</sup>The source of the comparative method in the science of religion is often traced to the influence of the philosophies of the Enlightenment, natural science notions of evolutionary development, and the promise of historical discoveries. Allen, for example, cites these factors and concludes, "This 'new science,' with its extraordinary enthusiasm and its unlimited confidence in the prodigious discoveries about to be made, was largely shaped by the values of the Enlightenment and the scientific progress of the nineteenth century." (Douglas Allen, Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions; Religion and Reason 14 The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978 , p. 25). To a great extent this is true and the insights of such observations are valuable. The task pursued here, however, is somewhat different. As the effort is to uncover the methodological foundations of this movement at a level beneath the fluctuations and developments of intellectual history, attention will be directed to the way in which the prejudices and

key to the foundation of the science of religion indicates both the assumptions of the founders of this science and the kind of results they sought in the application of this method.

According to the founders of the general science of religion, the only way to approach the nature of religion as such is through comparative examination of the whole range of its incomplete manifestations. Although religion was taken to be an ideal unity, i.e., its essential nature is nowhere given, it is only through compilation and analysis of the common characteristics of the determinate occurrences of the imperfectly realized forms of religion that the nature of religion can be understood. Since one must turn to the variety of religions in order to apprehend the essence of religion, all claims which are understood to be objective in nature must be based upon the widest (factual) evidence that can be obtained. As a science, the study of religion was to find its domain in the numerous varieties of the historical occurrence of religion, and from investigation of these materials it was to be capable of discovering the nature of religion.

As we turn from this brief sketch of the founding of the general science of religion in the work of Müller, Tiele, and Chantepie to the

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assumptions of the science of religion find their basis in thought. So when comparative method is spoken of here as a sort of outgrowth of the science of religion's rejection of philosophical and theological reflection, I am speaking not so much of the kinds of allegiances the founders of this science held, but of those sometimes unnoted theoretical decisions which allowed them to see the promise of comparative method as so great. It is true that theories of evolution in the natural sciences and the wealth of material uncovered by historical inquiry, in a sense, account for the growth of comparative method. But they do not account for the attempt of the founders of the science of religion to see this method as a way of uncovering the nature of religion. Nor do they account for the claims which were made for comparative method as a foundation for a science of religion.



interpretive task of deciphering the nuances of this portrait, the effort will be not so much to say what these scholars did to inaugurate a science of religion, but to say how they conceived of its possibility. The aim is to show what kind of theoretical and methodological decisions were made in order to establish this emerging science on a firm basis.

### F. Max Müller

Müller's conception of the foundation and task of the study of religion is directly related to his allegiance to the scientific spirit or, more generally, to his understanding of the fundamental characteristics of knowledge. Because Müller views knowledge as consisting of two factors, the senses and reason, he insists that the science of religion must not find its basis in either theological notions of revelation or some sort of philosophical a priori since both of these ignore the evidence through which knowledge achieves its certitude.<sup>10</sup> Of the two elements of knowledge, "the gate of the senses" is primary.<sup>11</sup> Out of the materials of sense perception is constructed conceptual

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<sup>10</sup>"As I had meant to treat the Science of Religion in a strictly scientific spirit, I had carefully excluded all theories which ascribe the origin of religion either to innate ideas or to supernatural revelation. I had placed myself completely on what is called a positivist platform." F. Max Müller, Natural Religion (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889), p. 194. Cf., also, F. Max Müller, Anthropological Religion (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), p. v; F. Max Müller, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882), p. 21, p. 32, p. 177, pp. 226-227; and Müller, Science of Religion, p. 78, for Müller's repeated rejections of a priori notions and ideas of revelation as foundation for the study of religion.

<sup>11</sup>Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 226.

knowledge, abstract and general statements. For Müller, reflection is limited to the arrangement of the materials of sense perception, and to constructing general statements on the basis of such arrangements.<sup>12</sup> It is this positivist interpretation of the limits of the capacities of reflection which leads Müller to understand the foundation of the science of religion in a particular way.

If neither theological nor philosophical claims are to form a basis for the study of religion understood as a science limited to the bounds of reflection, the question remains as to what can provide a foundation. For Max Müller, the answer to this question is to be found in his notion of the "faculty of the infinite" or the "faculty of faith." Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly what Müller considers this faculty to be, it is clear that he does not intend to locate it in any of the particulars of religious apprehensions, in what may be considered the contingencies of historical life. According to Müller, religion can be understood in two ways: "as a silent power working the heart of man," and "in its outward appearance, . . . as something outspoken, tangible, and definite, that can be described and communicated to others."<sup>13</sup> It is the first of these which accounts for the

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<sup>12</sup>"What is granted to us is that all consciousness begins with sensuous perception, with what we feel, and hear, and see. This gives us sensuous knowledge. What is likewise granted is that out of this we construct what may be called conceptual knowledge, consisting of collective and abstract concepts. What we call thinking consists simply in addition and subtraction of percepts and concepts. Conceptual knowledge differs from sensuous knowledge, not in substance, but in form only. As far as the material is concerned, nothing exists in the intellect except what existed before in the senses." Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, p. 89.

possibility of the second. However, this possibility is not to be taken as some sort of intuitive a priori or speculative postulate. Müller is careful to say that explanations of the conditions under which religion is possible must rest upon evidence gleaned by comparative examination of the historical forms of religion.<sup>14</sup> Still, the science of religion does not find its basis solely in the content of the forms of religion. While it is possible to speak of traditions and bodies of doctrines which may describe all that constitutes a particular religion, there remains another and more fundamental sense in which the word religion is used. This is the way in which one can speak of a faculty of the infinite:

If we say that it is religion which distinguished man from the animal, we do not mean the Christian or Jewish religion; we do not mean any special religion; but we mean a mental faculty or disposition, which independent of, nay in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names, and under varying disguises. Without that faculty, no religion, not even the lowest worship of idols and fetishes, would be possible . . . .<sup>15</sup>

Because this faculty of the infinite is general and universal, it can provide the basis for a science of religion, i.e., the faculty of the infinite accounts for the possibility (at least the subjective possibility) of any religious apprehension whatsoever, and so can form the foundation for the examination of religions in a scientific manner.

In the Introduction to the Science of Religion, Müller describes this faculty in terms of a disposition or capacity distinguished from the senses and reason. This is the root of his understanding of the

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<sup>14</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, pp. 14-17.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

sui generis nature of religion. Because of its distinctive nature, discussion of the faculty of the infinite must be guarded by careful definition,

. . . in order to confine it to those objects only, which cannot be supplied either by the evidences of the senses, or by the evidence of reason, and the existence of which is nevertheless postulated by something without us which we cannot resist. No simply historical fact can ever fall under the cognisance of faith, in our sense of the word.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to add though that Müller does not consider the faculty of the infinite to be merely a negative element, an empty abstraction. Nor does he want to say that it is a "substantial something." Reflecting on the notion of faculty in general, Müller writes, "Faculty signifies a mode of action, never a substantial something. Faculties are neither gods nor ghosts, neither powers nor principalities. Yet Faculties are inherent in substances, quite as much as forces or powers are."<sup>17</sup> Although Müller does not use these terms, it seems legitimate to interpret the faculty of the infinite as a description of that modification of consciousness which enables one to apprehend the infinite, i.e., as a condition of possibility. Sometimes Müller speaks of this condition of possibility as a "potential energy" or as the "Not-yet."<sup>18</sup> Much as human beings have a capacity or faculty of language, the faculty of the infinite is present as a dimension of human existence, as a mode of possible activity. The faculty of the infinite can be

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<sup>16</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, pp. 14-15.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>18</sup>Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 24.

characterized as that which allows the particulars of religions to be apprehended as religious. Müller does not attribute this faculty to a kind of "theistic instinct" given from without, but speaks of religion's possibility as a fundamental element of human consciousness.

. . . though an adequate definition . . . of all that has ever been called religion is impossible, what is possible is to give some specific characteristics which distinguishes the objects of religious consciousness from all other objects, and at the same time distinguishes our consciousness, as applied to religious objects . . .

Let it not be supposed, however, that there is a separate consciousness for religion. There is but one self and one consciousness, although that consciousness varies according to the objects to which it is applied. We distinguish between sense and reason, though even these two are in the highest sense different functions only of the same conscious self. In the same manner, when we speak of faith as a religious faculty in man, all that we can mean is our ordinary consciousness, so developed and modified as to enable us to take cognisance of religious objects.<sup>19</sup>

Müller's denial that religion's possibility is located in some extrinsic factor (transcendent or speculative) and instead insisting that it must reside in the possibilities of human action, is an attempt to express what he considers the fundamental insight of Kant's philosophy, the union of sensation and thought.<sup>20</sup> What Kant has shown is

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<sup>19</sup>Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>F. Max Müller, The Science of Thought (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), pp. 139-140. It should be noted, though, that this account of Müller's location of religion's possibility is open to debate. Emile Durkheim attributes Müller's understanding of religion's possibility to his "naturism" and continues to accuse Müller of a psychological argument which states that ". . . religion's reason for existence was to give us a conception of the world which would guide us in our relations with it . . . ." Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 98. Durkheim finds such an argument untenable and concludes,

"If we have need of knowing the nature of things, it is

that the two elements of knowledge, sensations and their form, are correlative. So, according to Müller, any attempt to use the forms of intellect on anything which transcends the limits of sensations is not permissible.<sup>21</sup> If we are to have knowledge of religious experience, it too must begin, as all other experience, with the senses. And if the faculty of the infinite is to account for the possibility of religions, it must do so on the basis of positive knowledge, on the basis of sense experience.<sup>22</sup> Müller's reliance on the evidence of the senses is clear.<sup>23</sup> It is also clear that Müller thinks what is given

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in order to act upon them in an appropriate manner. But the conception of the universe given us by religion . . . is too greatly mutilated to lead to temporarily useful practices . . . it [religion] was in no condition to fulfill its function, and people would not have been slow to perceive it: failure being infinitely more frequent than successes, would have quickly shown them that they were following a false route, and religion, shaken at each instant by these repeated contradictions, would not have been able to survive." (Durkheim, Elementary Forms, p. 98.)

It seems to me that although there is a "naturalist" side to Müller's work, it is not essential. He understands religion as having both an objective and subjective dimension. There are religious objects, and human consciousness is so structured that it is able to apprehend them as religious. In no case is Müller to be considered as the kind of functionalist who understands religion's origin to be located in a desire for a conception of the world which makes sense. If he were, Müller's whole attempt to elucidate the subjective foundation of religion in the faculty of the infinite would be inexplicable. His attempt to show that the infinite is somehow given in sense experience would be without purpose. And, his notion of an independent discipline to be called the general science of religion would remain without a foundation.

<sup>21</sup>Müller, The Science of Thought, p. 140.

<sup>22</sup>"If the idea of the infinite had no sensuous percept to rely on, we should, according to the terms of our agreement, have to reject it." Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 227; cf., also Müller, Natural Religion, pp. 192-196.

<sup>23</sup>Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 31.

in sense experience is not only the definite apprehensions one might normally associate with sense experience, but also an apprehension of the infinite. It is because of this that ". . . religion, far from being impossible, is inevitable, if only we are left to our senses, such as we really find them, not such as they have been defined for us."<sup>24</sup>

The faculty of the infinite is not simply located in the facts or claims of some religion, but apprehension of the infinite is nonetheless somehow "given" in the particulars of sense experience. In other words, while the infinite is not to be identified with any particular fact or collection of facts, still it is sense experience which provides the evidence for general statements such as those concerning the infinite. In terms of Müller's work, it is not the facts themselves, but the arrangement of the facts which forms the basis in evidence for any general statements concerning the infinite or the nature of religion. Müller's position can be read as a version of those arguments from induction which hold that investigation of particulars can generate universal statements which, in turn, form the premises for further deductions. The particulars form the basis in evidence for the general.

For Müller, this position stems from his understanding of Kant. Kant claims that all concepts must be able to relate to the experiential conditions of their application.<sup>25</sup> Müller extends this notion to

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>25</sup>Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), B195 and passim. In general, while Kant denies transcendent

the point at which all a priori thought is denied. At least, this is the case with regard to a general science of religion. Not only must all concepts be able to relate to empirical intuitions, they must also be limited to the arrangement of the contents of these intuitions. This is what Müller takes to be the meaning of Kant's statement, "Concepts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."<sup>26</sup> When Müller employs the faculty of the infinite as a description of the possibility of religions, he does so only on the basis of comparative knowledge of the historical forms, i.e., his claim is founded upon the evidence of the senses which defines the boundaries of reflection. Müller argues that religion as a capacity of human existence is not defined by the contingencies of historical life, but is nonetheless based on the cumulative evidence of historical investigations.<sup>27</sup> This is why "Comparative Theology," which deals with the classification of the historical forms of religions, precedes and provides the evidence for "Theoretic Theology" which is to explain the conditions under which religion is possible.<sup>28</sup> The "tenets of Natural

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metaphysics as a possible form of knowledge--as a science--because it is not possible to obtain knowledge of the realities which conform to the ideas of metaphysics unmixed with experience, he does not deny any form of scientific metaphysics. A scientific metaphysics is possible and will be a priori, not because it is concerned with objects inaccessible to experience, but because it is concerned with the conceptual structure which is presupposed in all empirical investigations. Strawson also makes this point in, P. F. Strawson, The Bounds of Sense (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1966), pp. 15-24.

<sup>26</sup>Müller, The Science of Thought, pp. 139-140.

<sup>27</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, pp. 15, 89.

<sup>28</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, pp. 16-17. A note of clarification should be added regarding the use of the word theology in this context. Here Müller considers theology simply to refer to the science



Religion" which supply the ground on which even revealed religions stand are, for Müller, the result of empirical inquiry, the "classification of all faiths."<sup>29</sup>

In summary, Müller's use of the faculty of the infinite effects the foundation of a general science of religion and points toward its task in two ways. In the first place, Müller argues that the faculty of the infinite accounts, formally, for the possibility of religions. It is a specific modification of consciousness which is distinctively human and is not simply to be identified with either the senses or reason. In this manner, it is sui generis. Since religion's possibility is located in the structures of human consciousness, a scientific examination of the manifestations of religion (i.e., religions) can proceed. One need not turn to some factor not given, whether philosophical or theological, in order to uncover the genesis of religion. However, if this is so the question arises as to what the nature of evidence of such a scientific inquiry might be. This is the second element of Müller's discussion of the faculty of the infinite. If it is to be argued that religion's subjective possibility is located in consciousness, the objective correlate of this faculty must be found in the objects of sense perception. Or, as Müller puts it, the infinite must have ". . . its real roots in the real . . . presence of the

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of religion, and in no sense uses it to indicate thinking based on a notion of revelation or a priori claims of any kind. As a matter of fact, Müller writes in Natural Religion, pp. 45-46, that misunderstanding might be avoided if the word theology were dropped altogether and replaced by Science of Religion.

<sup>29</sup>"Müller, Science of Religion, p. 68.

infinite . . . ."30 So while the faculty of the infinite functions as a kind of a priori which founds the possibility of religions, it does so only because the infinite can be located objectively in sense experience. Neither intuition nor any special kind of reflective act is required to understand the nature of religion or its possibility. The way to the "real roots" is through the practical work of the comparative examination of religions. It is this work which ultimately provides the foundation for all discussions of the nature of religion. Finally, Müller's claim is tantamount to saying that the examination of religions in this way is discussion of the nature of religion.

Much as Müller discusses two aspects of the possibility of religious apprehensions, he isolates two elements of the actual practice of the general science of religion. In the work of the science of religion, however, the order is reversed. While Müller found it necessary to show first that religion's possibility was located in the structures of consciousness and then to deal with the objective basis of the examination of religions, the practice of the science of religion must begin with attention to the particulars of religions before considering the general nature of religion.

The vast amount of data uncovered by historical research in the nineteenth century and the promise of comparative method enabled Müller

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<sup>30</sup>Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 45: "If the infinite had not from the very first been present in our sensuous perceptions, such a word as infinite would be a sound, and nothing else. For that reason I felt it incumbent upon me to show how the presentiment of the infinite rests on the finite, and has its real roots in the real, though not yet fully apprehended presence of the infinite in all our sensuous perceptions of the finite."

to speak of looking ". . . all facts straight in the face, to see whether they are facts or not, and, if they are facts, to find out what they mean."<sup>31</sup> This is the starting point of the work of the science of religion. It begins with facts and it intends to discover their meaning. Two steps are required to accomplish this. The first is that one consider all the facts. That is, only by considering the whole range of materials which constitute the variety of religion's occurrence can the student of religion hope to discover what is essential to religion. This is the import of Müller's famous statement concerning the study of religion, "He who knows one, knows none."<sup>32</sup> Any description of the nature of religion cannot rest on the analysis of the content of only one particular form of religion, but must seek a broader and stronger foundation. Such a foundation can be supplied by the application of comparative method. This is the second step. According to Müller, comparative analysis is the primary method of scientific inquiry since it guarantees a sure foundation in evidence.

. . . all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison. If it is said that the character of scientific research in our age is pre-eminently comparative, this really means that our researches are now based on the widest evidence that can be obtained, on the broadest inductions that can be grasped by the human mind.<sup>33</sup>

It is such a method which promises the student of religion the "old thread of Ariadne which has led students of many a science through darker labyrinths even than the labyrinth of the religions of the

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<sup>31</sup>Müller, Anthropological Religion, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

world."<sup>34</sup> Müller contends that within the morass of material uncovered by historical investigations it is possible to discern the essential features of religion, but such insight is not simply given in these facts. The actual practice of the study of religion must be to classify the facts in order to understand them.

Comparative method serves both to define the science of religion as a discipline distinguished from the field of historical studies, and to give the student of religions access to the central elements of religion. Müller has described the work of the science of religion by isolating several moments of its practice.

First of all, [it consists] in a careful [sic] collection of all facts of religion; secondly in a comparison of religions with a view of bringing to light what is peculiar to each, and what they all share in common; thirdly, in an attempt to discover, on the strength of the evidence thus collected, what is the nature, the origin, and purpose of all religion.<sup>35</sup>

As the first aspect of the task of the science of religion is to collect and classify the facts of religions, the second aspect is to apply the results of such inquiry to the general purpose to which all special research is directed, elucidating the essential features of religion. The comparative method is the foundation of both these aspects. It is the pivotal element in the practices of the science of religion, serving as the key to understanding the facts uncovered by historical investigation and providing evidence for all descriptions of the nature of religion.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>35</sup>Müller, Natural Religion, p. 11.

Müller's name for the description of the essential features of religion uncovered by classification and comparison is Natural Religion. Natural Religion is like a Grammaire generale, those fundamental rules indispensable to any grammar but fully expressed in no language.<sup>36</sup> Müller holds that there "never has been any real religion consisting exclusively of the pure and simple tenets of Natural Religion . . . ."<sup>37</sup> Yet these tenets of Natural Religion are uncovered by means of the comparative analysis of real religions. Although there is no single religion whose content reveals the nature of religion, that content which is held in common by the various religions does indicate the tenets of Natural Religion. In other words, the generalizations which comparison yields finally are the tenets of Natural Religion.<sup>38</sup>

This completes the foundational circle for the study of religion. In consciousness, the possibility of religions apprehensions is

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<sup>36</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, pp. 68-72. The comparison with the study of languages is especially apt in this case since, according to Müller, both disciplines rest on comparative analysis. Moreover, since religions themselves are ultimately connected with the resources of language, Müller concludes that ". . . whatever classification has been found most useful in the Science of Language ought to prove equally useful in the Science of Religion." Science of Religion, p. 90.

<sup>37</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, p. 71.

<sup>38</sup>Müller's position stems from the confidence he has in comparative method, and, more specifically, from his notion that scientific investigation does not end with specific and specialized research. Genuine scientific inquiry pursues the nature of things, and comparison can yield insight into the nature of things. "There is no science of single things, and all progress in human knowledge is achieved through comparison, leading on to the discovery of what different objects share in common, till we reach the widest generalisations and the highest ideas that are within the ken of human knowledge." Müller, Natural Religion, pp. 417-418.

accounted for by a particular capacity, the faculty of the infinite. Human beings are so constituted that they can experience immediately and directly the infinite. With our experiences of the finite and the definite is given the sense of the infinite or the "Not-yet." The faculty of the infinite and its objective correlate, the positive occurrence of religions, provide the possibility and the certain evidence for descriptions of the nature of religion, or what Müller calls Natural Religion. The various elements of the nature of religion are to be uncovered through comparative examination of the data of historical investigations. Such description would be bound neither by speculation nor narrowness of vision, but could obtain understanding based on the surest kind of evidence and, therefore, would be the accomplishment of a true science.

#### C. P. Tiele

Tiele, like Müller, intends to describe a foundation for the study of religion which rests neither on theological argument nor philosophical speculation. Philosophical speculation is rejected not so much because it is always in error but because it consists in arbitrary abstractions. This, according to Tiele, is for reasons not entirely philosophy's fault, since before the mid-18th century philosophical inquiry had but the scantiest of means to work with and "was obliged to draw the facts it required from very troubled and insufficient sources."<sup>39</sup> Tiele's position reflects the general desire of the emerging science of religion to establish a foundation for its work

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<sup>39</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, 9th ed., s.v. "Religions" by C. P. Tiele.

which is in accordance with the demands of science. As such, the science of religion must avoid the "specious edifice of mere hypotheses and fancies, an amusement by no means harmless, in which speculative philosophers of a former generation used to delight."<sup>40</sup> Philosophy does have an important role to play in the study of religion, but its reflections come only at the end of the work of the science of religion. Instead of speculative philosophical reflection providing the basis for the practice of the science of religion, the work of the science of religion--the comparative historical study of religions--provides "one of the pillars on which not a merely speculative and fantastic, and therefore worthless, but a sound scientific philosophy of religion should rest."<sup>41</sup> The role of this sound philosophy of religion is not essentially different from the work of the science of religion itself, but it does express the goal of the science of religion to provide an answer to the difficult question, What is Religion? Taken within the context of the science of religion, the philosophical reflections which are its culmination will be able to address this question on the basis of the strongest kind of evidence, and will stand within the limits of certain scientific inquiry.

The "theological bias" is rejected as a foundation for the science of religion in much the same way. In the first place, theological reflection regards all religions except one as false.<sup>42</sup> It begins

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<sup>40</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup>Tiele, "Religions," p. 358.

<sup>42</sup>Tiele, "Religions," p. 358. This notion is similar to Müller's argument against theological reflection which states that thought based

with a concept of revelation. More importantly though, it is theology's task which makes it impossible to form the foundation for the study of religion. Theology's direction toward a particular religion indicates certain limitations which do not allow theological thought to provide a basis for the work of a science of religion. According to Tiele, theology can relate many facts but can provide no reliable, i.e., scientific, way of analyzing them. In order to do this it needs the science of religion. It is only when the task of comparison and explanation is accomplished by the science of religion that theological knowledge can approach understanding. As Tiele puts it,

. . . it is only when continuing in touch with the science of religion that theology deserves the name of science and becomes a scientia instead of a mere eruditio. Facts accurately observed and faithfully recorded may be very curious; but, if not explained, not correlated, they are curious and nothing more. Theology indeed teaches what a certain religion is, what it demands of its adherents, how it has arisen and attained its present condition, and even what it ought really to be in accordance with its own principles; but if it does not compare its religious system with others, and above all test it by the laws of the evolution of religious life, which the science of religion alone can reveal, it can neither wholly comprehend nor fully appreciate its own religion. It may then be a branch of knowledge, not without practical use, but it is not a science.<sup>43</sup>

For Tiele, theological investigation is important to the study of religion as it supplies material for its reflections, and the science of religion is essential for theological activities as it provides the necessary methodological foundation for theological insight. This is

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on some notion of revelation instead of the sure evidence of the senses must not be considered foundational since its purpose could only be dogmatic or practical in in no case scientific.

<sup>43</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, p. 14.



the sense in which theology can become an element of the study of religion even though it is different in kind.<sup>44</sup> It does so in much the same way as philosophy, only with the recognition of the foundational role of the inquiry of the science of religion.

The fundamental rejection of both philosophical and theological knowledge as ways of understanding the nature of religion sets the limits for what Tiele takes to be the task of the science of religion. According to Tiele, this task is not to investigate the reality of the objects of faith or the nature of the superhuman itself, but is to inquire into religion based on such belief.<sup>45</sup> This is taken to be

. . . the aggregate of all those phenomena which are invariably termed religious, in contradistinction to ethical, aesthetical, political, and others. I mean those manifestations of the human mind in words, deeds, customs, and institutions which testify to man's belief in the superhuman, and serve to bring him into relation with it.<sup>46</sup>

Tiele supposes that within the limits of this domain the study of religion can uncover the nature of religion, and do so in a scientific manner. This is for two reasons. First, Tiele maintains that religion

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., I, pp. 11-14.

<sup>45</sup>This kind of attention to the positive manifestations of belief instead of the nature of the transcendent is sometimes understood in terms of the phenomenological epoche. Waardenburg, for example, discusses the "phenomenologies" of Tiele and Chantepie in his article, "Religion between Reality and Idea: A Century of Phenomenology of Religion in the Netherlands," *Numen* XIX (1972), pp. 128-203. While his description of the formal aspects of their work is illuminating, his definition of the phenomenology of religion is so broad as to conflate the study of religion in general and the phenomenological approach. This seems to me to ignore the distinctive aspects of both. While I would argue that the science of religion forms the background and the foundation for phenomenologies of religion, I do not want to say that it is a sort of nascent phenomenology.

<sup>46</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, p. 4.

is manifest in phenomena, and that only by investigation of the "outward manifestations" of religion can one understand the various religions.<sup>47</sup> Second, Tiele holds that religions are different expressions of religion. So by directing attention to all the diverse religious phenomena the essential elements of religion can be uncovered and made explicit.<sup>48</sup> And the goal of the science of religion, to show ". . . what religion really is in its essence,"<sup>49</sup> can be reached.

The actual work of the science of religion is divided into two parts, the morphological and the ontological. The first part consists of inquiry into the changes and transformations of the various forms of religious manifestations. Although Tiele claims that there is a certain "deductive reasoning" which characterizes the science of religion's goal to describe the essence of religion, this "deductive reasoning must start from the results yielded by induction, by empirical, historical, and comparative methods."<sup>50</sup> The analysis of these

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<sup>47</sup>"What religion is, and whence it arises, we can only ascertain from religious phenomena. Our inmost being can only be known by its outward manifestations. To wander in our speculations away from what has been discovered and established by anthropological and historical research, is to enter on a false path. To start from any a priori position, and to erect a system upon it, is a waste of time and leads to nothing." Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, pp. 18-19.

<sup>48</sup>"What we are concerned with in the last instance--a knowledge of the fixed, permanent, and unchangeable element in religion, and of its essential characteristics--we can only attain by gleaning it from the different forms which religion has assumed throughout the whole course of the world's history." Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, pp. 53-54.

<sup>49</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., I, p. 18.

materials constitute the morphological part of the study of religion. It should be noted that Tiele does not envision this inquiry only in terms of historical study. The investigations and discoveries which historical study engenders are illuminating and, in fact, essential, but they remain only a first step. This is because ". . . by the historical method we obtain only history. But we want more than that; we wish to understand and to explain."<sup>51</sup> In order to understand and to explain, to reach essential knowledge of the forms of religion, the comparative method must be employed. Comparative examination of religions functions for Tiele in much the same way as it does for Müller; that is, it serves to bridge the gap between the specificity of historical investigation and the general elements sought for in explications of the meaning of religious phenomena.

In his morphological analysis of the elements of religions, Tiele distinguishes several elements of the development of religion which include the stages of development (nature to ethical religions), directions of development (theocratic and theanthropic), and the laws of development (including the laws of human nature which are applicable to the development of religions).<sup>52</sup> Tiele's notion of the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., I, pp. 17-18. Cf., also Tiele's Britannica article where he indicates that historical investigation of religions is a necessary first step for the study of religion but adds that "like every genuine scientific study, historical investigations, if they are to bear fruit, must be comparative." Tiele, "Religions," p. 358.

<sup>52</sup>This is found in Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, Chapters 3-5, 6-7, and 8-9, respectively. A summary of these elements is also given in Tiele's Britannica article, which includes diagrammatical illustrations of the development of religions. For a brief description of Tiele's morphology, see Waardenburg's article, "Religion between Reality and Idea," p. 134.

development of religion is not to be taken simply as an account of the changes of the various forms of religions, i.e., as the growth, decay, and passing of transient forms of human cultural activity, but as a key to understanding the nature of religion itself. Underlying Tiele's concept of development are two important assumptions. The first is that religions exist in unity. There is something which can be named religion. "In short, the hypothesis of the evolution of religion rests on the conviction of the unity and independence of the religious life throughout all its changes of form."<sup>53</sup> So when Tiele speaks of the development of religion, it

. . . does not imply that religion develops locally or temporarily, in one form or another, but that religion, as distinguished from the forms it assumes, is constantly developed in mankind. Its development may be described as the evolution of the religious idea in history, or better as the progress of the religious man, or of mankind as religious by nature.<sup>54</sup>

This leads to the second element of Tiele's understanding of the development of religion, his notion of homo religiosus. Since Tiele understands human beings to be, by nature, religious, an adequate understanding of the human element of religion provides insight into the dimensions of human existence. This is why the science of religion which begins with specific inquiry, with historical and comparative investigation, finds its culmination in philosophy of religion, the description of those elements of human being where religion finds its origin.<sup>55</sup> Or, as Tiele puts it, "religion embraces the whole

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<sup>53</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, I, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Philosophy of religion is used here within the restrictions

man,"<sup>56</sup> "our religion is ourselves."<sup>57</sup> Insofar as we come to understand the essence of religion, we also understand the specifically human element in human beings.

Inquiry into the essence of religion forms the second part of Tiele's Elements of the Science of Religion. He begins with the rejoinder that this investigation is to take place only within the boundaries of the general science of religion. All considerations of the essence of religion must take their stand upon established facts. "Adhering to the same method as before, we shall start from the solid ground of anthropology and history, the well-ascertained results of which can alone enable us to understand the essence of religion and trace it to its source."<sup>58</sup> This sets the limits for statements concerning the essence of religion. The basis in evidence for such statements consists of the forms in which religion is manifested and the common elements of these forms. Since investigations into the essence of religion are not examinations of the reality of the objects of faith, but do concern the nature of religion as a human phenomenon, there is a sense in which the problem the science of religion intends to address is fundamentally psychological.<sup>59</sup> The

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which Tiele places upon it. In no sense does the philosophy of religion provide a foundation for a science of religion but instead describes the permanent elements gleaned from examination of the changing forms of religion.

<sup>56</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, II, p. 23.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., II, p. 24.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., II, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup>Tiele uses psychology as a way of distinguishing the work of

scientific program of the study of religion seeks to show, by means of historical research and comparative method, the enduring elements of religion as well as its origin in the constituents of human being. The latter point is the foundational work of the science of religion which accounts for the possibility of religion but nonetheless rests on the work of comparative study. In other words, although religion's possibility is located in certain features of human existence, these cannot be disclosed except by way of positive and comparative work.

Tiele takes the essence of religion to be the "abiding element" in the various and changing manifestations of religion.<sup>60</sup> It is that which persists through all developments of religions, and it is that from which religions are borne. In order to make explicit this essence, Tiele describes religion as having two sides, the objective and the subjective. The objective side consists of the forms of religion. This is defined as the manifestations of religion; the words, deeds, creeds, and cult activities which are named religious. These elements are both the index and offspring of the subjective side of

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the science of religion from metaphysical speculation. I do not think he is making any claim about a purely psychological root of religion. That is, Tiele is not adopting a Feuerbachian position which would state that religion is nothing more than an objectification of the essence of human being in ideal terms. Tiele considers the terms of restraint for a science of religion to prevent it from making such judgments. As Tiele writes,

" . . . to begin with, let me emphasise this point, that we are not now speaking of the essence of religion in the metaphysical, but solely in the psychological sense. To treat of religion as something more than a mere psychological problem does not indeed lie beyond the province of philosophy in the widest sense, but it certainly lies beyond that of our science." Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, II, pp. 188-189.

<sup>60</sup>Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion, II, p. 191.

religion, religiosity, which is understood as the constitutive and continuing element. It includes emotions, sentiments, and conceptions which together describe the "mental condition" or "innate sense" in which religion finds its origin. On the subjective side Tiele finds the "common root" and the "source" from which all elements of the outward forms of religion spring.<sup>61</sup>

The possibility of religion, whence religion proceeds, rests on an "innate sense" of the infinite which is formally prior even to apprehensions of the finite. According to Tiele, recognition of the finite takes place through a gradual process by means of sense perception which eventually, through the accomplishments of reasoning, is understood as a general idea. The sense of the infinite, however, is not acquired by means of perception or a reflective act, but is constitutive of human beings. "The origin of religion consists in the fact that man has the Infinite within him, even before he is himself conscious of it, and whether he recognizes it or not."<sup>62</sup> Whether or not this sense is well-founded, it cannot be denied that religion (as a human phenomenon) emanates directly from the infinite within, from the distinctive badge of humanity. This is an important point for Tiele since he maintains that the definitive position of the infinite in human life provides a foundation for a science of religion.<sup>63</sup>

Because religion is an expression of human nature itself, Tiele maintains that the unbiased investigations of a scientific enterprise

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., II, pp. 6-24.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., II, p. 230.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., II, pp. 237-254.

cannot ignore it. However, the task of a science of religion is not limited to a kind of foundational inquiry which would examine the constitutive features of human being. It must pursue the essence of religion in the actual occurrence of religion. This is the case because, in reality, the objective and the subjective sides of religion are inseparable. "It is one of the conditions of the life of religion that its internal elements should be reflected in its external, that the subjective should be constantly objectivised."<sup>64</sup> Through an analysis of the subjective as it is "constantly objectivised" one can ascertain the essence of religion in its actual occurrence. This actual occurrence Tiele calls piety. It is the "frame of mind" which necessarily manifests itself in words and deeds.<sup>65</sup> While any particular content of a religion does not matter--the content of the various doctrines, forms of worship, etc., do not pertain to the essence of religion--what persists in these forms does matter. The common elements of religions which continue to be made manifest in the progress of religion's presence become, for Tiele, the actual essence of religion.<sup>66</sup> So when Tiele states that the essence of piety, and therefore the actual (real) essence of religion itself, is adoration, he claims to have uncovered that common and abiding element which describes the occurrence of religion in all of its various manifestations.<sup>67</sup> In

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., II, p. 187.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., II, p. 196.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., II, pp. 190-196.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., II, pp. 198-208.



addition, he claims to have provided the groundwork which the emerging science of religion required.

For the general science of religion to be a genuine science with a certain foundation, it needed to begin with facts established by the historical sciences and had to be able to answer a crucial question: "Can we discover, among religious phenomena, any that recur so invariably that we are justified in regarding them as necessary manifestations of religious consciousness, whatever stage of development the religion may have attained?"<sup>68</sup> In providing an answer to this question, Tiele has outlined his notion of the basis and task of the science of religion. The science of religion receives its impetus from the fact that religion's source is rooted in the distinctively human element in human beings, the infinite within. However, because religious experience necessarily manifests itself objectively, in the facts, the science of religion can begin from the solid ground of anthropology and history. Yet the science of religion must be an independent discipline as it transcends the specificity of narrow research in order to disclose the essence of religion, discerned not by examination of only the particulars of the forms, but by comparative study of the whole range of the manifestations of religion.

P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye

In Chantepie de la Saussaye's major work, Manual of the Science of Religion, he outlines the foundation and major divisions of the study of religion. According to Chantepie, there are three essential conditions

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., II, pp. 2-3.

which must be met for the study of religion to be taken as an independent science.<sup>69</sup> The first of these is that religion as such be considered an object of philosophic knowledge; that is, without beginning from a notion of Christian revelation. Chantepie recognizes the contributions of Kant and Schleiermacher to this end, but takes the work of Hegel to be the true foundation for the science of religion. This is because it was Hegel who not only uncovered the relations between the various modes of studying religion--metaphysical, historical, and psychological--but also showed the harmony between the "idea and realisation of religion."<sup>70</sup> It is this insight which is essential for the science of religion. Since the idea of religion is, in principle, essentially one with its manifestations, it is possible for the study of religion to uncover the nature of religion through investigation of the various religions. The science of religion is given an aim and object. It is provided with the certitude of a broad base of inquiry as well as the possibility of reaching its goal which is to discern the nature of religion as such. And this can be accomplished on the basis of neither a speculative postulate nor some notion of revelation. In short, the study of religion can be a science. The second condition for the science of religion is the philosophy of history. Chantepie maintains that not until the world as a whole, the total life of human beings, was taken as an object of consideration was it possible for

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<sup>69</sup>p. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, Manual of the Science of Religion, trans. by Beatrice S. Colyer-Fergusson (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), pp. 3-7. This is a translation of the first edition (1887) of Chantepie's Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

the science of religion to exist. Instead of viewing history as simply the interplay of outward events, as political history, the philosophy of history introduced what Chantepie calls the history of civilization. Such a broad inquiry into the various elements of human life is an essential condition for the science of religion as it shows the connection of religions with other aspects of life, and paves the way for a "proper classification of mankind."<sup>71</sup> These two conditions supply the framework for a science of religion. But in order for this science to be realized, it must have materials. The discoveries and advances made in the historical sciences proper--in archaeology, philology, ethnography, folklore, etc.--furnish the materials necessary for a science of religion. This availability and collection of material, a result of the research of the nineteenth century, is the third condition for the science of religion. According to Chantepie, these three conditions together account for both the theoretical and empirical possibility of the science of religion. They also provide a clue to Chantepie's conception of the nature of the science of religion and the methods most appropriate to it.

Although Chantepie does not describe precisely the foundation of the science of religion, it is not because he is totally unconcerned with foundational and methodological matters, but because he holds that such discussions deserve fuller treatment than is possible within the limits of the Manual of the Science of Religion. And I would add, it is also because Chantepie grants a certain primacy to the historical

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

studies which comprise the bulk of his work.<sup>72</sup> According to Chantepie, the object of the science of religion is the study of religion, its essence and manifestations.<sup>73</sup> The presuppositions of this study are that there is a unity of religion in the variety of its forms, and that "religion is the specific and common property of all mankind."<sup>74</sup> The study of religion proper is divided into the philosophy and the history of religion, both of which are closely connected. The history of religion looks to the philosophy of religion for a definition of religion in order to decide whether particular phenomena are of a religious nature, but the philosophy of religion would be worthless, Chantepie maintains, if it "disregarded the actual facts that lie before us."<sup>75</sup> Since the science of religion presupposes that there is a unity of religion in the variety of its forms, knowledge of the nature of religion can be achieved through examination of the forms. And because religion is the "common property of mankind," no special

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<sup>72</sup>Chantepie does discuss methodological issues in his Th.D. dissertation, "Methodologische bijdrage tot het onderzoek naar den oorsprong van den godsdienst" (Utrecht, 1871). In this work Chantepie points out the limitations of a purely empirical approach and calls for an "intuitive-speculative" method for questions concerning the origin of religion. It should be noted though that in the Manual Chantepie describes discussions of the origin of religion as philosophical questions not really within the realm of "religious history." He also adds that whatever answer philosophy might provide must "conform itself to the data of ethnography and religious history" (Chantepie, Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 30). For a brief summary of Chantepie's dissertation, see Waardenburg's article, "Religion between Reality and Idea," pp. 140-142.

<sup>73</sup>Chantepie, Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

methods or insights are required beyond those of the historical sciences. So, in practice, the definitions of religion with which the science of religion must begin are tentative, awaiting the outcome of historical studies for confirmation.

The history of religion is further divided into two parts; the ethnographical, dealing with peoples "without history," and the historical in a narrow sense, dealing with the historical development of religions of "civilised nations." Chantepie also includes a third element in his division of the science of religion which he calls the phenomenological and which consists of the collecting and grouping of religious phenomena. Phenomenological investigations form the transition from the history to the philosophy of religion. The philosophy of religion treats religion according to its objective and subjective sides. These two "sides" of the philosophy of religion form its metaphysical and psychological parts. The phenomenology of religion, in Chantepie's view, is most closely connected with the psychological part as it deals with the facts of human consciousness. The connection is made with the philosophy of religion because the outward forms of religion can only be explained on the basis of inward processes.<sup>76</sup> Chantepie goes no further in explaining the relationship of the phenomenological section to the philosophy of religion, indicating that such discussions must be left to philosophy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>" . . . religious acts, ideas, and sentiments are not distinguished from non-religious acts, ideas and sentiments by any outward mark, but only by a certain inward relation." Chantepie, Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-71. The "Phänomenologischer Teil" is dropped

In the phenomenological section Chantepie deliberately refrains from participating in any discussion of religious consciousness, or any definition of religion, and limits the work to ". . . classifying the most important ethnographic and historical material connected with the phenomena of religion."<sup>78</sup> Chantepie continues to assert that no theoretic division will be made which does not correspond to "actual facts." On the whole, this system of classification corresponds to the program of the general science of religion which calls for the comparative examination of the whole range of the forms of religious manifestations in order to understand what persists in these forms. Although Chantepie was the first to use the term phenomenology in the study of religion, the actual structure of his "Phänomenologische Teil" is not different from the kind of comparative analysis which Müller and Tiele call for to complete the work of the historical sciences.<sup>79</sup>

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in its entirety in the second edition of the Lehrbuch as Chantepie had hoped to devote an entire work to the phenomenology of religion. This work was never completed. For discussion of the reasons for this see, Sharpe, Comparative Religion, pp. 222-223, and Waardenburg, "Religion between Reality and Idea," p. 140.

<sup>78</sup>Chantepie, Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 67.

<sup>79</sup>Some scholars view Chantepie's work as inaugurating the phenomenology of religion. Waardenburg, for example, takes Chantepie's Lehrbuch as "a document in the history of phenomenology of religion." ("Religion between Reality and Idea," p. 138). However, it seems to me that it would be more accurate to describe the phenomenology of religion, as a movement, in terms of the methodological features peculiar to it, and to consider Chantepie's "Phänomenologischer Teil" in light of what he considers the essential insight of Hegel, that there is harmony between the idea and realisation of religion. In other words, I would take Chantepie's Lehrbuch to be more of a document in the science of religion than in the phenomenology of religion. On the whole, I am persuaded by the reflections of Hultkrantz who traces the term phenomenology to Chantepie but adds that the disassociation of historical research from phenomenology begins with the work of G. van der

Among others, the phenomenological section includes chapters on the objects of worship, magic and divination, sacrifice and prayer, religious times, religious communities, and mythology. In short, the phenomenological section is a kind of comparative organization of religious phenomena which is intended to stand in contrast to the "historical sections" dealing with chronological, cultural, and regional histories of religion.<sup>80</sup>

The importance of Chantepie's work, at least for our effort to understand the foundation of the general science of religion, is that despite his reluctance to participate in theoretical discussions, Chantepie has provided a manual for the study of religion which is directly aligned with the overall program of the science of religion. As it has been portrayed here, the science of religion is distinguished by its effort to discern the nature of religion by means of the comparative method without the encumbrance of philosophical or theological

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Leeuw. (Åke Hultrantz, "The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods," Temenos, VI (1970), pp. 68-88). In the same vein, see also, Willard Gordon Oxtoby, "Religionswissenschaft Revisited" in Jacob Neusner, ed., Religions in Antiquity (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 590-608, who recognizes Chantepie as the first to use the term phenomenology in the study of religion, but seems to attribute its use as a methodological option to G. van der Leeuw and others. Hirschmann also discusses the "systematic phenomenology" of Chantepie in Eva Hirschmann, Phänomenologie der Religion (Würzburg-Aumühle: Konrad Triltsch, 1940), pp. 3-20. My own attempt to "define" the phenomenology of religion is found below in the following chapters.

<sup>80</sup>The "Phänomenologischer Teil" is found in chapters 9 through 27, and the "Historical"--including the "Ethnographic"--is found in chapters 28 through 83 in the English translation. (Chantepie, Manual of the Science of Religion, pp. 67-242, and pp. 243-668, respectively). The first German edition includes additional chapters in the "Historical Section" on the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Muslims, comprising all of volume II. (Chantepie, Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte, 1887).

speculation. Although both Müller and Tiele attempt to found the science of religion by outlining what they consider to be the origin of religion in the structures of human being, they describe the actual work of the science of religion in terms of historical research and the employment of comparative method. And while Chantepie only assumes the possibility of a science of religion as he cites the "conditions" necessary for its emergence, the appropriately titled Lehrbuch can be viewed as an exercise in the practice of the science of religion. So when Chantepie writes that the object of the science of religion is the study of religion in its essence and manifestations--the whole range of religious manifestations--he is acknowledging the central elements of the general science of religion.

In summary, although the Lehrbuch is introduced without benefit of inquiry into the groundwork of the science of religion, Chantepie is generally in accord with the foundational arguments of both Müller and Tiele. As Chantepie recalls the conditions for a science of religion, he expresses its fundamental assumptions. The science of religion is independent of theological inquiry and finds its basis in the methods and materials uncovered by the historical sciences. All claims as to the nature of religion must conform to the actual state of religions. Basically, the work of the science of religion is understood in terms of historical investigation and classification. Chantepie has attempted to carry out this task, and his manual stands as an illustration of the kind of activity which was to constitute the practice of the general science of religion.



### The General Science of Religion

So far our investigations have been limited to the specific ways in which the founders of the science of religion have attempted to outline the basis and task of this science. The assumption has been that the work of Müller, Tiele, and Chantepie, taken together, constitutes a topography of the science of religion; a topography which shows not only the surface features of this science, but also provides an index to the essential elements in the establishment of the discipline of the study of religion. The concluding observations of this chapter will be an attempt to review these essential features in a systematic manner in order to show those fundamental characteristics which contributed to the formation of the phenomenology of religion.

At the beginning of this chapter, the origin of the general science of religion was traced to the "discovery" of homo religiosus, or to the fundamental significance of religion in human life. The idea of homo religiosus has been used by the general science of religion, and by its successors, as a sort of shorthand formula expressing those assumptions which are indispensable for a science of religion to be considered a possibility. The founders of the science of religion understood at least three axioms to be necessary for the formation of this discipline. In the first place, religion must be recognized as a universal and distinctive element of human existence. Müller and Tiele express this when they trace religion's origin to the structures of human consciousness, to the "faculty of the infinite" and to the "infinite within." And Chantepie sees that religion occupies a central place in human life as it is the "specific and common property of all

mankind."<sup>81</sup> The point made by these scholars is that whatever else it may be, religion is at least a human phenomenon, viz., a psychological, historical, and social occurrence. As such, religion is taken to be within the domain of science. Moreover, because religion's root can be traced to the distinctively human element in human beings, scientific inquiries cannot ignore it nor can they treat it simply as a passing cultural phenomenon. In some sense, religion must be understood as distinctive, as sui generis.

The second axiom necessary for the science of religion is the recognition that religion is manifest in phenomena. While inquiry into the subjective constitution of consciousness may account for the possibility of religious experience, it does not provide insight into the nature of religion. In order to understand the nature of religion, the student of religion must turn to its objective occurrences. In short, if the science of religion is to pursue the nature of religion, it must do so in the varieties of its manifestations. Although religion itself is present nowhere, investigation of religions can yield knowledge of its nature. This is the third assumption of the general science of religion. While the general science of religion wants to hold that religion itself is not directly accessible, it still maintains that religion is somehow made manifest. Religions are, in part, different expressions of religion. There is a unity and independence of religion and the religious life persisting throughout all changes in its forms. And this unity can be grasped and understood.

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<sup>81</sup>Chantepie, Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 14.

These fundamental axioms provided the groundwork for the general science of religion, a groundwork which enabled this emerging science to delineate its task, the limits of its task, and the methods most appropriate to it. The task of the science of religion, as it was envisioned by its founders, was to understand and explain the nature of religion. It was to consider the wide variety of religious data in order to uncover those elements which endured throughout all its expressions, and in this way discover the ingredients essential to any description of the nature of religion. The work of the science of religion was not to include inquiry into questions of the reality of the objects of faith or the truth of the claims of religions. These are the limits of the science of religion. It cannot judge the reality of the objects of faith, but it can examine religion based on such belief or experience. The method taken to be the most appropriate to the work of the general science of religion was the comparative method. The reason for this was that the task and goals of the science of religion were not understood simply in terms of historical investigation even though the materials uncovered by the inquiries of the historical sciences were to form the basis of its work. In other words, the work of the science of religion was seen to be the kind of investigation which rests upon the certain ground of historical study, but goes beyond the specificity of historical inquiry in order to understand the nature of religion in general.

The assumptions of the general science of religion can be seen as functioning in both a positive and negative way. On the positive side, the central axioms of the science of religion provide a

groundwork for the actual practice of this science. A conception of the discipline is articulated which elucidates both its task and goal, its aim and object. In addition, a way to reach this goal is envisaged. There is a method which is taken as appropriate to the task of the science of religion. The further claim is that this method, the comparative method, provides a solid foundation for the science of religion in that it supplies the certitude necessary for a scientific enterprise, that of objective evidence. On the negative side, these axioms serve to guard against those ways of thinking which were seen to stand as barriers to the formation of a science of religion. These I have called the suspicions of the general science of religion. The suspicion is that both speculative thought and theological argument fail to supply a foundation or method for a science of religion and, more importantly, they tend to divert its task. This is because philosophical and theological thought begin with preconceived notions of religion which not only lead to circularity of thought, but also ignore the actual state of religions. In the case of philosophical thought, the specificity of religion's occurrence is neglected. And when theological inquiry begins with the claims of a particular religion, it disregards the wide range of religious manifestations. According to the science of religion, neither of these approaches is able to provide a basis for a science nor can either yield adequate knowledge of the nature of religion.

This is, more or less, the stated position of the general science of religion. However, more important for this attempt to understand the essential features of the general science of religion is

what is left unstated. It seems that there are presuppositions in the structure of the science of religion which have remained unnoted, but have nonetheless informed its conception and work. Moreover, it seems that these presuppositions can be located in the suspicions of the general science of religion. The point is that in their effort to eliminate all a priori (ungrounded) theories from the science of religion, its founders employed certain additional assumptions which served to determine the particular character of this science.

The intent of the general science of religion was to remove every dogmatic bias from its work--whether philosophically or theologically speculative--in order to give due attention to the actual occurrence of religion. But what was accomplished was the generation of a new and generally unacknowledged dogmatic guideline.<sup>82</sup> While the general science of religion, perhaps correctly, suspected that certain kinds of theological and philosophical reflection were not able to provide a basis for inquiry into the nature of religion, they did not

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<sup>82</sup>The language of dogmatic guidelines is taken from Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 153-162 and passim. Interestingly, Gadamer observes that although the history of understanding since classical literary criticism has been accompanied by theoretical reflection, the purpose of these reflections has been to serve the art of understanding, e.g., poetics sought to serve the art and appreciation of poetry. In this context it could be said that, in much the same way, the theoretical reflections of the general science of religion--the efforts of especially Müller and Tiele to understand the elements of human being which account for religious experience--where the kinds of reflection which served the practice of the science of religion. While, in a sense, the science of religion sought to provide a foundation for its work, this foundation was actually part of the practice of the science of religion. Because the presuppositions of the science of religion are so intertwined with the science itself, it seems that they take on a dogmatic character and can be spoken of in terms of an unacknowledged dogmatic guideline.

pursue their questioning to the foundations of their own thought. Specifically, the attempt to liberate the emerging science of religion from the supposed unity of theological reflection (i.e., the truth of Christian revelation) resulted in a limited understanding of the capacities of reflection and the awarding of a particular prominence to the so-called objective components of inquiry. The same argument can be made from the rejection of philosophical thought. As the science of religion sought to remove itself from ungrounded speculation, it granted primacy to the particulars, to the "facts," of the historical sciences and to the method of induction in general. Under the new dogmatic guideline pre-eminence is given to the observable and formal aspects of religion. The concept of evidence in the work of the science of religion is derived from the natural sciences and the evidence of human interests is devalued, i.e., it is identified with the existential judgments of theology or the specious proposals of speculative philosophy, and is therefore considered inadequate for a scientific enterprise. So from the perspective of the general science of religion, intuition is understood as simply speculation or fancy, the creation of mere hypotheses; the concrete is taken to be the factual, the materials uncovered by the historical sciences; scientific method is understood as the collection and comparative arrangement of empirical data; and essence is understood in terms of empirical generality, specifically the common or enduring elements of religions.

The effort here is not so much to criticize the foundation of the general science of religion as it is to say that it operated with a certain naiveté with regard to its own assumptions. When it accepts

the work of the historical sciences as objective and resting on certain evidence, it does so without recognition of the kind of theoretical decisions this involves. And because this foundation remains unquestioned, it serves easily as a dogmatic guideline, as the support and validation for the practice of the science of religion. The notion of evidence and the presuppositions concerning the nature of thought which the science of religion adopts generally from the natural sciences is not taken simply as an analytic style, as a way of thinking with certain capacities and limitations, but as the predominant style.

In summary, the effort of this chapter has been to show that the general science of religion attempted to establish the study of religion on a solid foundation apart from the speculative claims of philosophy and theology. As it denied the capacities of a priori thinking to provide a basis for achieving adequate knowledge of the nature of religion, the science of religion granted a certain primacy to the assumptions and procedures of the historical and natural sciences. Specifically, the science of religion holds that the universal property of religions, religion, is given in its individual parts. These individual parts are the materials uncovered by the work of the historical sciences, the "data" of the world's religions. This collection of material becomes, in a sense, the "text" which the science of religion seeks to understand and explain. The method taken to be most appropriate for this task is the comparative method because it promises to reveal what is specifically religious about the facts of religions, i.e., it goes beyond the specificity of historical inquiry to show what persists in the various expressions of religions. In addition

the comparative method includes the certain evidence provided by the objective inquiries of the historical sciences. The assumption of the general science of religion is that by distillation of the data of all religions one can achieve knowledge of religion itself. This presupposition, I have suggested, functions as an unacknowledged dogmatic guideline for the science of religion inasmuch as it provides validation for the work of the science of religion. In general, the notion of evidence and the methods borrowed from the historical and natural sciences become, in the practice of the science of religion, the standard universal measure of objectivity.



## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY AND STRUCTURE: THE METHOD OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

#### Introduction

As we turn toward a consideration of the phenomenology of religion it is important to recall the foundational elements of the general science of religion. In the last chapter, the general science of religion was characterized by its attempt to provide a certain foundation for the study of religion between theological claims and philosophical argument. The pivotal element in this effort was comparative method as it supplied both a method by means of which the study of religion could proceed, and the guarantee of an evidential basis in the actual manifestations of religion.

The distinctive position of comparative method in the general science of religion can be traced to its practical and theoretical significance. In terms of practical application, comparative method was recognized as an actual method, a procedure, which provided a way for the science of religion to reach its goals. The role of comparative method was to discern those enduring and common elements which provide insight into the nature of religion and which detect its sui generis nature. This was to be accomplished by investigation and classification of the entire range of the materials of religions. Because comparative method expressed the science of religion's

allegiance to the objective components of religions, to the "facts" of religions, it also served a theoretical function. It reflected the decisions of the general science of religion to avoid all speculative argument and to turn instead to the actual materials of religions which alone could provide the objective certitude required of scientific inquiries. In short, comparative method embodied the essential elements of the general science of religion as well as a means for its practice.

The twofold function of comparative method in the science of religion directly relates to our investigations of the phenomenology of religion. The thesis of this chapter is that while the phenomenology of religion rejected certain elements of the application of comparative method, it nonetheless implicitly accepted its theoretical function. As the phenomenology of religion perceived problems with the model of comparative method given in the general science of religion and with the kinds of work generated by it, this movement sought to provide the study of religion with a "new" and more adequate method. It will be argued here, however, that the way in which this "new" method is employed by the phenomenologists of religion remains tied, on a fundamental level, to the assumptions of the founders of the science of religion. Although it is unacknowledged, the theoretical function of comparative method continues to operate in the phenomenology of religion much as it did in the science of religion. It persists as a dogmatic guideline in the work of the phenomenology of religion yet is itself unquestioned. Further, this guideline informs, and even in a sense forms, the way in which phenomenology is construed as a method.

There are two aspects to the present consideration of the phenomenology of religion. In the first place, I intend to present a way of understanding the phenomenology of religion as a movement. In order to accomplish this, our inquiries will be directed to the context of the phenomenology of religion in the general science of religion, and to the distinctive method which it tried to develop as a result of criticisms of its predecessors. Because the effort here will be to show that there is a methodological perspective which properly belongs to the phenomenology of religion, the focus of this inquiry will be an elucidation of the general methodological features of the works in this movement and not the specific, though often illuminating, programs of morphological arrangement and analysis present in its various documents.<sup>1</sup> In this sense it might be more appropriate to say that

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<sup>1</sup>There is a sense in which the materials of the individual scholars in the phenomenology of religion deserve, if not demand, extended critical treatment. It could be argued that one reason for this is that the work of each scholar is quite distinct and all attempts to treat such work as part of a movement are, at best, artificial. The phenomenology of religion is not monolithic, either in theory or in practice. However, it is my position that while it is true that the phenomenology of religion has not always had a clearly articulated set of rules which have been uniformly applied to religious phenomena, it is nonetheless possible to consider the phenomenologists of religion as sharing a common attitude and common assumptions, i.e., a common methodological perspective. Some of the secondary literature in this area reflects the effort to treat the phenomenology of religion as a movement. Setting its method in a historical context as a development in the study of religion are, among others, Wach, "Development, Meaning and Method," pp. 3-26; and Sharpe, Comparative Religion, pp. 220-250. Among the many commentators and phenomenologists of religion who have attempted to describe the methodological attitude of the phenomenology of religion are: Ashby, "The History of Religions"; C. J. Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," C. J. Bleeker, The Sacred Bridge (Lieden: E. J. Brill, 1963); W. Brede Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion, trans. by John B. Carmen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960); Geo Widengren, "An Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion," Ways of Understanding Religion, ed. by

the task of this chapter is to constitute the phenomenology of religion as a movement rather than to describe its often diverse features.

The second element of our discussion will be an effort to uncover the methodological assumptions of the phenomenology of religion. In order to do this we will return to the relation between the general science of religion and the phenomenology of religion, but now on the level of their common presuppositions. These critical investigations will seek to show the way in which the phenomenology of religion distinguished itself from the work of the general science of religion and the way in which it remained fundamentally tied to the science of religion.

#### The Emergence of the Phenomenology of Religion

The founding efforts of the general science of religion were followed by work in a variety of directions. Joachim Wach has observed that this work was of at least two kinds.<sup>2</sup> The first was the "search for parallels" of the broadest kind in which attention was directed to comparative examination of sacred texts. For this kind of study to take place, it was necessary to make available for scholarly examination the documents of the various religions of the world, and especially significant were those of the "distant East." As Wach indicates, the landmark of this type of inquiry was the editing and collection of

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Walter H. Capps (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), pp. 142-151; and Åke Hultkrantz, "The Phenomenology of Religion."

<sup>2</sup>Wach, "Development, Meaning and Method," pp. 3-5.

The Sacred Books of the East begun by Max Müller.<sup>3</sup> The second direction of inquiry cited by Wach included philological, ethnographical, anthropological, psychological and positive historical studies.<sup>4</sup> These highly specialized and detailed investigations were dominated by what Wach calls a "positivistic temper" in which norms and values attending religious phenomena were to be "explained" sociologically, psychologically and historically. While the first kind of investigation was concerned with broad generalizations, the second was drawn to minute detail. Yet the two types of study are held together by common notions of evolutionary development or, more generally, by a desire to uncover the origin of religion.<sup>5</sup> Now Wach goes on to cite

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<sup>3</sup>F. Max Müller, ed. The Sacred Books of the East, 50 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1879-1910).

<sup>4</sup>As is exemplified by the works of: E. B. Tylor, Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871); James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, 7 parts in 12 vols., 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (London-New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911-1915), the first edition was published in 1890 in 2 vols.; Wilhelm Wundt, Völkerpsychologie: Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte, 10 vols. (Leipzig, 1900-1920); and Emile Durkheim, Les Formes elementaires de la vie religieuse: Le systeme totemique en Australie (Paris: Alcan, 1912). A brief review of the extent of the literature in this area during the first quarter of the twentieth century is found in A. Eustace Haydon, "History of Religions," Gerald Birney Smith, ed., Religious Thought in the Last Quarter-Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), pp. 140-167.

<sup>5</sup>Some notions of evolutionary development are already present in Müller's work (especially in Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion where he discusses "progress" in religion but criticizes Darwinian theories) and particularly in Tiele's work whose idea of evolutionary development is definitely set forth in the Britannica article. Elaide describes the birth of the science of religion in these terms: ". . . as an autonomous discipline devoted to analyzing the common elements of the different religions and seeking to deduce

still another kind of inquiry, a sort of post-World War I turning point in the study of religion, which included those scholars influenced by phenomenological philosophy and neo-Kantian scholarship. This direction of inquiry, according to Wach, is characterized by its desire to overcome the narrow specialization of the so-called "historicist" inquiries of earlier periods and to search instead for an integrated perspective which would finally allow one to investigate the nature of religious experience.

If Wach's general characterization of the origin of the phenomenology of religion is followed, we can see two aspects to the way in which this group of scholars sought to criticize its predecessors and to establish yet another direction of inquiry. From the point of view of the phenomenology of religion, the vast amount of material generated by the initial efforts of the general science of religion could not attend to the task of describing religious phenomena. The reason for this was that over-arching theories of evolution--whether biologically, culturally, or psychologically genetic--diverted its inquiries. Much as theological presuppositions and speculative systems in philosophy were taken by the founders of the science of religion to be prejudices which formed barriers to the task of this science, the phenomenologists

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the laws of their evolution, and especially to discover and define the origin and first form of religion . . ." ("The 'History of Religions' as a Branch of Knowledge," p. 216). However, I would add that while concepts of the biological or historical evolution of human life certainly played an important role in the formulations of the founders of the science of religion, they were not necessary to them. Instead, as I have tried to show earlier, the possibility of the science of religion was thought to rest upon the distinctive character of religion in human life and the evidence made available through historical comparative study.

understood notions of evolutionary development to function also as an abstract theoretical apparatus which neglected or distorted the special character of religious phenomena.<sup>6</sup> This is the first way in which the phenomenology of religion criticized and distinguished itself from its predecessors.

It is the common argument against "reductionism" which the phenomenologists made a central element in their approach to the study of religion. All attempts to reduce religious phenomena to any particular aspect of its manifestations must be rejected. This is directed both to general theories or systems which do not proceed from the subject matter itself and also to explanations of the nature and genesis of religion made by the numerous human sciences. Attempts by disciplines like sociology, psychology, and anthropology to explain (away) religious phenomena must be considered one-sided efforts. Such inquiries can elucidate a particular element of religious phenomena (the cultural, psychological, or sociological dimension), but they can never explain religion. In other words, if religious phenomena are to be understood,

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<sup>6</sup>Eliade makes this kind of observation when he writes: "The image that our nineteenth century created of 'inferior societies' was largely derived from the positivistic, antireligious, and ametaphysical attitude entertained by a number of worthy explorers and ethnologists who had approached the 'savages' with the ideology of a contemporary of Comte, Darwin, or Spencer. Among the 'primitives' they everywhere discovered 'fetishism' and 'religious infantilism'--simply because they could see nothing else." Mircea Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, trans. by Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series LVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp. xiii-xiv. Cf., Hultkranz, "Phenomenology of Religion," pp. 70-72, who also connects the emergence of the phenomenology of religion with the rejection of the "evolutionistic bias" in the science of religion and to a rejection of the models of inquiry given in sociological and psychological investigation.

the methods appropriate to such understanding must emerge from investigations of religions themselves.<sup>7</sup>

For the phenomenology of religion, the practical effect of the importation of extrinsic theories to explain religion is that certain essential elements of the religious life are ignored. So when Rudolf Otto, for example, undertakes to examine the primary "non-rational" in religion (the numinous), he repeatedly asserts that this element, the essential element, is neglected when one begins with concepts and procedures which do not attend to the special character of religion.<sup>8</sup>

Eliade makes the same kind of point in more general terms when he writes in the Author's Forward to Patterns in Comparative Religion,

To try to grasp the essence of such a [religious] phenomena by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false;

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<sup>7</sup>Consider, for example, Rudolf Otto, The Philosophy of Religion, trans. by E. B. Dicker (London: Williams and Norgate, Ltd., 1931), p. 227: "The focal point, the starting point for all science of religion . . . is Religious Experience, a thing that is not interpreted by mythology and archeology, that in default of immediate personal knowledge must be understood from the life of those who are religious in the narrower and more forcible sense." Cf., also, Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 86-107; and Kristensen, Meaning of Religion, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. by John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 15: "And all ostensible explanations of the origin of religion in terms of animism or magic or folk-psychology are doomed from the outset to wander astray and miss the real goal of their inquiry, unless they recognize the fact of our nature [the apprehension of the numinous]--primary, unique, underivable from anything else--to be the basic factor and the basic impulse underlying the entire process of religious evolution." Cf., also, Rudolf Otto, "Darwinism and Religion," Rudolf Otto, Religious Essays: A Supplement to the 'Idea of the Holy', trans. by Brian Lunn (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 121-139.



it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it--  
the element of the sacred . . . .

I do not mean to deny the usefulness of approaching  
the religious phenomenon from various different angles;  
but it must be looked at first of all in itself, in that  
which belongs to it alone and can be explained in no  
other terms.<sup>9</sup>

When the phenomenology of religion criticized the "reductionism"  
of its predecessors, it also described its own starting point. If the  
effect of taking the viewpoint of "other" disciplines is to ignore the  
distinctive character of religions, the phenomenology of religion set as  
its task the investigation of the "irreducible element" of religions,  
i.e., the nature of religion. This constructive task is the second as-  
pect of the way in which the phenomenology of religion attempted to dis-  
tinguish itself from its predecessors. Despite the fact that the gen-  
eral science of religion said it intended to uncover the nature of re-  
ligion, according to the phenomenology of religion, what was accom-  
plished was ". . . a preoccupation with the amassing of data and indis-  
criminate 'comparing' . . . ." But what needed to be done was ". . . to  
view these data structurally and functionally and to understand their  
religious meaning."<sup>10</sup> This is the task of the phenomenology of religion.

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<sup>9</sup>Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. by  
Rosemary Sheed (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958), p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup>Joachim Wach, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and  
Non-Christian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 6,  
commenting on the problems of the late nineteenth century "school of  
'comparative religion'" and the "constructive thought" which has  
emerged since the publication of Otto's Idea of the Holy, i.e., what I  
take to include the phenomenology of religion. Cf., also, Mircea  
Eliade, The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion (Chicago: The  
University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 6-7, where Eliade states that  
the "historian of religion" (here, including the phenomenologists of  
religion) must bring out the "autonomous value" of religions, and that  
this cannot be accomplished if religions are "reduced" to one of their

The phenomenology of religion denounced the science of religion's adoption of evolutionary theories and the overall tendency to limit investigations to specific historical studies or to approach the materials of religion from the point of view of extrinsic theories and disciplines. Such tactics, it was maintained, fail to pay attention to the central and distinctive elements of religion. Or, in terms of our earlier discussion, the phenomenology of religion criticized its predecessors for not adequately addressing its own question, What is Religion? Yet it seems that the criticisms made by the phenomenology of religion also serve to identify certain basic convictions which were taken over from the general science of religion and were transformed into fundamental features of the phenomenology of religion. In other words, although the phenomenology of religion criticizes its predecessors, this movement has nonetheless accepted the task and fundamental assumptions of the science of religion.

It should be noted, however, that my description of the foundational inquiries of the general science of religion surveyed in the last chapter would not be that of the phenomenology of religion. As I have indicated, the phenomenology of religion saw its predecessors as being embedded in nineteenth century evolutionary theories and drawn to positive overspecialized historical studies. In a sense the work of the general science of religion is finally taken to be of the same kind as that of Tylor and Frazer or others influenced by the "positivistic" philosophies of Comte and Spencer. It seems to me that such

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secondary aspects or contexts.

interpretations are mistaken and fail to take account of the genuine similarity between the task and goals of the general science of religion and the phenomenology of religion. So as the affinities between the two groups are pointed out here, it should be realized that this kinship is barely acknowledged and most often operates on the level of unrecognized common presuppositions.

Even as the phenomenology of religion argued against the narrow inquiries which it suspected characterized the general science of religion, it also reaffirmed the goal of the science of religion (as described in the last chapter) to investigate the nature of religion. It appears, however, that the phenomenology of religion either was not cognizant of the aim of the general science of religion, or took its efforts to be so misdirected from the outset as to make the goal unattainable. But when the phenomenology of religion describes its own intent, it is done in terms very close to those of the science of religion. It speaks of the "autonomous value" of religious phenomena (Eliade and Pettazzoni), religion's sui generis nature (Widengren), the "essence of religion" (Bleeker), and, more generally, genuine "understanding of religious phenomena" (van der Leeuw).<sup>11</sup> The difference

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<sup>11</sup>Eliade, Quest, p. 7; Raffaele Pettazzoni, "History and Phenomenology in the Science of Religion," Raffaele Pettazzoni, Essays on the History of Religions: Studies in the History of Religions, trans. by H. J. Rose (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), pp. 215-219; Geo Widengren, Religionsphänomenologie (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1969); C. J. Bleeker, "The Key Word Religion," C. J. Bleeker, The Sacred Bridge (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), p. 36; it is van der Leeuw's notion of verstehen as discussed in, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, trans. by J. E. Turner with additions by Hans H. Penner, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 676, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion, trans. by Hans-Christoph Piper (Darmstadt: Gütersloher Verlagshaus,

between the two groups, at least from the standpoint of the phenomenologists, is on the level of method. While the founders of the general science of religion "discovered" homo religiosus and then sought to describe this unique animal in its particular modes of existence, the phenomenology of religion intended to protect it from misunderstanding and misinterpretation. This movement attempted to put into practice a method of inquiry which would guard against all reductions of religious phenomena to any one aspect of their appearance. But while doing so it also took for its own the task and goal which, as we have seen, describe the original impulses of the general science of religion.

The second basic element taken over from the general science of religion is the presupposition that some form of comparative investigation of the forms of religious manifestations can yield knowledge of the nature of religion. In the work of the phenomenology of religion and in terms of its method this notion is somewhat modified, but on the most basic level it remains the same. As van der Leeuw observes, we must begin by bringing the various phenomena together in relation, by comparing the analogous and by separating the opposed, i.e., by classifying the materials of religions.<sup>12</sup> Now the phenomenologists of

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1948, 2nd ed.), pp. 1-12, and also, Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Phänomenologie der Religion," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 6 vols. (Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1930), v. 4, p. 1172.

<sup>12</sup>van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 4: "Dazu müssen wir anfangen, die Gegenstände des religiösen Lebens zu klassifizieren, versuchen zu ermitteln, was eine Handlung zum Opfer, was einen verehrten Gegenstand zum Fetisch, was eine Art der Frömmigkeit zur Mystik macht. Wir müssen dann die verschiedenartigen Phänomene zueinander in Beziehung bringen,

religion hardly claim, as does Müller, that the scholar who is only familiar with one religion, knows none, but comparative work is nonetheless emphasized as the way to understanding religion.<sup>13</sup> It serves to differentiate the work of the phenomenologist of religion from that of the historian, and it also provides access to the central element of the structures of religion.

The phenomenology of religion maintains that we must begin with the given matters of fact, with the data of historical research, but we must also go beyond this point to assert the special character of these facts. Like the general science of religion, the phenomenology of religion does not want to make judgments concerning the truth claims of particular religions--this again is the work of theology--but it does intend to evaluate the sense of religious manifestations. It seeks a way between the objective facts and their subjective valuation. It is in pursuit of the structures of the materials of religions.<sup>14</sup> The

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das Gleichartige zusammenstellen, das Entgegengesetzte trennen." Consider also, Eliade's reflections on the advantages of his method in Patterns, p. xvi: "The analysis of each group of hierophanies, by making a natural division among the various modalities of the sacred, and showing how they fit together in a coherent system, will at the same time clear the ground for the final discussion on the essence of religion."

<sup>13</sup>As in Eliade's "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," p. 89: "But the historian of religions [here, including the phenomenologist] aims to familiarize himself with the greatest possible number of religions . . . Insofar as one can formulate general considerations on the religious behavior of man, this task rightly belongs to the historian of religions, provided, of course, that he master and integrate the results of the researches made in all the important areas of his discipline."

<sup>14</sup>van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 3. See also, van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, pp. 686-687.

exact meaning of structure in the phenomenology of religion is seldom stated with clarity though it is clear that the effort to "inquire into the structure of religion and religions" is directed toward the disclosure of the "unique quality" of religious phenomena, i.e., it intends to show what sets the religious apart from the cultural and historical life which necessarily attends it.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the inquiry into the structures of religion is the culmination of specific historical studies.

Instead of examining the "outward traits of resemblance"<sup>16</sup> as it was thought the general science of religion did, the phenomenology of religion intends to question to the deepest level of religious phenomena. While the general science of religion searched for parallels and almost glibly spoke of the "classification of all faiths,"<sup>17</sup> the phenomenology of religion was, as Bleeker puts it,

. . . struck by the fact that the phenomena such as magic, sacrifice and prayer occur in a number of religions, even all over the world. Therefore the question arose what could be the religious significance of such constitutive elements of religion as such. In this process of research the facts are severed from their historical context and combined in an ideological connection. The result is that one gets a deeper insight into the meaning and structure of the religious phenomena.<sup>18</sup>

It is not entirely evident how the notion of structure is substantially

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<sup>15</sup>C. J. Bleeker, "The Conception of Man in the Phenomenology of Religion," Man, Culture and Religion: Studies in Religious Anthropology, ed. by Maraisusai Dhavamony, S.J., et al (Rome: Gregorian U. Press, 1970), p. 15.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Müller, Natural Religion, p. 68.

<sup>18</sup>Bleeker, "The Conception of Man," pp. 15-16.

different from the "parallels" of the general science of religion, and on the most fundamental level I believe it is not, but for our present purposes, it is enough to say that the idea of structure at least functions in the phenomenology of religion much as parallel did in the general science of religion. In terms of the actual method of the phenomenology of religion, the "structures of religion" emerge only near the end of investigation and they form something close to statements of the essence of religion. We will return to this important function of the notion of structure as we analyze the specific method of the phenomenology of religion, but for now it must be said that the use of structure in this movement serves to delineate those "comprehensible associations" which not only distinguish phenomenological analysis from historical analysis but also completes it.

In these preliminary remarks I have begun to suggest how the phenomenology of religion is related to the general science of religion. These observations have taken place on two levels. In the first place, the effort has been to show what problems were thought to attend the work of this science and how the phenomenology of religion sought to distinguish itself from the science of religion. The second level of inquiry has been directed to the similarities of the two groups. Although the phenomenology of religion was severely critical of its predecessors it nonetheless accepted, intentionally or not, basic convictions first articulated by the founders of the science of religion. Moreover, the assumptions taken over from the general science of religion were the same fundamental convictions which are intimately tied to what I have called the dogmatic guideline of the science

of religion. At the same time that the phenomenology of religion rejected the intertwining of evolutionary theories and "positivistic" method with the study of religion, it neglected to acknowledge the kind of assumptions which were appropriated. Specifically, prominence is given to the objective components of inquiry, and to the notion that these matters can yield knowledge of the nature of religion. This claim will be considered in greater depth as we continue to examine the various elements of the phenomenology of religion. But if it is granted that the phenomenology of religion was able to reject certain elements of the science of religion while continuing to accept its most fundamental presuppositions, we can begin to see how phenomenological method informed by these presuppositions takes on an appearance distinct from its philosophical counterpart and has a logic of its own.

What is the Method of the  
Phenomenology of Religion?

Some critics have argued that despite the continuing search for the structures of religion, the phenomenology of religion has managed to neglect primary historical and cultural elements and instead makes univocal statements concerning the essence of religion when, in fact, there is only a kind of familial ambiance, analogous relations, among the various religions which can be uncovered by historical research. The charge is that the phenomenology of religion starts its work with a preconceived notion of religion and proceeds to cloud the actual basis for understanding religions. As Ugo Bianchi has observed, ". . . it is a fact that when scholars talk of phenomenology, they mostly refer to so-called 'structures' or 'systems' wherein they make



those phenomena [the data of "religious worlds"] fit and have a 'meaning.' But how could we delineate these 'structures' . . . were it not by means of positive and inductive historical research?"<sup>19</sup>

The phenomenologists maintain however, that instead of neglecting historical research, the phenomenology of religion has, by means of its distinctive method, brought it to fruition. Historical research uncovers facts and relationships. It asks the question of how something happens and makes positive judgments.<sup>20</sup> The phenomenology of religion takes up these materials in a systematic way and endeavors to understand them, to disclose their meaning. It remains tied to the given matters of fact, but approaches them in a unique way which, in the final analysis, is intended to complete the work of historical investigation.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the phenomenologists of religion are

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<sup>19</sup>Ugo Bianchi, "The Definition of Religion. On the Methodology of Historical-Comparative Research," Problems and Methods of the History of Religions, ed. by U. Bianchi, C. J. Bleeker, A. Bausani (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), p. 29; cf., Ugo Bianchi, The History of Religions (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 178-181; and Th. van Baaren, "Science of Religion as a Systematic Discipline," p. 50.

<sup>20</sup>Consider, van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 1; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art, trans. by David E. Green (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), pp. 5-6; and also, Eliade, Quest, pp. 35-36; Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, trans. by Willard R. Trask Bollingen Series LXXVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>21</sup>Eliade makes this kind of point in Shamanism, p. xv, when he writes:

". . . the historian of religions, while taking historico-religious facts into account, does his utmost to organize his documents in the historical perspective--the only perspective that ensures their concreteness. But he must not forget that, when all is said and done, the phenomena with which he is concerned reveal boundary-line situations of mankind, and that these situations demand to be understood

far from dismissing the priority of historical research.<sup>22</sup> Instead, an even greater claim is made for the work and evidence of the historians, viz., that it can yield knowledge of the nature of things. Moreover, it is phenomenological method which can not only restore the proper place of the historical sciences, but also guard against those elements which would divert its task, color its evidence, or diminish its claims. This, from the point of view of the phenomenology of religion, is to be accomplished by three methodological movements.

### The Epoche

The first step in the method of the phenomenology of religion is the application of the epoche, the phenomenological "brackets." While

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and made understandable."

He does maintain, however, that the role of the historian of religions stands in contrast to that of the historian proper and, in this context, to the phenomenologist of religion who he thinks, in principle, rejects any work of comparison and instead, ". . . confronted with one religious phenomenon or another . . . confines himself to 'approaching' it and divining its meaning." (p. xv) It does not seem to me that such a description of the phenomenology of religion is adequate since, as has already been indicated, this movement is indeed interested in classification and comparison--in principle (cf., for example, van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 4, quoted in n. 12). Rather, I would hold that Eliade's description of the work of the historian of religion is directly applicable to the general outlook of the phenomenology of religion.

<sup>22</sup>As van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 2, maintains: "Umgekehrt muss die Struktur, in die wir die Gegenstände stellen, fortwährend an diesen Gegenständen geprüft werden. Das begreifliche Ganze, das unsere Wissenschaft von den Gegebenheiten macht, muss jedesmal mit diesen Gegebenheiten konfrontiert werden--auch mit eventuellen neuen Gegebenheiten, selbst auf die Gefahr hin, dass es dadurch seine Begreiflichkeit wieder verlieren würde." Cf., also, Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Confession Scientifique," Numen 1 (January, 1954): 12-13; C. Jouco Bleeker, "The Contribution of the Phenomenology of Religion to the Study of the History of Religions," Problems and Methods, p. 41; Bleeker, "The Key Word of Religion," p. 36; Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 12; Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, pp. 8-9.

in the case of philosophical phenomenology the brackets function both in a positive and negative sense, the phenomenology of religion emphasizes the negative aspect.<sup>23</sup> The basic function of the epoche is to keep out of play extrinsic theories and assumptions. For the phenomenology of religion, the epoche serves as a methodological technique imposed in order to eliminate those factors which, from the outset, distort the subject matter of religions.

The phenomenology of religion, like the founders of the general science of religion, wishes to remove theological and philosophical judgments from its starting point. In addition, it intends to avoid those "reductionistic" theories which pervade the human sciences and which have been applied to the materials of religions. On the theological side, the effort is to remove from consideration questions concerning the truth of the claims of particular religions as well as the subjective valuation of the subject matter. On the philosophical side, the phenomenology of religion does not want to entertain any

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<sup>23</sup>In Husserl's understanding of phenomenological method, the negative function of the epoche is the "bracketing out" of questions concerning the truth or reality of the matters under investigation, the assumptions of the natural attitude. On the positive side, the application of the epoche enables the task of description and clarification to take place. It signifies the radical character of phenomenological method, the attempt to break through all kinds of assumptions in order to turn to the elusive "things themselves." What is left inside the brackets is the "givenness" of the objects of investigation, the ways in which things are meant or experienced. This, then, becomes the object of phenomenological analysis. On this matter, see, Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, trans. by W. R. Boyce Gibson, Muirhead Library of Philosophy (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1931), pp. 110-114 (hereafter cited as Ideas I). Husserl's understanding of phenomenological method and its relation to the claims of the phenomenology of religion will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapters.

pre-conceived notions about the nature of religion or religions. With regard to "reductionistic" theories, the phenomenology of religion maintains that the essence of religion or religious phenomena lies behind models of investigation like the sociological or psychological, and the epoche enables the student of religion to disregard these various theoretical apparatus.<sup>24</sup> In short, this movement intends to maintain an attitude of impartiality with regard to the materials of religions. All a priori elements, from whatever source, are to be eliminated from the phenomenology of religion's investigations.

Sometimes the language of the epoche is not used in this movement's description of its starting point, but what remains common is the effort to obtain a neutral position in inquiry and, more importantly, to impose a methodological restraint on the employment of certain reflective tools.<sup>25</sup> From the beginning, the phenomenologist of religion cannot bring to bear any special theoretical apparatus. In other words, the phenomenology of religion does not wish its studies

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<sup>24</sup>Observations concerning this function of the epoche are made throughout the literature of the phenomenology of religion, as in, Widengren, "Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion," pp. 143-144; Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 3; C. J. Bleeker, "Some Remarks on the 'Entelecheia' of Religious Phenomena," The Sacred Bridge, p. 21; C. J. Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," C. J. Bleeker, The Rainbow: A Collection of Studies in the Science of Religion, Studies in the History of Religions (supplements to Numen) XXX (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 19-20; van der Leeuw, Einführung, pp. 2-3; van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 687. Hultkranz speaks specifically to the issue of extrinsic theories and the use of the epoche, especially with regard to the work of van der Leeuw in, "The Phenomenology of Religion," pp. 71-72.

<sup>25</sup>For example, neither Eliade nor Kristensen use the term, but both speak directly of the necessity of the restraint of judgment and the disavowal of theoretical standpoints. Cf., Eliade, Patterns, xiii-xvi; and Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, pp. 1-15.

to be colored by either preconceived notions of religion or by methods of study which do not proceed from the subject matter itself.<sup>26</sup> In practice, the restraint of the epoche has been radicalized such that reflective considerations in general are suspect.<sup>27</sup> The phenomenologist must, as far as is possible, direct attention to the "religious facts" without recourse to any reflective position.

As a point of comparison, we can recall how the general science of religion labored to show that the possibility of the apprehensions of religions could be traced to the structures of consciousness, to the infinite within, and to the objective occurrence of this possibility in the various concrete materials of religions. By contrast, the phenomenology of religion sees that understanding is to be achieved by means of "attentive listening" and maintaining the "viewpoint of believers."<sup>28</sup> This movement does not intend to account for the

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<sup>26</sup>Consider, in this context, Wach's description of the phenomenology of religion:

"Its aim is to view religious ideas, acts, and institutions with due consideration to their 'intention,' yet without subscribing to any one philosophical, theological, metaphysical, or psychological theory. Thus a necessary supplement to a purely historical, psychological, or sociological approach is provided." ("Development, Meaning and Method," p. 24.)

<sup>27</sup>Here, consider Bleeker's warning,

"In my opinion the phenomenology of religion is an empirical science without philosophical aspirations. It should be prudent by using as less as possible of the terminology of a certain philosophy or psychology for fear of being forced to accept the theoretical implications of these concepts." ("The Phenomenological Method," p. 7.)

<sup>28</sup>Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," p. 19: "They the epoche and 'eidetic vision' are void of philosophical or theological implications. They simply express the attitude of impartiality, of attentive listening which is the absolute

possibility of religions; it wishes only to describe--from a neutral standpoint--the phenomena of religions. This is the positive expression of the phenomenology of religion's insistence on the irreducibility of religious phenomena. Yet in order to reach this neutral position, the phenomenology of religion seems to deny the powers of reflection in general. It is as if one can somehow dismiss reflective decisions, slip into the shoes of the believer (yet without accepting the valuation which the believer holds), and gain the assurance of a neutral (or objective) standpoint. Moreover, this objectivity, i.e., "attentive listening" without judgment, reflective grounding, or valuation, seems to be taken as co-extensive with understanding or insight into the meaning of religious phenomena.<sup>29</sup>

The use of the epoche in this context signifies the attempt by the phenomenology of religion to methodologically deny the power of reflection to offer insight and to instead enter (though in a limited

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condition for a right understanding of the import of religious phenomena." And Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, p. 13. Consider also, Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 3: "In using the epoche one puts oneself into the position of the listener, who does not judge according to preconceived notions."

<sup>29</sup>This position is taken to its furthest extreme in the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith who calls for the "personalization of our studies" in which the ground of evidence for all statements about religions is the acknowledgement of believers. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither--and Why?", The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, p. 37. In a wider area of discourse something like this attitude is discussed in terms of the hermeneutical circle. In the phenomenology of religion, though, the movement toward the position of "detached-within" is a distinctive element of a technique of investigation which is held to yield insight into the nature of religion. (The term "detached-within" is from Winston L. King, Introduction to Religion: A Phenomenological Approach [New York: Harper & Row, 1954, rev. ed., 1968], pp. 6-7.)

sense) the lived realities of the religious. This kind of move can be made because the general capacities of reflection and the specific claims made by religions are taken to be of the same order. And both must be bracketed out of consideration. In other words, because the preconceived notions of philosophy and the "reductionistic" theories of the sciences are tied to the capacities of reflection in general, and the existential valuations held by believers are tied to theological judgments, the phenomenology of religion uses the epoche to put out of play all notions of reflection which might claim to yield insight into the nature of religion. All are taken to be either prejudices or distortions.

Even van der Leeuw, who is by far the "most philosophical" of the phenomenologists of religion and who is often criticized for this, maintains that religion, and indeed all of life, is ineffable. What we must do when we wish to understand is to reconstruct and systematically arrange the materials of the religions--what he calls the phenomena. This is only the first step in van der Leeuw's method, but it is the foundation for what follows. Since, in principle, we have no direct access to religion (the thing-in-itself), and since reflective acts tend to distort the materials of religions, we are left with the work which describes human activity in general, ordering. And this, it seems to me, is held to be concomitant with understanding. So, from van der Leeuw's point of view, the methodological restraint of the epoche does not indicate any special activity, but is simply the standpoint of our natural attitude, "the distinctive characteristic

of man's whole attitude to reality."<sup>30</sup> Here, it is not the "natural attitude" which is to be described through the imposition of the epoche. Instead the epoche is intended to put out of play certain kinds of reflective acts and judgments in order to enable one to participate in the distinctively human activity of ordering which is characteristic of the natural attitude. As van der Leeuw continues, "Phenomenology, therefore, is not a method that has been reflectively elaborated, but is man's true vital activity . . . ." <sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 675.

<sup>31</sup> van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 676. Waardenburg ("Religion Between Reality and Idea," pp. 169-172) distinguishes this moment of van der Leeuw's method, the "intensification of what is natural" (ibid., p. 171), from the application of the epoche proper which he thinks is limited to the "restraint of judgment." Waardenburg does indicate, however, that there are "several other connotations of the epoche in van der Leeuw's work" (ibid., p. 172, n. 111). I understand the use of the phenomenological brackets in a larger sense to include both an intellectual suspension and the turn to the natural standpoint. As I say this it is recognized that such an understanding of the epoche does not make sense in terms of the way in which the brackets are employed in philosophical phenomenology. And it is also recognized that there are aspects of van der Leeuw's description of the epoche which are fairly consistent with its philosophical counterpart (cf. especially Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 646, n. 1, and p. 676). Yet when van der Leeuw's use of the epoche is considered in the context of his understanding of the work of the phenomenology of religion as first of all classification (ibid., p. 674) and the connection of this work with the history of religions (Religionsgeschichte [cf., Einführung, pp. 1-6 for a description of this relationship]), it seems accurate to say that van der Leeuw does employ the brackets as a restraint of reality or truth judgments and also as a return to the activity of the natural standpoint. This is what I take to be the meaning of the "intensification of what is natural." In other words, while admitting the ambiguities of van der Leeuw's use of the epoche, I nonetheless take this way of understanding the brackets to be consistent with its general application in his work. It seems to me that, for van der Leeuw, the positive result of the imposition of the epoche is reaching the natural standpoint though not including an existential participation or commitment. This is the reason, I would maintain, why van der Leeuw does not speak of his point of departure in terms of "empathy" (Einfühlung),



The manner in which the epoche is used here is an important element in the method of this movement. Although van der Leeuw does not speak for all phenomenologists of religion, his understanding of the epoche as characteristic of our "whole attitude toward reality" does clearly express the way in which the brackets are generally employed. The epoche is intended to dismiss theoretical viewpoints, achieve the natural standpoint of human beings, and finally pave the way for insight into the nature of religion.<sup>32</sup> The reason a claim like this can be made is that while the epoche serves to parenthetically dismiss the powers of reflection, it does not bracket out the weight given to the bare facts of religions, the data, nor does it eliminate the notion of an "objective standard" in the evaluation of religious phenomena. Moreover, this movement accurately connects its own position with human activity of the natural standpoint. Although the method rejects the final step of existential valuation of the claims which

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but still claims to begin with a method which is no more than our "whole attitude to reality." Van der Leeuw does speak of "reconstruction" and "sympathetic experience" as the way of all understanding (Religion in Essence and Manifestation, pp. 674-675), but in the practice of the phenomenology of religion this comes after the imposition of the brackets and is its positive result (consider his discussion of the phenomenology of religion, *ibid.*, pp. 683-686). For further discussion of these matters in terms of van der Leeuw's understanding of "type" and "structure," cf., n. 48, below.

<sup>32</sup>Consider Eliade's reflections on the advantages of his method: "We are dispensed from any a priori definition of religious phenomena; the reader can make his own reflections on the nature of the sacred as he goes." (Patterns, p. xvi) Eliade continues to state that this neutral approach will ". . . clear the ground for the final discussion on the essence of religion." (*Ibid.*) It is my thesis that "a priori definition" is construed very broadly in this movement, beyond metaphysical and speculative claims, to include the general powers of reflection, and further, that this bracketing is thought to be able to lead to the essence of religion.

attend religions, the fundamental relation to the materials of religions is retained. The basic attitude of our everyday relationship to the objectivity and evidence of facts is upheld. And, more importantly, the phenomenology of religion maintains that this standpoint can yield a knowledge of the nature of religion.

The crucial role of the objectivity of the materials of religions will be clarified as we continue to describe the method of the phenomenology of religion. But at least it can be seen at this point that the epoche is taken to be a methodological device which can formally avoid the pitfalls of theory which are thought to surround the approaches to religious phenomena, and at the same time is able to lay the foundation for insight into the nature of religion. Yet this step is only the beginning for the phenomenology of religion. After the imposition of the epoche parenthetically removes those elements which might distort any understanding of religion, the next step is to achieve, in Bleeker's terms, an "eidetic vision"<sup>33</sup> of religions.

#### The Eidos of Religions

Having, by means of the epoche, removed commitments to the claims of religions, the speculations and implications of philosophical inquiry as well as evolutionary and other theoretical postulates of the human sciences, the phenomenology of religion is left with the, as it were, bare data of religions. And by attending to these materials--without the various distortions of existential involvement and of theory--the phenomenologist of religion intends to disclose the eidos

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<sup>33</sup>Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 3.

of religion. In the work of this movement, the use of the language of eidetics has a quite different connotation than it does in philosophical circles.

The phenomenology of religion does not intend to describe the essence of religion in any way except in terms of the actual occurrence of religions. So instead of considering essence in terms of a fixed possibility distinct from knowledge of the existence which embodies the essence, the phenomenology of religion intends to concern itself only with the actual materials of religion. While the epoche places the phenomenologist of religion in a proper attitude with regard to the materials of religions, the move to the level of eidetics is descriptive of the practices of this movement. The "eidetic vision" connotes the attempt to inventory and arrange the data of religions, and thus to disclose "religious categories."<sup>34</sup> The materials of religions are systematically surveyed, comparatively examined, and classified into groups.<sup>35</sup> But, as van der Leeuw emphasizes, these systematic efforts do not simply "push around stagnant facts."<sup>36</sup> The phenomenology of religion does not see itself as merely looking at the materials of religions, as "stock-taking in an antiquated museum."<sup>37</sup> Instead, the grouping of the data of religions is taken to be the

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<sup>34</sup>Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, pp. 1-12, p. 18; Eliade, Patterns, p. xvi.

<sup>36</sup>van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 6, my translation.

<sup>37</sup>Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," p. 19.

means for disclosure of the "essentials of religious phenomena," the meaning and structures of religion.<sup>38</sup>

For the phenomenology of religion, there are two elements to the systematic arrangement of the materials of religions. In the first place, the "religious data" are removed from their positions in time and space, from the context of historical development, in order to discern the structures of religious phenomena. As Raffaele Pettazzoni indicates, the movement away from the specificity of individual cultural environments to a different kind of analysis obtains for the phenomenology of religion a necessary universality.<sup>39</sup> The claim is that only by detaching the facts or data of religions from the particularity of their incidence and by seeking to establish relationships among them, and grouping the facts according to these relations, can the student of religion hope to understand those elements of the materials of religions which describe their religious character. This, for the phenomenology of religion, is their meaning. Bleeker speaks of this kind of inquiry in terms of discovering "ideological connections" among religious phenomena in which ". . . the facts are severed from their historical context and . . . are combined in such a way that the meaning of these phenomena as such becomes clear and transparent."<sup>40</sup> The more general description of this element of the

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<sup>38</sup>Bleeker, "Methodology and the Science of Religion," p. 217.

<sup>39</sup>Pettazzoni, "History and Phenomenology in the Science of Religion," p. 217.

<sup>40</sup>Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 3.

phenomenology of religion's eidetics is the notion of morphology or typology.<sup>41</sup>

It should be emphasized here that the comparative arrangements of the phenomenology of religion are thought to be different in kind than those called for by the general science of religion. While the science of religion sought to uncover the similarities among different religions, the phenomenology of religion seeks to discern parallels in a narrower sense, in specific kinds of actions and certain kinds of objects which might finally reveal the particular character of the religious. The phenomenology of religion's concern is to say what constitutes the unique quality of religious phenomena.<sup>42</sup> Viewed in light of the growth of the study of religion as a discipline, it can be said that the science of religion discovered widespread traits of resemblance among the various religions and was thus lead to speak of not

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<sup>41</sup>Heiler calls this kind of approach the "phenomenology of concentric circles" in Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion Die Religionen der Menschheit I* ed. by Christel Matthias Schroder (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961), pp. 19-21. Sometimes a distinction is made between morphology and typology with a preference for the use of morphology. (Cf., Hultkranz, "The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods," pp. 77-81). Typology is used to refer to the division of religions according to kinds, e.g., monotheistic, polytheistic, etc., often including geographical-historical divisions. Morphology refers to the classification of the contents of religions according to structures and recurring patterns, and this is taken to be the proper phenomenological task. I tend to use the two terms interchangeably simply because van der Leeuw employs the notion of type and others use the concept of morphology without any substantial differences in approach. In this context, I take both words to name the classifications and analyses of the materials of religions which are intended to reveal the nature of religion, i.e., the work of the phenomenology of religion.

<sup>42</sup>Cf., Bleeker, "The Conception of Man in the Phenomenology of Religion," pp. 15-16.

simply many religions but of homo religiosus and the possibility of the scientific study of religion itself. Religions were analysed and compared as wholes or groups of religions, and often they were arranged in hierarchies determining relative value and degrees of development.<sup>43</sup> By contrast,

Phenomenology does not try to compare the religions with one another as large units but it takes out of their historical setting the similar facts and phenomena which it encounters in different religions, brings them together, and studies them in groups. The corresponding data, which are sometimes nearly identical, brings us almost automatically to comparative study. The purpose of such study is to become acquainted with the religious thought, idea or need which underlies the group of corresponding data.<sup>44</sup>

Or, as Kristensen continues, "it is the common meaning . . . that is important, and that we must try to understand."<sup>45</sup> The eidetic analyses of the phenomenology of religion, the construction of morphologies, is the effort to treat the contents of religions systematically in order to elicit the meaning of religious phenomena. The weight here is on the systematic and the drive toward the so-called "inner logic"<sup>46</sup> of religious phenomena.

This is the second element in the phenomenology of religion's systematic treatment of the materials of religions. As the phenomenology of religion moves from the historical and cultural contexts of

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<sup>43</sup>See, for example, Tiele's Britannica article, "Religions"; and also his, "On the Study of Comparative Theology."

<sup>44</sup>Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>46</sup>Bleeker, "The Conception of Man in the Phenomenology of Religion," p. 17.

the materials of religions, it attempts to organize the materials in light of their distinctively religious characteristics.<sup>47</sup> Van der Leeuw stresses both the systematic element and the effort to describe the peculiar sense of religious phenomena when he speaks of the "interconnection of meaning--structure" and "structural connections" which are neither simply factual relationships nor causal connections, but are called "types," the discernment of the manifestations of the essential nature of religion.<sup>48</sup> According to Bleeker, finally the task

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<sup>47</sup>As Eliade emphasizes when he discusses the current situation of the history of religions (in this context, including the phenomenology of religion):

"In short, we have neglected this essential fact: that in the title of the 'history of religions' the accent ought not to be upon the word history, but upon the word religions. For although there are numerous ways of practising history--from the history of technics to that of human thought--there is only one way of approaching religion--namely, to deal with the religious facts. Before making the history of anything, one must have a proper understanding of what is, in and for itself. In that connection, I would draw attention to the work of Professor van der Leeuw, who has done so much for the phenomenology of religion, and whose many and brilliant publications have aroused the educated public to a renewal of interest in the history of religions in general." Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, trans. by Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed and Ward, A Search Book, 1969), p. 29.

<sup>48</sup>van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, pp. 673-674. The notions of type and ideal type are interpreted in the "Epilegomena" of this work in light of van der Leeuw's discussion of phenomenological method as intertwined with the process of understanding (verstehen). For van der Leeuw, phenomenological analysis begins with a "reconstruction" of experience which is necessitated by the fact that immediate experience is never directly accessible. The outcome of the process of reconstruction is the discernment of structure. Structure is the connection between reality (the "chaotic maze") and someone who understands it, but itself is neither experienced directly nor is it abstracted logically. Rather, it is that which is understood. It is "reality significantly organized." The weight here is on significance which is taken to be meaning or the "interconnection of meaning" belonging both to the reality and to the experiencer joined in the act

of the phenomenology of religion is to determine the "religious logic," the "inner logic," of religious phenomena, ". . . which works otherwise than the rational logic, but which possesses a rationality of its own, easily to be disclosed by the student of the phenomenology of religion who approaches his material in an unbiased way."<sup>49</sup> Whether

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of understanding. The interconnection of meaning is disclosed in the act of understanding where it "dawns upon us." Because structure takes place in understanding it is not restricted to a momentary experience or insight, but extends over experiential unities. Van der Leeuw concludes, "The understood experience thus becomes coordinated, in and by understanding, within experience of some yet wider connection. Every individual experience, therefore, is already connection; and every connection remains always experience; this is what we mean by speaking of types, together with structures." (Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 673.) Type, then, is taken to be the "structural connections," individual experiences coordinated within some wider connection. The wider connections of experiences are spoken of in terms of "ideal types" which, like types, have no reality but do "appear" as connection. They display their own logic or, for van der Leeuw, "life." It should be recalled at this point that in van der Leeuw's view neither phenomenological method nor the process of understanding differ essentially from human activity in general. In addition, I would maintain that all the movements of understanding described here are differentiated only by levels of greater generality. They are all parcel of the same basic activity of life which van der Leeuw discusses in a variety of ways in the "Epilogomena" as ordering, classifying, or assigning names. The meaning of this activity is what "dawns upon us" and is called understanding. In the work itself, the phenomenological task is carried out by organizing the data of religions according to kinds of activities and objects and their forms in religions by means of the overarching rubric of power which is interpreted variously according to types of religious phenomena (objects and activities in their interrelations) and as the description (understanding) of religion itself. The relationship of the organization of the materials of religions and discussions of the essence or meaning of religion will continue to be discussed below. This matter is also briefly treated in van der Leeuw's Einführung (p. 3) when he describes the difficult road between objective facts and their subjective valuation which the phenomenology of religion attempts to follow in search of the sense (Sinn) of religious phenomena. Consider also, Hirschmann, Phänomenologie der Religion, and Waardenburg, "Religion Between Reality and Idea," especially pp. 161-183, for discussions of the overall schema of van der Leeuw's work.

<sup>49</sup>Bleeker, "The Conception of Man in the Phenomenology of



this element of the eidetic inquiries is considered in terms of an "inner logic" or in the sense of van der Leeuw's "types," the crucial point is that the act of systematic arrangement itself is held to disclose the unique qualities of religious phenomena.

These two elements, the removal of the materials of religions from their historical contexts and the construction of morphologies, together form the eidetic component of the phenomenology of religion's method. The foundation of this movement's eidetics is not traced to any prior notion of what constitutes religion or to the location of religion's possibility in some particular aspect of human being. Instead, it relies on the "empirical unity"<sup>50</sup> displayed by historical research. And it is to this inquiry that the phenomenology of religion must always return in order to establish and confirm its claims.<sup>51</sup> Although this movement distinguishes its own work from that of the historian (it does not intend to confine itself to the verification and explanation of particular data), it nonetheless understands its

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Religion," p. 17. E. O. James describes the phenomenology of religion in much the same way although he does not distinguish the specific elements of the method of this movement. He does note in passing a distinction between "interior religious experience" (the realm of the phenomenology of religion) and "the exterior manifestations of the phenomena" (history's domain) which are complementary aspects of the same task and are both conditioned by the results of historical research. E. O. James, History of Religions (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 228-229.

<sup>50</sup>Pettazzoni, "History and Phenomenology in the Science of Religion," p. 219.

<sup>51</sup>Cf., van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 2, quoted in n. 22; van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 685; and also, Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 12.

basis to be in the "historical facts."<sup>52</sup> This point is also made by Widengren when he discusses the difference between the "systematic synthesis" of the phenomenology of religion and historical analysis concluding that the separation of the two is only theoretical since, as phenomenologists, "we take our stand only on positive historical investigations or comparison."<sup>53</sup> Finally, "what is good for the history of religions [religionsgeschichte] is good for the phenomenology of religion."<sup>54</sup> This fundamental reliance on the assumptions of historical research defines the limits of the phenomenology of religion's understanding of eidetic inquiry. Because the "empirical unity" of the data of religions is taken to be the foundation for the work of this movement, eidetic analysis does not go beyond the ordering of the materials of religions according to common characteristics.

In the end, what takes place in the eidetic element of the phenomenology of religion is not fundamentally a different kind of analysis than that of historical inquiry, but is a shift to a level of greater generality. This is why what is important to the phenomenology of religion is not the specific cultural contexts and historical developments of various religions, but the different forms and types of activities and objects which are common to the various phenomena called religious.<sup>55</sup> The systematic analysis of these materials, their

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<sup>52</sup>Bleeker, "The Contribution of the Phenomenology of Religion to the Study of the History of Religions," p. 41.

<sup>53</sup>Widengren, Religionsphänomenologie, p. 1, my translations.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>It is not that the phenomenology of religion denies the reality

organization and arrangement, is the eidetic step of the phenomenology of religion. The isolation of those elements which are specific to religious phenomena, and which are held to describe the nature of religion, is spoken of in terms of the "peculiar intentionality"<sup>56</sup> of religions. This is the third step in the method of the phenomenology of religions.

#### The Peculiar Intentionality of Religion

Discussions of the method of the phenomenology of religion commonly include only two methodological principles: the "epoche" and the "eidetic vision."<sup>57</sup> A third step, the disclosure of the "peculiar intentionality" of religion, is included here because it serves to emphasize what Bleeker calls the "ultimate aim" of the phenomenology of religion to provide "an inclusive formulation of the essence of

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of the historical milieu, but it does insist that it is not definitive for understanding religious phenomena. As Eliade observes:

"There is no such thing outside of history as a 'pure' religious datum. For there is no such thing as a human datum that is not at the same time a historical datum. Every religious experience is expressed and transmitted in a particular historical context. But admitting the historicity of religious experiences does not imply that they are reducible to nonreligious forms of behavior." (Mircea Eliade, "Comparative Religion: Its Past and Future," Knowledge and the Future of Man, ed. by Walter J. Ong, S.J. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), pp. 250-251.

<sup>56</sup>The term is taken from Eliade, The Quest, p. 35.

<sup>57</sup>For example, only the two elements are discussed in Sharpe, Comparative Religion, p. 224; Bleeker, "Methodology and the Science of Religion," pp. 5-6; Widengren, "Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion," pp. 143-144; and Oxtoby, "Religionswissenschaft Revisited," p. 597.

religion."<sup>58</sup> Although the attempt to uncover the "peculiar intentionality" of religion may not be a methodological step which goes beyond the kind of inquiry that takes place in eidetic analysis, it does describe the prevalent effort of the phenomenology of religion to address the general question of whether or not there is anything distinctive about religious phenomena. In other words, the possibility of inquiry into the "peculiar intentionality" of religion stems from the phenomenology of religion's understanding of the significance of its eidetic inquiries.

Eidetic inquiries provide morphologies, the elucidation of the common elements of religions. Because these morphologies are not limited to the historical and cultural contexts of specific religions but attempt to show what it is that exceeds the boundaries of particularity and contingency, they are held to display the "inner logic" of religions. From investigation of these features of religious phenomena, the unique and distinctive elements of religion are to be disclosed. Oxtoby clearly expresses this aim of the phenomenology of religion when he writes,

The phenomenologist characteristically concentrates his interest on those patterns which seem most general, most persistent, most nearly universal. It is the timeless quality of the religious response, its inherent and inevitable domicile in human behavior and expression, which is planted as seed in the assumption and develops in full bloom in the finished treatment of the material.<sup>59</sup>

Sometimes when the phenomenology of religion speaks of the import of

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<sup>58</sup>Bleeker, "The Key Word of Religion," p. 36.

<sup>59</sup>Oxtoby, "Religionswissenschaft Revisited," p. 586.

its eidetic analyses it seems to indicate that religion itself lies "beneath" the data of the many religions in the "religious thought, idea or need"<sup>60</sup> or in the "inner logic"<sup>61</sup> of religions. But at the same time the phenomenology of religion sees the way to this "inner logic" is through the systematic arrangement of the data of the variety of religions; understanding of the "inner logic" of religion is to be conditioned by the results of historical inquiry into the materials of religions.<sup>62</sup> What is emphasized here is that the foundation of this effort to uncover the "peculiar intentionality" of religion is in the "empirical unity"<sup>63</sup> of religions which is uncovered by historical research. This is why, I would maintain, the intentionality of religion is not located in some description of religious consciousness but is discussed in terms of the overall entelecheia of the observable; in religious institutions, forms of piety, kinds of activity, etc..

This is all to say that the language of intentionality is used here not because of philosophical allegiances, but because of the effort of this movement to understand, only in ways appropriate to the material, the whole range of religious expressions, activities, objects

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<sup>60</sup>Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup>Bleeker, "The Conception of Man in the Phenomenology of Religion," p. 17.

<sup>62</sup>E. O. James emphasizes this in History of Religions, pp. 228-229, as does Bleeker, "The Contribution of the Phenomenology of Religion to the Study of the History of Religions," p. 41, and Widengren, Religionsphänomenologie, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup>Pettazzoni, "History and Phenomenology in the Science of Religion," p. 219.

and their interrelations. In this concluding element of the phenomenology of religion's method, the most comprehensive level of inquiry is reached. It is here where the phenomenologist shows how, in Kristensen's words, "the particular and the universal interpenetrate again and again."<sup>64</sup> Because the nature of religion is taken to dwell between the specifics of religions and their perduring forms, the phenomenologist attempts to uncover the "patterns" of religions. To the extent these patterns reach the widest level of generality and inclusiveness, the peculiar intentionality of religion is thought to be uncovered.

For example, when Bleeker describes the "objectives of the phenomenology of religion," he isolates three aspects of its task: the *theoria*, the *logos*, and the *entelecheia* of religious phenomena.<sup>65</sup> Under the first Bleeker includes the comparative work of the phenomenology of religion, those schemes of classification which arrange the elements and forms of religions (e.g., sacrifice, prayer, worship, magic) occurring throughout the various specific religions.<sup>66</sup> The second aspect, the *logos* of religious phenomena, deals with the "hidden structure of the different religions."<sup>67</sup> In contrast to the comparative

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<sup>64</sup>Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, p. 36.

<sup>65</sup>Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 14.

<sup>66</sup>Bleeker, "Some Remarks on the 'Entelecheia' of Religious Phenomena," p. 16. Bleeker's "phenomenological classification," arranged in terms of "Holy Vision" (God and Salvation), "Holy Road" (conceptions of human being and the cosmos), and "Holy Acts" (forms of piety, cult, and doctrine), is briefly described in Waardenburg, "Religion Between Reality and Idea," pp. 184-195.

<sup>67</sup>Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 14.

work of the first objective, attention here is directed to the internal logic of specific religions. Although these two objectives do not describe the method of the phenomenology of religion, they do emphasize two poles of phenomenological investigations. And, taken together, the two objectives stress the overall effort of this movement to understand religion through the arrangement and classification of the materials of the various religions.

By the same token, Bleeker's final objective of the phenomenology of religion, inquiry into the entelecheia of religious phenomena, underscores the aim of the phenomenologist to describe the nature of religion. According to Bleeker, the notion of entelecheia serves two purposes. In the first place, it overcomes the tendency of the phenomenology of religion to be a static kind of analysis. The idea of entelecheia enables the phenomenologist to give due attention to the dynamic qualities of religions, their change and growth, without the encumbrance and distortions of narrowly conceived evolutionary concepts of history. This is the second purpose which the idea of entelecheia serves. Not only does inquiry into the entelecheia of religious phenomena prevent the phenomenology of religion from simply seeing religions as static entities outside the dynamics of historical life, it also provides an avenue for approaching the question of the essence of religion in terms appropriate to the distinctive character of religious phenomena and within the limits of phenomenological inquiry.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Bleeker, "Some Remarks on the 'Entelecheia' of Religious Phenomena," pp. 16-24.

Bleeker's notion of entelecheia is one way of expressing the aim of the phenomenology of religion to describe the peculiar intentionality of religion. Because entelecheia is understood in an Aristotelian sense as "the course of events in which the essence is realized by its manifestations,"<sup>69</sup> investigations into what Bleeker calls the theoria and logos of religions provide the basis upon which the more general issue of the essence of religion can be addressed. Or, to put the matter in terms of the present discussion, morphologies and typologies, the specific and the comparative taken together, are thought to yield insight into the nature of religion. Bleeker's positive conception of inquiry into the nature of religion is revealed in his discussion of the kinds of problems dealt with under the notion of entelecheia: knowledge of the origin of religion ("how religion has arisen in the course of history and how it originates today");<sup>70</sup> whether or not the history of religions indicate a particular logic (the passing, change, and regeneration of religions); the problem of "impure religion" (what is a religion and what is not a religion); and the question of the possibility of a "gradual rising of religious level"<sup>71</sup> (the pervasiveness of the fundamental ideas of religions and their ability to address the present situation).

Characteristically, the understanding of essence is framed in terms which tie it to the central features of the specific materials

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 23.



of religions, to the common forms of those objectivities which appear throughout the variety of religions. Bleeker's discussion of entelecheia concludes with the general statement, "The phenomenology of religion teaches us that religion is man's inseparable companion. It is an invincible, creative and self-regenerating force."<sup>72</sup> This, it seems to me, is as close as Bleeker comes to a description of the nature of religion. If we wish to gain a more specific description, we are turned to the "structures of religion," to the abstractions gleaned from the morphological studies which constitute the bulk of phenomenological inquiries, i.e., analyses of types of activities and representations found in religions, constant forms of expression, common symbolic features, etc..<sup>73</sup>

Certainly attempts by other phenomenologists of religion to examine the "peculiar intentionality of religion" could also be examined. We might consider a number of the various ways in which scholars in this movement have endeavored to disclose the typical religious principles which characterize the complexity of religious life and defines the nature of religion itself.<sup>74</sup> Yet each would show us that when the

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<sup>72</sup>Bleeker, "Some Remarks on the 'Entelecheia' of Religious Phenomena," p. 24. In the same vein, see Eliade's "Conclusions" to Patterns, pp. 464-465.

<sup>73</sup>Bleeker uncovers four elements of the structure of religion: "constant forms"; "irreducible elements"; "points of crystalization"; and "types" in C. Jouco Bleeker, "La Structure de la Religion," Bleeker, The Sacred Bridge, pp. 25-35. In Bleeker's work, structure is not theoretically distinct from morphological study but is developed on a greater level of generality deduced from the primary historical and comparative work. For a more detailed statement of his phenomenological studies see, C. Jouco Bleeker, De Structuur van de Godsdienst: Hoofdpijnen ener fenomenologie de godsdienst (The Hague: Servire, n.d., 1956).

<sup>74</sup>For example, we could consider Kristensen's (The Meaning of

phenomenology of religion speaks of the "peculiar intentionality of religion" or the essence of religion, what is being considered is the infinite variety of the materials of religions organized according to common and persistent features. And, in terms of the method of this movement, this synthetic activity is held to be the preeminent avenue to the disclosure of the nature of religion. This is the promise of the phenomenology of religion. When this movement views the large complex of varied and divergent data of religions it does not simply see the historical facts of many cultures and many religions, it also sees the possibility of the systematic treatment of these materials disclosing the characteristics of the universal phenomenon, religion.

Structure and History:  
The Triumph of Type

The effort up to this point has been to describe a methodological perspective which characterizes the diverse work of the phenomenology of religion. Despite the numerous essays on method which appear in the work of this movement, the common perspective often operates on an implicit level, functioning more as a pregiven or assumed attitude than a set procedure or a carefully elucidated example of foundational thinking. One reason this may be so is the starting

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Religion) notion of the "holy" as the common factor revealed through religious cosmology, religious anthropology, and cultus; van der Leeuw's (Religion in Essence and Manifestation) understanding of "power" as that which permeates all types of religious activities and objects; Heiler's (Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion) idea of the "transcendent" as the common element of religious manifestations; or Eliade's (Patterns) discussions of the appearance of the sacred and recurring "symbolic structures" as the crucial element which defines religion.

point of the work of the phenomenology of religion. As was indicated above, the imposition of the epoche serves not only to eliminate certain kinds of theoretical positions from the phenomenologist's work, but also devalues the importance of theoretical reflection in general and underscores the cardinal significance of the data of religions. It is this kind of decision which reflects, and perhaps establishes, a certain reluctance on the part of this movement to discuss fundamental methodological issues. Bleeker expresses this general attitude most directly when he writes,

For the first it is dubious whether theoretical considerations on methodology are very fruitful and attractive. Not improperly it has been said that discussing methodology is like an endlessly sharpening of a knife whilst one never gets something to eat. Such a theoretical exposition mostly is a bloodless argument which some people perhaps read with pleasure, but which is not to the taste of historians of religion [including, in this context, phenomenologists of religion]. They are fascinated by the religious phenomena to such a degree, that they do not allow themselves time to reflect on the method of their study.<sup>75</sup>

Still, whether or not the phenomenology of religion self-consciously reflects upon a particular method of inquiry, its work does display a certain set of assumptions and theoretical considerations. The attempt, in this chapter, has been to describe this method under the divisions: epoche, eidetic vision, and peculiar intentionality of religion.

A more comprehensive way of expressing this movement's perspective is to consider the idea of structure as it is held to be both the completion of historical research and a way of broaching the problem

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<sup>75</sup>Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," p. 12.

of religion and religions. According to the phenomenology of religion, the work of the historian is of premier importance in the study of religion because it uncovers the essential and indispensable materials of religions. But the simple accumulation of data cannot provide answers to questions concerning the nature of religion. What is required, according to this movement, is the arrangement of the data of religions according to the principles of the epoche and the eidetic vision in order to uncover the structure(s) of religion. Structure is taken to be that which distinguishes the materials of religions from their cultural contexts and from other kinds of phenomena. It is those forms and types of representations and activities which occur throughout the various religions, and which can be discerned despite the vast differences in the particularity of their cultural and historical contexts.

The notion of structure itself is built upon something like what Eliade has described as a "synchronic" understanding of history.<sup>76</sup> In this view, the data of historical research is understood to hold the power to reveal more than the particular situation of a historical community. The materials which the historian uncovers are taken to have the capacity to not only impart information concerning a specific time and cultural context, but also the possibility of the knowledge of the nature of things. In terms of the work of the phenomenology of religion we can see how, assuming the "synchronicity of history," it finds its basis in the facts of religions, in the concrete, but is

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<sup>76</sup>Mircea Eliade, "The Sacred in the Secular World," Cultural Hermeneutics 1 (1973): 104-106.

nonetheless permitted to arrange and analyze these facts without regard to their specific historical settings. Further, it is maintained that through this kind of investigation an understanding of the essence of religion can be achieved. Assuming this "synchronic" view Eliade is able to conclude, "When I discuss the time structure of the sacred, I am no longer related to temporal differences in a diachronic context; I have the right to jump from the ancient neolithic Near East to India and Africa in examining the world of the agriculturalist, although it arose at different times in these places."<sup>77</sup> However, what Eliade does remain related to is the particularity, the facts, of these different time periods and cultural milieux. The effort here is simply to say that with something like a "synchronic" understanding of the work of historical studies, the phenomenology of religion is able to conclude that its arrangements of the data of religions, the elucidation of structures, are legitimately based in empirical evidence and still can claim insight into the general nature of religion--that which is nowhere empirically given.

Perhaps this point can be illustrated by way of an example. When Eliade examines the elements of myth, he discovers that a key feature of myths is that they present exemplary models for life (e.g., models for hunting, for agricultural activities, for getting married, for dying) and that central (common) to these models is the repetition of that which was revealed from the beginning, in illo tempore, by gods, ancestors, or heroes. In turn, repetition is taken to be a key feature

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<sup>77</sup>Eliade, "Sacred in the Secular World," p. 105.

of mythic and, finally, religious experience; it is a clue to the understanding of sacred time and to the understanding of homo religiosus. It is descriptive of the "structure" of religious manifestations. Certainly Eliade's analysis is far more elaborate than this brief summary indicates. It is filled out by inquiry into the various aspects of the mythic (and religious) description of reality, i.e., by analysis of the "celestial archetype," the "symbolism of the Center," ritual reenactment of the acts of gods, etc.<sup>78</sup> Yet what remains common to all the aspects of analysis is the movement to levels of greater empirical generality. As one compares the various particular elements of myths, for example, and discovers that which is common, the investigator gains access to their meaning or nature, and to the nature of the greater phenomenon, religion.<sup>79</sup> And this, it must be emphasized, is held not to be a work of reduction, but one of integration. It is the discovery, finally, of the nature of religion through investigation of the particular aspects of religions.

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<sup>78</sup>See, among his other works, Eliade, "The Sacred in the Secular World," pp. 105-106; and Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History, trans. by Willard R. Trask Bollingen Series XLVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954).

<sup>79</sup>In this light consider Eliade's reflections on religious symbolism in his, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," p. 107:

"This is not to say that one must put all meanings of this symbolism [magic flight] on the same plane--from the flight of shamans to the mystical ascension. However, since the 'cipher' constituted by this symbolism carries with it in its structure all the values that have been progressively revealed to man in the course of time, it is necessary in deciphering them to take into account their most general meaning, that is, the one meaning which can articulate all the other, particular meanings and which alone permits us to understand how the latter have formed a structure."

When the phenomenology of religion takes the elucidation of the structures of religion to be the completion of historical investigation, this movement does not suggest that the basic work of the historian is inadequate, but only that it does not go far enough in drawing out the implications of its study. In fact, through the "synchronic" understanding of history, fundamental importance is granted to historical research. If the historian of religions wishes to understand the essence of religion, he or she may continue work as phenomenologist of religion without any radical change in perspective.

Turning again to the observations of Eliade, "Once the historian of religion takes on the search for meaning, he can following the phenomenological principle of suspension of judgment, assume the structure of synchronicity, and, therefore, as I have said before, bring together the meanings evident in many different cultures and eras."<sup>80</sup> It is the thesis of this investigation that such a "bringing together of the meanings evident in different cultures and eras" is, for the phenomenology of religion, statements concerning the essence of religion. In other words, the variety of arrangements of the materials of religions, the systems of empirical classifications, which emerge from the work of this movement appear to be the culmination of the search for the essence of religion. This is what I mean by speaking of the triumph of type.

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<sup>80</sup> Eliade, "The Sacred in the Secular World," p. 107.

The Phenomenology of Religion and  
the General Science of Religion

In order to see how types of religious manifestations achieve such a crucial role in the work of the phenomenology of religion, we can recall its starting point in the assumptions of the general science of religion. As has been indicated, when the phenomenology of religion considers the work of its predecessors, it sees a discipline established on the basis of a narrowly conceived rationalistic view of scientific progress. It sees a "positivistic" science infused with notions of historical and cultural, if not biological, evolutionism which, from the beginning, serve to distort the possibility of understanding religious data. According to the phenomenology of religion, the complexity and uniqueness of religious phenomena does not reveal a unilinear evolutionary process. In short, the approach of the general science of religion is understood as a reductionism. And this, together with other "reductionistic" approaches of the human sciences, must be removed from the investigation of religions. Instead, religious phenomena must be understood in terms of its religious character. With its antireductionist standpoint, the phenomenology of religion insists upon the uniqueness of religious experience.

Yet when we consider what emerges from this notion of the irreducibility of religious phenomena, we see that religious experience comes to be understood in terms of the data or facts of religions, that the formation of types are taken as insight into the meaning of religions, and that analysis of these two elements are meant to provide access to the essence or nature of religion. I want to propose that



one way of understanding this movement is to see its method as an attempt to make radical some of the unnoted assumptions of the general science of religion. In other words, the phenomenology of religion while rejecting certain aspects of its predecessors' work has accepted its most fundamental assumptions, its general framework, and turned them into crucial elements of its own method; elements which promise to, methodologically, reap the benefits of historical research.

When the phenomenology of religion begins its work with the imposition of the epoche, with the suspension of judgment, it not only removes certain theoretical positions from its starting point, but it also reflects the thesis of the general science of religion that religion is manifest in phenomena. Phenomenologists of religion do not argue, as does Max Müller, that the possibility of religious apprehensions have their objective correlate in the objects of sense perception which, in turn, serve to provide the evidence for a scientific examination of religion. But this movement does assume that there is something distinctive about religious phenomena which remains after all theoretical tampering with the phenomena is removed. What remains, for the phenomenology of religion, is the particulars of religions, the facts, which taken together are understood to constitute a general and universal element of human existence, religion. This is also the assumption of the founders of the science of religion. If it is the case that religion is somehow present in its manifestations (the data of religions), no special kind of reflective act is required to understand the nature of religion. In fact, reflective acts only tend to distort or misrepresent that which is already empirically given.

Because of this kind of assumption, taken over from the general science of religion, the phenomenology of religion is able to impose its version of the epoche in the hope of discerning the essence of religion.

Still, according to this movement, the nature of religion is understood to be only partially presented in its manifestations. Religion dwells within the contingencies and particularity of historical life. If its general nature or essence is to be understood, the whole range of materials must be examined. In the work of the phenomenology of religion this is the movement to the level of the "eidetic vision." In the general science of religion this is expressed in its particular understanding of the role of comparative method. Although the adequacy of the way in which the science of religion employs comparative inquiry--its search for parallels, its notion of origins, its evolutionary tendencies--is denied, the phenomenologist of religion nonetheless intends to disclose the common elements of religions through a kind of comparative study of religions. But in this case it is through the construction of morphologies and through the explication of structures. While the phenomenology of religion does not attempt to discover parallels in the same way its predecessors did, it does try to describe the forms of religious representations, manners of activity, and kinds of conceptions of the world which persist throughout the multiple data of religions. This level of analysis in the phenomenology of religion assumes, as did that of its predecessors, there is a unity and independence of religion and the religious life which can be grasped and understood on the basis of the data of religions.

The phenomenology of religion expresses this in its understanding of history as "synchronic." According to this point of view, empirically based historical research has, by its nature and with the help of phenomenological classifications, the capacity to disclose the essence of religion. What this accomplishes in the practice of the phenomenology of religion's efforts to discern the nature of religion is the assurance of objective evidence. And it is a standpoint which is not unlike the general science of religion's attempt to provide a scientific (objective) basis for the study of religion.

The assumptions of the phenomenology of religion will continue to be examined as we turn to an analysis of the possibility of understanding the relation between religion and religions. But it can be noted here, by way of summary, that despite the wide divergence in the works of the phenomenology of religion and a certain reluctance to discuss fundamental methodological issues, several common methodological features can be described. In fact, this reluctance to participate in fundamental discussions of method has itself been traced to a methodological decision, a decision made explicit in the application of the epoche. When the brackets are imposed, two significant results emerge. In the first place, various kinds of judgments are removed from the practice of the phenomenologist. These have been discussed in terms of theological, philosophical, and "reductionistic" theories. Because these kinds of reflection are construed so broadly, fundamental methodological thinking in general is thought to be suspect. So when this movement thinks about method, what emerges is something like summaries or debates concerning the practice of the phenomenologist. This

is the second result of the use of the epoche. Even as the phenomenology of religion devalues the capacities of reflection, it at the same time awards a special role to the empirical materials of religions. The empirical presuppositions of this movement, as well as its suspicions, have been traced to the assumptions of the founders of the general science of religion.

This general standpoint provides for the phenomenology of religion the establishment of a technique of practice through which the investigator may come to understand religion itself without the distortions of extrinsic theories. This technique of inquiry has been described here in terms of the "eidetic vision." This is the point at which the phenomenologist of religion arranges and analyzes the all-important data of religions in the hope of uncovering the structure of religion, its essence or "peculiar intentionality." It has been suggested that this element of method rests upon a "synchronic" understanding of history which itself is yet another expression of the phenomenology of religion's acceptance of the presuppositions of its predecessors. Finally, what emerges from the work of this movement is the elucidation of the types of religious manifestations. It is these forms of empirical generalities which are held to describe the essence of religion as it is a human phenomenon, and in terms appropriate to its unique character.

Throughout this analysis what I have tried to show is that, first, there is a method which describes the work of the phenomenology of religion. And, second, that despite differences between the general science of religion and the phenomenology of religion, the two remain tied

at the level of the fundamental axioms first expressed in the founding efforts of the science of religion. Further, in the phenomenology of religion these presuppositions are neither radically questioned nor are they critically apprehended. The task of the critical consideration of these assumptions will be that of the remainder of this investigation.

## CHAPTER IV

### RELIGION AND RELIGIONS: THE PARADOX OF FOUNDATION

#### IN ALLGEMEINE RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT AND THE

#### WORK OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

##### Introduction

Until this point, the effort has been to trace the central methodological features of the phenomenology of religion to their foundations in the general science of religion by way of analysis of the texts and common themes of these movements. This task has led us through a description of the foundations of the general science of religion to a method which unites a diverse group of scholars into a movement, the phenomenology of religion. We have seen that the foundational elements of the science of religion and the method of the phenomenology of religion are united by certain goals and methodological assumptions. Appropriately, the general science of religion has been recognized as the predecessor to the method of the phenomenology of religion. The assumptions concerning the nature of the study of religion and direction in which it must proceed first described by the founders of this science continue to appear, at least implicitly, in the work of the phenomenology of religion. Despite the criticisms which the phenomenology of religion levels against its predecessors and despite the attempt to distinguish its method from that of the general science of religion, the two remain tied on the most fundamental level.

Throughout this work the overall effort has been to understand the work of the phenomenology of religion and to examine its particular way of addressing the problem of the relation between religion and religions. In the context of the work of the phenomenology of religion, we have seen that the method of this movement cannot be understood simply as an attempt to "apply" a philosophic method to a determinate subject matter; simply as a philosophic method put to work in a positive science.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we have seen that the phenomenology of religion must be approached in terms of its attempt to outline a "phenomenological method" within the problematic and sharing the assumptions of the general science of religion. And, as we have examined the general science of religion, it has been shown that the methodological foundations of this science are to be discovered on a level beneath the fluctuations of intellectual history, beneath the influences and developments which contribute to the formation of intellectual movements. The thesis of this investigation is that it is necessary to pursue the prejudices and assumptions of the science of religion, and

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<sup>1</sup>The application of phenomenological method can be seen in many of the human sciences. For example, the work of Binswanger, Minkowski, and Straus, among others, shows the extent to which phenomenological method has been used in theoretical and clinical psychological studies. Cf., Ludwig Binswanger, Being in the World: Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger, trans. Jacob Needleman (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Eugene Minkowski, Lived Time: Phenomenological and Pathological Studies, trans. Nancy Metzger (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963); and Erwin W. Straus, Phenomenological Psychology: The Selected Papers of Erwin W. Straus, trans. Erling Eng (New York: Basic Books, 1966). In the case of the phenomenology of religion, however, the appropriation of this method is not straightforward. To attempt to understand this movement as the direct application of a philosophical method, would be to misconstrue the particular features of the phenomenology of religion as well as its distinctive task.

of the phenomenology of religion, further in order to examine the claims of these movements in light of their fundamental presuppositions. In this way we will be able to critically examine the distinctive manner in which the problem of the relation between religion and religions is addressed. Moreover, we will begin to see the limits of the phenomenology of religion's method and the context within which its problematic is fixed.

When comparative method was spoken of as an outgrowth of the science of religion's rejection of philosophical and theological reflection, it was not simply an indication of the particular kinds of allegiances held by the founders of this science, but instead a recognition of those sometimes unnoted theoretical decisions which allowed them to see the promise of comparative method as so great. It is true that certain elements of the intellectual milieu of the science of religion--particularly theories of evolution in the natural sciences and the wealth of materials uncovered by nineteenth century historical research--in a sense, account for the growth of comparative method.<sup>2</sup> But a description of this intellectual environment would not fully account for the attempt of the founders of the science of religion to see comparative method as a way of uncovering the nature of religion. Nor would it account for the claims which were made for comparative method as a foundation for a science of religion.

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<sup>2</sup>On this point, consider, Sharpe, Comparative Religion, pp. 47-71; Eliade, "The Quest for the 'Origin' of Religion," pp. 40-42; Allen, Structure and Creativity in Religion, pp. 6-9; and Wach, "Development, Meaning, and Method," pp. 3-5.



Now when the phenomenology of religion accepts the starting point of the general science of religion, it accedes to certain limitations and possibilities which define the specific shape of the method which the phenomenology of religion proposes. In the last chapter, it was suggested that while the phenomenology of religion attempted to refute the particular way in which comparative method was put into practice by the science of religion, it nonetheless accepted the theoretical function of this method. In other words, the phenomenology of religion continued to affirm the role of comparative method even while it criticized its particular application in the science of religion. In this way the phenomenology of religion appropriated the restraints upon thought first imposed by the science of religion, and with this appropriation granted to the "outward" manifestations of religion, interpreted as the historical data of religions, a specific priority.<sup>3</sup> The materials uncovered by historical research, the facts of religions, came to be held as the source of certitude; they are the gaurantor of objectivity.

Because the facts of religions are understood to be free from those theological, speculative, and "reductionistic" theories which

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<sup>3</sup>The term "outward" here is meant to indicate those elements of religions which can be observed, measured, and compared. What tends to be emphasized is the contents of the myths, rites, and symbols of the various religions in contrast to the more "inward" aspects of relation which could be described in terms of the character and structure of manners of experiencing. Admittedly, the "outward/inward" distinction is problematic in itself. Yet it seems to me that such a distinction is applicable to the work of the phenomenology of religion by virtue of its emphasis on the empirical data of religions as the criterion for evaluating analyses and descriptions of religions. In other words, from the point of view of the phenomenology of religion, religion is taken to primarily reside in the objective manifestations of religious experiencing.

have served to distort attempts to understand the nature of religion, or of homo religiosus, the phenomenology of religion takes these materials as given in objectivity and as somehow "neutral." That is, the facts disclosed by the work of the historical sciences are understood to be outside of those interpretive schemas which have served to define the various starting points of methods in the study of religion. Yet, these facts--the materials of religions--are understood in a particular way. They are taken to be essentially distinct from the cultural contexts in which they take place and even, in the work of the phenomenology of religion with its synchronic view of history, distinct from the specific tradition of which they are a part.<sup>4</sup> Because these materials can be made to "stand on their own" outside of the particular occasion of their occurrence, they may be ordered and arranged according to their common characteristics with the intention of discovering the nature of the greater phenomenon, religion. This is the effort to disclose the structures of religion. And it is supposed that by confining one's method to the arrangement of these "facts" it is possible to avoid the pitfalls and the distortions of theory.

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<sup>4</sup>This is the "ahistorical" character of a movement which finds its evidential basis in the materials uncovered by the historical sciences. Consider Eliade's comments in Shamanism, pp. xvii-xix: "In our role of historian of religions [and, here, as phenomenologist of religion as well], it suffices us to observe that the dialectic of the sacred makes possible the spontaneous reversal of any religious position. The very fact of this reversibility is important, for it is not to be found elsewhere. This is why we tend to remain uninfluenced by certain results attained by historico-cultural ethnology. The various types of civilization are, of course, organically connected with certain religious forms; but this in no sense excludes the spontaneity and, in the last analysis, the ahistoricity of the religious life."

Now it is almost commonplace to suggest that the decision to restrain from making theoretical judgments is itself a theoretical judgment. Yet, in the phenomenology of religion, there is the effort to avoid all notions, and implications, of theoretical judgment even while granting a premier significance to the work of the historical sciences. This strange, if not strained, relationship between the phenomenology of religion's understanding of the facts of religions and the possibility of describing the nature of religion without theoretical considerations stems from a paradox already present in the foundational reflections of the general science of religion. This paradox is one which displays the tension between the way in which the general science of religion understands essence, and its sense of the priority of historical research.

#### Essence and Manifestation

To speak of a paradox in the general science of religion's foundation is to express two ways in which the materials or contents of religions are understood. On the one hand, they are taken to be the historical data of religions; the facts; that which is uncovered by positive historical research. They are those materials which are empirically verifiable and which can provide the kind of evidence upon which scientific inquiries rest. But, on the other hand, these materials are also taken to be manifestations of religion. That is, they are understood as the imperfect and incomplete expressions of an ideal unity, religion. It is this sense of the significance of the materials of religion, taken as manifestation, which expresses the general

science of religion's underlying theory of essence.

The notion of essence can be found in the efforts to uncover the "ontological root" of the possibility of religious apprehensions, i.e., Müller's description of the "faculty of the infinite," Tiele's analysis of the "innate sense" of the infinite, and even Chantepie's discussion of the possibility of a science of religion located in philosophic conceptions of religion since Kant and Hegel. These descriptions of the "subjective foundation" of religion can be viewed as a kind of justification of the science of religion which is prior to its work as a science. In other words, the elucidation of those particular capacities of human beings which are necessary for any religious apprehension to take place can be considered as a kind of philosophic prolegomena to the science of religion proper. It is certain that the foundational inquiries of the general science of religion can be understood in philosophical terms only in a limited sense, and only if one is willing to discount the disclaimers which the founders of this science insist upon making.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is nonetheless clear that these foundational inquiries do have philosophical import and contribute directly to the way in which the work of the general science of religion is imagined. Specifically, these discussions of foundation relate to a theory of essence in two ways.

In the first place, by addressing the way in which human being is constituted in order to formally account for the possibility of

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<sup>5</sup>In this context recall the discussion of Müller, Tiele and Chantepie in Chapter II concerning the limits of philosophical inquiry in the general science of religion.

religious apprehensions, by attempting to establish the ontological possibility of religious apprehensions, the ground is cleared for inquiry into the nature of religion apart from the criteria formed by the content of any particular religion. The notion of essence here is such that no actual instance of a religion can fully express the essence of religion itself since all religions dwell in the contingencies of historical life and can be only more or less adequate representations of the greater unity. Secondly, the notion of essence in the general science of religion functions as a definition. For the most part, this is a negative sense of definition as is exemplified in the statement above that the claims of no particular religion can determine what is religious and what is not. Still, it is assumed that the idea of the essence of religion provides a standard by which individual instances of that which is being described can be measured.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Here, the general science of religion's understanding of essence is not unlike Plato's notion of essence as stated in Euthyphro where he recounts Socrates' discussion of what is intended to be discovered by providing an adequate answer to his question, "What is piety?." Socrates asks Euthyphro to state the nature of piety commenting, "Well, bear in mind that what I asked of you was not to tell me one or two out of all the numerous actions that are holy; I wanted you to tell me what is the essential form of holiness which makes all actions holy. . . . show me what, precisely, this ideal is, so that, with my eye on it, and using it as a standard, I can say that any action done by you or anybody else is holy if it resembles this ideal, or, if it does not, can deny that it is holy." (Plato, Euthyphro 6. d-e.) In much the same way, the founders of the general science of religion inquire into the nature of religion in order to be able to proceed in their scientific task--in the practical work of the study of religion--to say what is religious and what is not religious, to apply Socrates' "standard" in the analysis of the materials of religions. However, it would be beyond the use of Platonic theory as example to suggest that the founders of the general science of religion are employing a notion of essence and definition as that developed in the Theory of Forms. As a matter of fact, the theory of essence in the

So when the founders of the general science of religion urge us to examine the whole range of religious manifestations in order to see what is common and what perdures, it is because there is an assumption that there is something which unites this vast variety of cultural expressions. Moreover, it is argued that this something, religion, is ontologically guaranteed by the very structures of human being through which it finds its expression. Müller's observation that it is religion which distinguishes humans from animals, though not any particular religion, but a ". . . mental faculty or disposition, which independent of, nay in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under varying disguises,"<sup>7</sup> indicates how human being itself provides a foundation for the work of the general science of religion.

In this context, then, all religious expressions, all of the determinant forms, are taken to be culturally and historically embedded partial realizations of the "pure" essence of religion. This notion of essence, though, is not to be found in the manifestations themselves, but is grounded in the philosophic prolegomenon which

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science of religion is in continual tension with the understanding of the nature of evidence adequate for scientific inquiry. The notion of evidence stems from the priority given the materials of sense perception. In the practice of the science of religion, this finally comes to be the fundamental element which guarantees the adequacy of description. By contrast, in the Theory of Forms certain knowledge is of the forms while perceptual knowledge is only an approximation of pure philosophical knowledge. In other words, the reference to a Platonic theory of essence remains only as an example, but as an example which displays one element of the science of religion as well as the tension which is central to its foundational studies.

<sup>7</sup>Müller, Science of Religion, p. 14.

constitute the preliminary reflections of the general science of religion. If we look for the source of religious apprehensions or, more fundamentally, if we are concerned with the standards by which we might ground descriptive analyses of religion, we must turn to the ontological structures of human being. However, even in the midst of all this talk about the "faculty of the infinite" and the "innate sense" of the infinite, the founders of the general science of religion are cognizant of the rigorous evidential requirements of a science. They are aware of the methods of inquiry most appropriate to scientific tasks and the dangers of the specious proposals of speculative philosophy. In the effort to establish the study of religion not only as an independent discipline, but as a science, the priority and sense of the materials of religions as manifestation is transformed. And the foundation of the general science of religion finally must be seen as paradoxical.

#### Manifestation and Historical Research

When the idea of the essence of religion is viewed in the context of the general science of religion's conception of its practice, we come to understand that those notions of the possibility of religion which seem to be asserted as a priori truths are nonetheless taken to be a posteriori concepts. It is the assumption of the founders of the general science of religion that if this study is to obtain a solid grounding for its work, all forms of a priori argument must be disregarded.<sup>8</sup> In other words, whatever the status of the truths asserted

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<sup>8</sup>Sharpe, in a somewhat different context, summarizes the starting

by concepts such as the faculty of the infinite, the concepts themselves are seen to be, of necessity, a posteriori. What this means in the work of the general science of religion is that despite all of those statements which locate the nature and the possibility of religion in the structure of human being, it is nonetheless held that these concepts must be based upon historical research and the comparative arrangement of the data of religions. Finally, the science of religion finds its actual foundation in the objectivities which historical research uncovers.

There are several reasons why this is the case, but most fundamentally it is what Müller has called the "positivist platform" which accounts for the transformation of the notion of essence from the investigation of the structures of human being to the arrangement of the facts of religions. When the founders of the science of religion describe the necessary conditions for this study to be a science, two essential elements are included. The first is that it must be possible to isolate a subject matter. This subject matter is given in the materials uncovered by nineteenth century historical research and

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point of the science of religion when he observes, "The method that resulted can be characterized as scientific, critical, historical and comparative: scientific because of its inductive pattern and its belief in universal laws of cause and effect, and because of its distrust of obvious a priori arguments; critical because of its fundamental attitude to evidence; historical because of the new sense of continuity between the past and the present to which it gave rise; comparative because it claimed comparison to be the basis of all knowledge. It compared the known with the unknown, it compared phenomena in apparent temporal sequence, it compared phenomena belonging to different areas but having features in common. In all this, in true scientific spirit, it set out to determine, with regard to religion, the genus 'religion' which underlay the species 'the religions'." Sharpe, Comparative Religion, pp. 31-32.



it is united under the name religion. Because of the pervasiveness and significance of this subject matter, it is held that the study of religion cannot be neglected by the Geisteswissenschaften. The second element required of genuine scientific inquiry is the possibility of certain evidence. And, according to the founders of the general science of religion, this cannot be provided by philosophical reflections on the nature of human being. But the required evidence is given in sense experience, in this context understood to be the data of religions. It is held that only through investigation of observable and measurable "outward manifestations" can we gain access to the nature of religion. This is the "positivist platform." It is the assertion that facts are the only possible objects of certain knowledge, and that the study of religion as a scientific enterprise must rigorously pursue such certitude.

Although Müller's discussion of the primacy of sense data is the most direct, each of the founders of the science of religion have a version of this kind of argument which states that a scientific study of religion must rest upon the evidence of the senses which can be interpreted as the historical materials of religions. As Tiele concludes,

What religion is, and whence it arises, we can only ascertain from religious phenomena. Our inmost being can only be known by its outward manifestations. To wander in our speculations away from what has been discovered and established by anthropological and historical research, is to enter on a false path.<sup>9</sup>

In whatever manner it is stated, it is clear that what I have called the philosophical prolegomena of the general science of religion is

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<sup>9</sup>Tiele, Elements 1: 18-19.

transformed such that even the truths which it asserts are taken to finally find their evidential basis in the analysis of those materials uncovered by the historical sciences.

The point of these reflections is to suggest that the foundation of the general science of religion, from the start, relies upon an empiricist assumption. It is presumed that all of which we know with certainty must be derived from, or is dependent upon (as in association or inductive inference), sense experience. Because of this assumption, historical research occupies a crucial position in the practice and ultimately in the foundational statements of the general science of religion. Were it not for the sound data which the historical sciences can provide, concepts such as the faculty of the infinite would remain speculative musings. However, since facts can be provided to form an evidential basis for the reflections of the science of religion, it is possible for this study to take its place among the human sciences. When manifestation is viewed in light of the notion of the evidential requirements for scientific tasks which the general science of religion employs, the whole sense of manifestation changes. What was described above as a kind of partial realization of an ideal unity disclosed by inquiry into the structures of human being, now is seen as the materials of sense experience ordered and arranged according to their distinctive characteristics, uncovering that which is common and continuing in the "outward" forms. It is these two seemingly contradictory ways of speaking of the foundation and practice of the general science of religion which constitutes the paradox which is fundamental to the manner in which this emerging science was conceived.

### The Paradox and Its Resolution

It seems that these foundational inquiries can be made sense of in the context of the already discussed critiques of theological and philosophical reflection. According to the founders of the general science of religion, theological insight cannot provide a basis for a science of religion because such insight is fundamentally informed by, and directed to, the claims of a particular religion. Because of this, theological analyses of "other religions" are described and evaluated in light of particular theological starting points. Where the general science of religion takes issue with philosophy is in its tendency to be speculative; that is, insofar as philosophical reflection bases itself on certain premises of reason, on certain hypotheses, and then proceeds to erect systems upon them, it fails to pay attention, to be informed at the most fundamental level, by the actual materials about which it is speaking. So it is maintained that neither theological reflection nor philosophical reflection can provide the necessary foundation or methodological tools for a science of religion to begin its work.

Yet we must remember that the general science of religion is not only in search of a foundation and a method with which to analyze the multiplicity of data of religions. The tools of historical research can provide this. But this science also wishes to understand and to describe the nature of religion itself, that which unites the vast materials of religions. It is concerned with the problems of the relation between religion and religions. And it is in the context of this issue that the rejections of theology and philosophy become so

significant. Both philosophy and theology can provide ways of understanding religion itself. Theology begins with the transcendent source (in this case the truth of Christian revelation) of all religious apprehensions. The nature of religion is given in the claims of one religion and from analysis of these claims we can see how all religions, to greater or lesser degrees, participate in religion. And philosophy, too, with its metaphysics and ontologies describes in a variety of ways what the nature of religion as a whole is. But, as has been shown, neither of these kinds of inquiry is taken by the general science of religion to be adequate as a basis for scientific studies. So the science of religion is left with a dilemma. How can it propose to understand the nature of religion itself without falling into the traps set by the mistaken approaches of philosophy and theology? Or, to put the matter differently, how can a science provide its own foundation?

The attempt to resolve this issue is given in the foundational reflections of the science of religion. In the first place, the criticisms leveled against philosophy and theology reveal a central assumption of the founders of this study. A crucial issue which unites the rejection of both philosophical and theological inquiry is the notion of inadequate evidence. According to the general science of religion, while each of these modes of thought employ an idea of evidence which is appropriate to its own task (the claims and import of revelation and the postulates of rigorous thought and logical relations), neither attest to the kind of evidence required for a science,

the evidence provided by sense datum.<sup>10</sup> This is the empiricist assumption of the science of religion. All knowledge must at least be related to sense experience.<sup>11</sup> It is this assumption which underlies and informs the criticisms of theology and philosophy. It is also the assumption which leads to the unique understanding of comparative method as both a way of supplying a foundation for the science of religion and as the method of its practice. In other words, comparative method is taken by this study to be that which provides an evidential basis for reflections on the possibility of a science of religion and it is also the method through which its actual work is to be carried out.

As it is discussed by the founders of the science of religion, the foundation of this study indeed appears to be based on a circular argument. Yet it seems that this is an unavoidable procedure for any science which would attempt to provide a foundation for its practice in its own work. In the case of the science of religion, what appeared to be a philosophic prolegomenon for this study, i.e., the discussions of the faculty of the infinite, the innate sense of the infinite, and the necessary conditions provided by philosophical inquiry for the

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<sup>10</sup>The use of sense data language in this context is a shorthand formula intended to indicate the fundamental significance awarded the materials of the historical sciences as they are taken to be objective and able to serve as the evidential ground of independent and rigorous judgment.

<sup>11</sup>This is to emphasize the general import of Müller's interpretation of the significance of Kantian philosophy for the science of religion. With regard to Müller's understanding of Kant's philosophy, see, Müller, Science of Thought, pp. 138-140; and also, Müller, Science of Religion, pp. 14-18. Müller's work, in this context at least, directly expresses the overall position of the science of religion.

independent study of religion, turn out to be the outcome of comparative study of religions. It is held that this is possible because the infinite is present in the actual materials of religions. As Müller observes,

If the infinite had not from the very first been present in our sensuous perceptions, such a word as infinite would be a sound, and nothing else. For that reason I felt it incumbent upon me to show how the presentiment of the infinite rests upon the sentiment of the finite, and has its real roots in the real, though, not yet fully apprehended presence of the infinite in all our sensuous perceptions of the finite.<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, Müller notes that the infinite, while present in sensuous perception, is "not yet fully apprehended." In practice, it is the application of comparative method with its arrangements of the data of religions which will enable the student of religions to "fully apprehend" the infinite, to achieve insight into the nature of religion itself. But at the same time it must be emphasized that this insight is possible only because religion is already present, though perhaps in disguised forms, in the actual materials of religions.

This is the circle of foundation in the general science of religion. In the course of these observations we have seen how the general science of religion attempts to secure a basis for its enterprise in the work of the science itself. Here, even those philosophic statements which might seem to constitute a foundational argument which is prior to the work of this science find their evidential basis in the comparative studies which form the practice of the general science of religion. So these statements do not function as foundational in any

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<sup>12</sup>Müller, Origin and Growth, p. 45.

rigorous sense, but instead are supported by the discoveries of comparative inquiry.

In order to summarize this difficult argument, it can be said that although it certainly is possible to view various elements of the general science of religion as a kind of philosophical investigation which is prior to the work of this science, as a sort of pre-science of religion, the founders of this science of religion would deny that such reflection could provide an adequate basis upon which the science can be established. It is only the materials of sense perception, in this context the facts of religions, which supply the evidential requirements for such a foundation. So by turning to sense data, and the works of the historical sciences which deal with these materials, the general science of religion has rejected the primacy of philosophical inquiry (interpreted as speculative) while at the same time recognizing the possible truth of its claims. This is what is meant by the denial of all a priori theories as foundational. And this is what is meant by the earlier observation that even those descriptions by the founders of the general science of religion which analyze the possibility of religion and which are asserted as a priori truths are, in fact, understood as a posteriori concepts, concept taken to be based on the primary and fundamental application of comparative method.

This, then, is the way in which the paradox of foundation in the general science of religion is thought to be resolved. And, more importantly, this is the way in which the general science of religion contends that the problem of the relation between religion and religions can be adequately addressed. As the science of religion

discovers not only the vast store of materials of religions, but also attempts to establish a method of inquiry which can uncover the union of these materials, it maintains that there is an actual basis--provided by the work of the science itself--for discussions of the nature and possibility of religion.

The Dilemma of the Phenomenology of  
Religion: Religion and Religions

In a variety of ways throughout this work it has been shown how the phenomenology of religion, despite sometimes vehement criticisms of its predecessors, continues to operate in the foundational circle of the general science of religion. Although it is most often implicit, this movement has accepted the most fundamental methodological assumptions of the science of religion as well as its task and goal. And here again, in the context of the paradoxical situation of the general science of religion, it is the case that the phenomenology of religion inherits and remains tied to those tenuous foundational arguments which are intended to provide the basis upon which the question of the relation between religion and religions can be addressed. As the phenomenology of religion itself does not make the foundation of the approach to this issue a problem, this movement's dependence on its precursors is implicit even in its rejection of certain elements of the general science of religion. This dubious inheritance, with its specific presuppositions, presents to the phenomenology of religion the limits within which it must consider the continuing dilemma of the relation between the materials of religions and the possibility of describing the nature or essence of religion.



The significant role comparative method plays in both the general science of religion and the phenomenology of religion need not be re-viewed again, but at least some of the implications and assumptions of awarding primacy to this method must be noted. Because comparative method is taken as both the foundation and the vehicle for the study of religion, the phenomenology of religion comes to understand the location of religion to be within a narrowly prescribed range. Or, to turn the matter around, because it is supposed that religion is located in those materials of religions which are identified by the historical sciences, comparative examination is understood to be the only appropriate way to uncover the nature of religion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Kristensen's observations in The Meaning of Religion might help illustrate this point. In this work he maintains that the formulation of the essence of religion is a task appropriate to the philosophy of religion. But the philosopher is reminded: "Whoever seeks to know the essence of religion must possess a general picture of the different types of religious thinking and action, of ideas of deity and cultic acts; this is the material for his research. This material is precisely what Phenomenology provides." The Meaning of Religion, p. 9. And, according to Kristensen, "Phenomenology has as its objects [sic] to come as far as possible into contact with and to understand the extremely varied and divergent religious data, making use of comparative methods." [Ibid., p. 11.] Phenomenology of religion, then, occupies a distinctive position ". . . between history and philosophy . . . Phenomenology is at once systematic History of Religion and applied Philosophy of Religion." [Ibid., p. 9.] It is significant that for Kristensen there is no basic difference with regard to the work of the historian, the phenomenologist, and the philosopher of religion. Although Kristensen argues against those who would find the essence of religion in the broadest kind of empirical commonality (which is basically the position of the general science of religion) he nonetheless understands the essence of religion to be tied to the work of comparative inquiry. The difference between the phenomenologist of religion, from Kristensen's point of view, and someone like Tiele or Chantepie is that the latter are seeking comparisons among broadly defined empirical constituents of religion (i.e., among the various religions--Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, etc.) and the former see that comparisons must be made among more narrowly conceived notions of the constituents of religion (i.e., among types of

More to the point, this avenue of approach includes an additional assumption on the part of the phenomenology of religion. When this movement is faced with the issue of the nature of religion, it takes this question to be rooted in empirical fact and proceeds to discuss the various aspects of the various religions. The phenomenology of religion seeks to describe homo religiosus and so searches out various members of this species, investigates them and classifies them according to a variety of characteristics in order to discover which properties are common to the species and which are accidental or contingent. This movement seeks the "structures of religion" through "arrangement" and "classification" of empirical investigations of the actual occurrences of religions. It seems clear to me that this kind of procedure must already presuppose the nature of the phenomenon it is seeking to describe. And this presupposition must be greater than the often cited heuristic device of provisionally taking as religious what religious people say is religious.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the

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manifestations--sacrifice, worship, shamans, dieties, etc.). Both approaches, however, assert the primacy of comparative method as foundational for inquiry into the essence of religion. And both identify religion with the materials uncovered and identified by the historical sciences. Both hold that the philosophy of religion rests upon comparative research and that it is not a kind of inquiry which is fundamentally different than that of comparative study.

<sup>14</sup>This position is frequently taken in the context of discussions of the descriptive aims of the phenomenology of religion. In some cases it is seen as a distinctive methodological decision and in others as a simple device intended to remove the phenomenologist of religion from ongoing definitional debates in order to proceed with specific work. Kristensen and W. C. Smith are notable examples of the first position. Kristensen maintains, in a convoluted argument concerning the necessity and limits of empathy or "imaginative reexperiencing," that "Every religion ought to be understood from its own standpoint, for that is how it is understood by its own adherents."

phenomenology of religion claims that it is seeking to understand and describe homo religiosus, but instead it searches out and elucidates those characteristics which belong to this phenomenon. The result of such a procedure is that this movement can never reach the point of discussion of the nature of religion nor is it able to question its own presuppositions concerning the nature of religion. The issues for debate remain on the level of presupposition, and the discussion of these presuppositions is barred from the first by arguments against speculation and by the assumption concerning the criteria for adequate evidence of description. And the question remains as to how we might move from investigation of particular religions to discussions of religion.

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(Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, p. 6.) Smith takes this position further when he writes: ". . . no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers. I know that this is revolutionary, and I know that it will not be readily conceded; but I believe it to be profoundly true and important . . . I will only recall that by 'religion' here I mean as previously indicated the faith in men's hearts. On the external data about religion, of course, an outsider can by diligent scholarship discover things that an insider does not know and may not be willing to accept. But about the meaning that the system has for those of faith, an outsider cannot in the nature of the case go beyond the believer; for their piety is the faith, and if they cannot recognize his portrayal, then it is not their faith that he is portraying." (W. C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither-and Why?," p. 42.) Bleeker exemplifies the second position as he describes the effort to understand what religion means for religious people as a ". . . working principle which is useful in making inquiry into the essential quality of a religion." (Bleeker, "How to Distinguish Between True Religion and False Religion," p. 70.) See also his "Methodology and the Science of Religion" where Bleeker emphasizes the heuristic values of this starting point; "Phenomenology of religion must begin by accepting as proper objects of study all phenomena that are professed to be religious. Subsequently the attempt can come to distinguish what is genuinely religious from what is spurious." (p. 6).

An example might help illustrate this point. If I wish to understand and describe trees I might follow a procedure like that of the phenomenology of religion and examine oaks, elms, maple, fir, cherry, apple, dogwood, and every other particular kind of tree I can locate. I might look at tall trees covering the tops of mountains and consider the dwarfed bonsai with its twisted limbs. I can examine the slender young sapling and compare it to an ancient redwood, describing and arranging the properties and characteristics belonging to this class of objects. I can describe what is common and seemingly universal; bark, roots, branches. We can debate the inclusiveness of my descriptions and question which properties are more nearly universal. But we will never reach the nature of tree. And, in fact, in order for our debates and my analyses to take place at all we will have to already know, in however an inchoate manner, what a tree is. It is the adequacy of this knowledge, or this assumption, which provides the foundation for our descriptions and our debates. It is neither the particular trees themselves nor my classification of them. Yet as long as we remain in the sphere of the arrangement of trees and their characteristics, we will neither be able to address the adequacy of our assumptions nor will we be able to properly evaluate my arrangement of the properties of trees.

In much the same way, the efforts of the phenomenology of religion to describe homo religiosus, if they are not entirely arbitrary, must rest upon a sense of what constitutes religious phenomena. But the clarification and critical discussion of this sense has been ruled out as the phenomenology of religion has naively accepted the limits

placed upon reflection by its predecessors. This movement continues to insist that its own actual work, or more accurately, the subject matter of its practice, can provide the foundation for its inquiry. In this way, the phenomenology of religion remains in the paradox of the foundational circle of the general science of religion. Because the science of religion, and in turn the phenomenology of religion, wishes to avoid the difficulties of speculative abstraction or pre-determined criteria of evaluation (as in the rejection of the place of Christian revelation and, in the phenomenology of religion, in the critique of reductionisms), it presumes that a solid foundation for its work as well as insight into the nature of religion can be achieved by comparative examination of data. This is what is meant by suggesting that the phenomenology of religion takes the question of the nature of religion to be a question of empirical fact. If this attitude does not finally lead to fundamental confusion, it at least produces a forgetfulness of the goals of investigation. Lost in the myriad arrangements of materials and the internal debates of the historical sciences, the phenomenologist of religion is not able to genuinely address those questions which motivate the establishment of the movement in the first place. Instead it continues to pose "new" arrangements and additional variations and critiques of the old.

It is the thesis of this investigation that we must once again recover, and perhaps restate, the question. We must ask how it is possible to speak of the nature of religion and ask what this has to do with a multiplicity of religions. The remainder of the task will be to clarify this question and, through a critical discussion of the

method and assumptions of the phenomenology of religion, seek ways in which this question can be addressed.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION AND HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY

#### Introduction

Characteristic of phenomenological method, considered in even the most general terms, is that it aims at describing as faithfully as is possible and as free from unexamined conceptual presuppositions as is possible, concretely experienced phenomena.<sup>1</sup> This overall portrayal of the method applies also to the efforts of the phenomenology of religion. Yet when the ways in which phenomenological method has been appropriated in the context of the study of religions are closely considered the characteristics of this method are not quite so clear. While philosophical discussions of the method are characterized by strict methodological rigor, the works of the phenomenology of religion--especially those which deal with methodological issues--appear to be peculiarly lacking in rigorous argument.<sup>2</sup> But despite the

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<sup>1</sup>In this regard consider Spiegelberg's description of philosophic phenomenology: "Phenomenology is, in the twentieth century, mainly the name for a philosophic movement whose primary objective is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions." Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968 ed., s.v. "Phenomenology" by Herbert Spiegelberg.

<sup>2</sup>Hans H. Penner, "Is Phenomenology a Method for the Study of Religion?" Bucknell Review 18 (Winter 1970): 29, aptly summarizes the situation: "Anyone who desires to find out what a phenomenology of religion is, and how the approach is applied, will find the search a frustrating experience."

frustrations which the student of this movement inevitably encounters, it is possible to see at least the outlines of a common method in the literature of this movement.

One element which contributes to the distinctive contours of this movement's appropriation of phenomenological method is its particular intellectual heritage. Here, the effort has been to discover the distinctive qualities of this method by looking to the foundational inquiries of the precursors of this movement as the context for the emergence of the phenomenology of religion. That the phenomenology of religion's method can be uncovered and described with the help of inquiry into the work of those who first attempted to establish a general science of religion is the historical thesis of this study. By viewing the various aspects of the phenomenology of religion in light of the assumptions and the efforts of its predecessors to establish the study of religion as a distinct area of inquiry, the particular method of the phenomenology of religion is brought to light as a modification and continuation of the founding efforts of the general science of religion. Through these descriptive and analytic inquiries we have seen how phenomenological method itself has taken on distinctive contours as the phenomenology of religion has made methodological decisions and framed its questions in the context of the work of its predecessors.

But now our tactics will change. The task which continues to present itself is that of the critical evaluation and clarification of the application and promise of this method. This analysis will proceed on two levels. In the first place, the work of the phenomenology of religion will be evaluated in terms of the possibility of fulfilling



its task within the limits this movement sets for itself. In other words, the attempt will be to provide a general critique of the ways in which the phenomenology of religion conceives of and carries out its project. The second level of investigation will be one which looks to the method and insights of Husserlian phenomenology in order to elucidate certain characteristics of the phenomenology of religion. This critical study will attempt to examine some general themes of Husserl's phenomenology in order to clarify the method of the phenomenology of religion. In short, the effort will be to provide a phenomenological critique of the phenomenology of religion.

A word of clarification with regard to the use of Husserlian phenomenology in this context should be added. In circles of philosophical phenomenology, the work of the phenomenology of religion is frequently dismissed as this movement has not participated in a philosophical program.<sup>3</sup> To criticize the phenomenology of religion here

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<sup>3</sup>For example, Spiegelberg in his "historical introduction" to the phenomenological movement only briefly refers to the phenomenology of religion in the section entitled, "extra-philosophical phenomenologies." He identifies the phenomenology of religion with comparative study of religion citing especially the work of van der Leeuw whose "Epilogomena" to Phänomenologie der Religion (Religion in Essence and Manifestation) which attempts to connect phenomenology of religion with philosophical phenomenology is considered by Spiegelberg to have the "character of an afterthought." He concludes his observations concerning the phenomenology of religion by noting: ". . . it would be . . . misleading to confuse a mere typology of religious institutions with a phenomenology in the philosophical sense, which concentrates on the religious acts and contents in religious experience and explores their essential structures and relationships." (Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction, Phaenomenologica 5, 2d ed., 2 vols. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, 1:11.) It seems to me that Spiegelberg accurately identifies the phenomenology of religion with comparative study. However, he does neglect the claim of this movement to be able, by means of its distinctive version of phenomenological method, to uncover the "essential

because it fails to participate in the traditions of the application of philosophical phenomenology to various areas of inquiry would be a fruitless task. Moreover, it would fail to recognize the significance of the questions and issues which the phenomenology of religion has sought to address. So instead the effort will be to explore the ways in which the insights of philosophical phenomenology can allow us to see the crucial elements of the phenomenology of religion, and to constructively propose a critical evaluation of the method and the assumptions of this movement. To this end, the reflections of Hans Penner have provided a first step. While there are limits to Penner's description of Husserl's phenomenological method, his essay remains instructive as it points out the relevance of Husserl's methodological reflections to the efforts of the phenomenology of religion to establish a method which will be able to describe the meaning, significance, and unity of the occurrence of the variety of materials of religions.<sup>4</sup>

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structures and relationships" of religious experience. It is this claim, discussed here in terms of the relationship between religion and religions, which is the focus of our attention.

<sup>4</sup>In this context, a particular difficulty which should be noted is what seems to me an error in Penner's analysis of Husserl's work, viz., the discussion of the phenomenological reductions and the denial of the possibility of regional eidetic inquiry within the confines of the Husserlian perspective. Penner defines Husserl's understanding of phenomenological method as only a transcendental philosophy. (Penner, "Is Phenomenology a Method," p. 30 and ff.) However, Husserl--in numerous places--discusses the importance and role of eidetic and regional inquiries. Consider, for example, Husserl, Ideas I, pp. 201-205; or the Britannica article, "Phenomenology" ("Phenomenology," Edmund Husserl's Article for the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1927): New Complete Translation by Richard E. Palmer, in Phenomenology and Existentialism, eds., Richard Zaner and Don Ihde [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Capricorn Books, 1973], pp. 47-71.) The distinctive importance of regional inquiries will be discussed in greater detail below as the possible contributions of Husserl's thought to a phenomenology of religion are explored.

As we continue to consider this movement, Husserl's theme of the "crisis of the European Sciences" will illustrate the plight of the phenomenology of religion.<sup>5</sup> To speak of a "crisis" in this movement is to suggest that the phenomenology of religion has established a set of boundaries for its reflections, perhaps by fiat, which finally serves to defeat the goal of describing the ways in which religion is a dimension of human existence. An examination of the roots of this "crisis," including a re-examination of the assumptions of this movement, will provide the basis upon which the possibility of establishing a phenomenology of religion may be reconsidered. The hope is that the phenomenology of religion and the problem of the relation between religion and religions will receive a new elucidation. Exploration of the various facets of this "crisis," a constructive critique of the phenomenology of religion, is the work which remains.

Can the Phenomenology of Religion  
Achieve its Goal?

To suggest that the phenomenology of religion is the kind of inquiry which deals with empirical matters is no new revelation. Both commentators and phenomenologists of religion have frequently emphasized

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<sup>5</sup>Cf., Husserl's Vienna lecture, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man," in Edmund Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, trans. with an Introduction by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), pp. 149-192; and Edmund Husserl, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, trans. with an Introduction by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), especially pp. 3-18. This work, a translation of, Edmund Husserl, Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie, with an Introduction by Walter Biemel, Husserliana IV (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), also includes a new translation of the Vienna lecture (pp. 269-299).

this point. Bleeker, for example, expresses this directly when he states, "In my opinion the phenomenology of religion is an empirical science . . . ." <sup>6</sup> On one level, naming the phenomenology of religion an "empirical science" simply states the obvious point that this movement deals with matters of fact, with the materials of religions, with what is considered to be the manifestations of religion, or, as it is often stated, with the phenomena. More generally, the phrase indicates the focus of attention on concrete phenomena. And it also signifies the effort of the phenomenology of religion to distinguish itself from both theological and philosophical studies as well as the intention to establish a particular connection with the historical sciences. <sup>7</sup> But the way in which the phenomenology of religion is an "empirical science" also shows its particular understanding of what constitutes the phenomena or manifestations of religion. The implications of what this movement designates as phenomena, as its objects of investigation, in turn establishes the limits of the possibility of describing the nature or structures of religion.

Already those assumptions of the general science of religion which can be understood as empiricist have been noted in the discussion of the paradox of foundation in this science. We have also seen that

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<sup>6</sup>Bleeker, "Phenomenological Method," p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Consider Widengren's (Religionsphänomenologie, p. 1) description of the tie between the phenomenology of religion and historical studies: "The phenomenology of religion endeavors to give a comprehensive description [Darstellung] of all alterations of the manifestations of religion and thereby becomes the systematic completion of the history of religions [Religionsgeschichte]. The history of religions gives an historical analysis, while the phenomenology of religion presents a systematic synthesis." (my translation.)

these assumptions have been taken over by phenomenologists of religion and that they serve to describe the particular ways in which this movement addresses the central issue of how the materials of the various religions are thought to have the capacity to elucidate the nature of religion. In this movement, an extraordinary weight is given to the data of religions in an attempt to avoid the various errors and distortions of speculative, theological, and "reductionistic" treatments of religion(s) while still providing the kind of evidence considered necessary for rigorous inquiry. In other words, the objectivities uncovered by the historical sciences, the facts, are understood to be essentially free from those mutilations wrought by various theoretical positions. Moreover, these essentially "neutral" materials are considered to hold the possibility for disclosing the nature of religion.

Two central elements of the phenomenology of religion's methodological position are indicated here. In the first place, what might be called a "fetishism of facts" on the part of this movement is not an altogether naive acceptance of the notion that there is no knowledge beyond that of facts. In fact, the positive import of the efforts to avoid the "reductionisms" of sociology, psychology, etc., while also maintaining that the work of the historian needs to be, and can be, "completed" by the phenomenologist of religion is the rejection of the radical skepticism implied by all "reductionisms," including that of historicism.<sup>8</sup> Even as it does not accept a skeptical standpoint, the

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<sup>8</sup>To take the standpoint of any of the "isms" would be to find one's own observations encompassed by the same point of view--e.g., the statements of the psychologist would be merely the reflections of her or his psychological makeup; those of the historian, only a matter of

phenomenology of religion does undertake the analysis and arrangement of those materials brought to light by the historical sciences, and it does so with a purpose. This is the "completion" of the work of the historical sciences, the exploration and illumination of what Eliade calls "spiritual universes."<sup>9</sup> The effort is to see the materials of religions, first of all, as religious. The task is then to describe what is religious about these materials, and it is, finally, to describe the union of these materials. This is to elucidate the structure, meaning, or nature of religion through arrangement of the data of religions.

This is the second aspect of the phenomenology of religion's position. Even as this movement rejects the skepticism implied by various ways of analyzing the materials of religions, it also refuses to accept the approaches described by theology and philosophy. But what it does not reject, even in the critiques of all "isms," is the notion of evidence provided by the historical sciences. In other words, while the phenomenology of religion seems to reject the skepticism which is brought about by historicism, et al., it does not recognize the need for fundamental critical reflection concerning the norms of its own position. This movement does not take phenomenological method as a method of radical criticism.

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historical circumstance, etc.. Needless to say, from points of view such as these it would not be possible to speak of religion, or of homo religiosus, at all. But as the phenomenology of religion does intend to approach the materials of religions "on their own terms," this movement does not immediately fall into the skepticism of the "isms."

<sup>9</sup>Eliade, The Quest, p. 63.

In the context of this movement's vision of its method, an unacknowledged shift in the understanding of the standards of reason, or rigorous inquiry, can be seen as there is an acceptance of the fundamental importance of the materials of religions. This shift occurs from the modes of investigation described by theological and philosophical thought to those of the historical sciences. The works of philosophical and theological reflection are seen to be, at their basis, colored by speculation and existential commitment. But the data which the historical sciences display is taken to be, at its core, untainted by theoretical distortion. Even though the outcome and the methods of particular kinds of studies of religious phenomena in the historical sciences is criticized (as are the "reductionisms"), the evidential basis of these studies is not questioned. Ultimately the materials or data uncovered by historical research comes to be viewed as that which holds the measure for rigorous thought. It must be emphasized that the shift which occurs in this movement is one of the standards of reason. That is, there is a shift in the understanding of the criterion of evidence for rigorous thought. And it is this shift which remains on the level of assumption. While the specific starting points of speculative philosophical thought and theological commitment are criticized, the implications of these critiques for understanding the capacities of reflection in general are not pursued. While the phenomenology of religion accepts the materials provided by historians, it does not question the criterion of evidence of historians, it does not question the criterion of evidence of historical studies. The result of this unacknowledged shift is, in one sense,

superficial. It is simply the case that it is now historians who identify religious phenomena instead of theologians or philosophers.

But, in another sense, this shift has fundamental import. As boundaries are drawn about the capacities of reflection, and as identification of religious phenomena is implicitly awarded to the historical sciences, this movement proceeds to arrange and classify the materials of religions as if this will lead to essential insight and as if the foundations of its inquiry is pre-given. In this sense the phenomenology of religion can be said to be an empiricism. It is not so by virtue of a carefully elaborated epistemology which argues that all knowledge is dependent upon sense experience and so our knowledge of religion cannot go beyond that of the facts at hand. The phenomenology of religion hardly presents an argument for its position at all. But this movement does assume that the data of religions (as named and identified by the historical sciences) provides both the material and the necessary evidential basis for inquiry into the nature of religion. Within this context phenomenological method comes to be taken as a tool, an unquestioned apparatus, for the ordering of historical facts.

Even on the surface, the assumptions and method of this movement present serious barriers to the possibility of accomplishing the task of describing the relation between religion and religions. In the first place, and as has been noted already, religion tends to be viewed as residing primarily in the outward manifestations of religions, in that which can be identified by methods appropriate to



historical studies.<sup>10</sup> This observation draws attention again to the shift in thought in which the phenomenology of religion participates. When it is perceived that only those materials uncovered by the historical sciences can be viewed as free from speculative and existential manipulations of thought, religion itself comes to be understood in terms of the observable and measurable. The possibility of objective or neutral inquiry is taken to reside in the data which is "out there," and whose claim to objectivity can remain unblemished by the ordering procedures of this movement's method.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>This is the case even as the phenomenology of religion intends to describe the "inner logic" of religions (Bleeker, "The Conception of Man," p. 17) or the so-called "interior religious experience" (E. O. James, History of Religions, p. 228). Even this description is considered to be based upon and conditioned by historical research. Consider, in this context, the discussion of the method of the phenomenology of religion in Chapter III.

<sup>11</sup>van der Leeuw speaks to this point in his Einführung. At the outset, he connects the work of the phenomenology of religion with that of the historical study of religions in general: "I speak of this 'phenomenology' as one type of treatment of the history of religions [Religionsgeschichte] as it has no particular region but treats precisely the self-same subject matter which the history of religions [Religionsgeschichte] proper would treat, though phenomenology grasps it in a particular manner." (van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 1, my translation.) According to van der Leeuw, the historian of religions is concerned with understanding positive religions, a concern which rests upon knowledge of "the facts." Attached to this notable endeavor of gathering and analyzing vast amounts of materials is the work of the phenomenology of religion. According to van der Leeuw, what distinguishes phenomenological studies from historical studies is that the former is "systematic." The phenomenology of religion is "systematic" as it attempts to compile out of all religions a "core-type." This "core-type" then provides the basis for theology and philosophy to proceed "in the light of full disclosure" (van der Leeuw, Einführung, p. 3). The important point to note here, at least for present purposes, is that neither theological nor philosophical reflection can provide a basis for understanding religion as these forms of reflection are taken to be concerned with normative value and truth questions. But the given matters of fact (uncovered and described by historians of religions) do provide the materials and basis for

Still, to criticize the phenomenology of religion for neglecting other, and perhaps more fundamental, avenues of approach would overlook a central aspect of this movement. The obstacles which are viewed as integral to the interpretations of philosophy and theology, to the hermeneutical situations of these modes of understanding, are interpreted so broadly as to include a whole range of reflective inquiry such that it is only the "outward manifestations" (i.e., empirical actualities) which can remain free from the machinations of theory. Given the restraints placed upon the capacities of reflection, it is only the facts of religions as they are identified by the historical sciences which are taken to be even potentially free from the distortions of pre-conceived theories and interpretations.

The method, broadly conceived, by which one deals with these facts, with the vast variety of materials of religions, is that of induction. Framed in terms of the approach of the phenomenology of religion, as speculative intuition and the self-evidences of existential commitment are rejected as sources of genuine understanding of matters of fact, the student of religion is turned to the investigation and arrangement of the materials of religions themselves. From this generalizations are drawn (here, typological and morphological arrangement) which then serve as premises for further analyses--statements as to the structures or the nature of religion. This is the sense in which the procedure of the phenomenology of religion is inductive. But given this procedure, the phenomenologist of religion is

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describing the structure of the "core-type" religion which in turn, provides a basis for theological and philosophical inquiry.

faced with all of the problems which attend empiricist presuppositions and the method of induction. For example, we may ask the phenomenologist of religion, How do the knowledge of particulars lead us to something more than knowledge of particularity? How do empirical generalizations form premises for further investigations? On what basis may we evaluate one kind of general statement over against another? Or, more directly, how do we choose one typological arrangement (or one description of the "structures of religion") over another? How do we avoid the circularity of argument which seems endemic to definitional or descriptive statements which are generated by inductive procedures?

Although the phenomenologist of religion might exhort us to return to the materials of religions themselves, inasmuch as these materials are seen to be constituents of religion, a "returning" to these manifestations will be a return to the specificity of a particular kind of apprehension which does not, simply as actuality, display its own essential possibility or sense, let alone the structure or sense of religion.<sup>12</sup> Another kind of critical reflection is needed to allow this sense to be apprehended. But given what are taken to be the necessary restraints upon the capacities of reflection, it does not seem to me that phenomenologists of religion are able to employ

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<sup>12</sup>Some historians are quick to recognize the problems associated with the phenomenology of religion's attempt to move from analysis of religions to statements concerning religion and, I think, are rightly critical of this movement's attempt to see in the materials of the historian's inquiries into particular religions, the evidence for statements concerning religion itself. On this point consider, Ugo Bianchi, The History of Religions, pp. 178-181.

modes of reflection which would adequately address questions attending inductive modes of inquiry.<sup>13</sup>

The general question at issue here is the status of that which is designated as phenomena. In other words, How can those materials which are identified and uncovered by the historical sciences be taken as constituents of religion, of that which is nowhere historically given? For the phenomenology of religion, the materials of religions must be viewed as religious in a general sense. This is to say that the facts of religions must be considered outside of their particularity, outside of the particular religions of which they are a part and outside of their particular historical and cultural contexts. This is one aspect of what it means to constitute the materials of religions as phenomena of religion in this movement. Analysis of

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<sup>13</sup>Occasionally these kinds of questions are addressed by emphasizing the heuristic nature of the phenomenology of religion's approach. For example, there is the attempt to resolve these questions by means of what might be called a "hypothetico-deductive" approach. This is the position in which a hypothesis concerning the nature or structure of religion is formed on the basis of that which is "suggested" by the data. In other words, the hypothetical definition or description is used as a provisional explanation of the facts, or as a heuristic device, which may be employed until it is falsified by new facts or further considerations of the materials at hand (cf., Bleeker, "Methodology and the Science of Religion," p. 8). Defined as hypothetical or as an "operative principle," however, one cannot finally verify, or even critically discuss, the description or definition of religion. In this case, all descriptive claims are relegated to a kind of functional definition. While this approach may seem to expiate some of the difficulties inherent in the movement from investigations of the materials of particular religions, to typological arrangement, to descriptions of religion itself, it does not address the fundamental questions at hand. There is no effort to address the question of how it is we may discern the nature of religion itself from investigations of the materials of the many religions. The movement from the specific to the general is not addressed and the phenomenology of religion remains embroiled in the problems associated with empiricism and with the method of induction.

these phenomena, finally the construction of morphologies, is description of the phenomenon of religion. This act of constituting the materials of religions as phenomena of religion presents the student of the phenomenology of religion with a twofold problem.

First of all, even when they are removed from their particular contexts, the materials of religions retain their status as facts of religions. They remain as those elements which have been named as facts by the historical sciences. Moreover, the phenomenology of religion insists upon their status as empirical actuality in order to provide a basis for its claim to objectivity as well as its goal of neutrality in investigation. The insistence upon empirical orientation in this movement recalls again the efforts to rule out various preconceived judgments. More importantly, however, it indicates the methodological presupposition of this movement that the way to guarantee a neutral inquiry which can lay claim to conclusions based on evidence is through arrangement of the empirical data of religions, understood fundamentally as empirical data. So the phenomenology of religion assigns the task of designating phenomena to historical and specific empirical studies. But what is given in historical investigations is the materials of the many religions with the vast complexity of their determinant religious and cultural contexts. When faced with the question of what this multiplicity of materials has to do with religion or with the kind of experiencing appropriate to homo religiosus, the phenomenology of religion turns to its distinctive version of comparative analysis which yields morphologies and typologies.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup>Cf., for example, Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, pp. 2-3,

claim here seems to be that the phenomena, the materials of the various different religions, standing within the context of their particularity have particular meanings or sense (as Christian, Buddhist, etc.), but when compared or placed in the context of morphologies and typologies they reveal a "new meaning" which is their "religious meaning."<sup>15</sup> This indicates--in terms of the method of the phenomenology of religion--the indefensible position that the materials of the specific religions do not have sense as religious phenomena until they have been compared, until they have been removed from their specific contexts and analyzed as phenomena of religion.

Secondly, the effort to "detach" the individual elements of religions from the particular contexts of their occurrence puts the phenomenology of religion into conflict with historians who maintain that historical processes must be understood, first of all, as historical processes.<sup>16</sup> Since by definition, by the phenomenology of religion's

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and, generally, the discussion of "The Eidos of Religions" and "The Peculiar Intentionality of Religion" above in Chapter III.

<sup>15</sup>Cf., in this context, Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," p. 3; Bleeker, "Methodology and the Science of Religion," p. 217; and Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 161.

<sup>16</sup>Consider Ugo Bianchi's (The History of Religions, p. 7) reservations concerning the phenomenology of religion's use of comparative study: "From what we have already said it is clear that the comparison implicit in the history of religions--a comparison which does not mean to identify things different but on the contrary to distinguish elements otherwise left in confusion, will be above all a comparison between religions, between religious systems and complexes, and not mainly a comparison of detached elements or individual phenomena. In fact these latter, separated from their context, would be misunderstood and arbitrarily identified or contrasted. Here one sees the inevitable limitations of a phenomenology which would break up history and historical processes into so many elements of belief or practice especially if the student reserved for himself the supreme privilege

definition, the materials of religions are taken as empirical actuality, they must be understood in terms of this actuality as a part of the determinant context of their appearance. Yet this movement maintains the context of appearance, whether this is understood as the actual historical and cultural context or the interrelated complex of meanings and claims associated with particular religious traditions, does not reveal the distinctive religious meaning (in contrast to the Christian, Buddhist, etc.) of the phenomena. So morphologies and typologies are constructed which claim to display this "religious meaning." In a sense, the morphologies and typologies construct the religious meaning which would not otherwise be evident.<sup>17</sup> Now from the point of view of the historical sciences, these arrangements are at best arbitrary and are always in danger of not only neglecting, but distorting, the distinctive character and meaning of the materials of particular historical, cultural, and religious traditions.<sup>18</sup>

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of putting them together again, or interpreting them on the basis of arbitrarily erected structures, in homage to religions or philosophies taken de facto as models. If he were to do this explicitly his method would be more legitimate but would then become a philosophy or a theology. Even then he would misunderstand the facts, or fail to render them full justice, in so far as he neglected the results of historical and positive research. Hence the danger of studies and publications, undertaken from the phenomenological point of view (on pre-established religious items: God, sacrifice, soul, salvation, religion), which do not take into account the exigencies of historical method and research."

<sup>17</sup>Cf., for example, the discussion of aquatic symbolism in Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, pp. 131-138, and also Seymour Cain, "Mircea Eliade: Attitudes Toward History," Religious Studies Review 6 (January 1980): 13-16, for a brief discussion of Eliade's "ambivalence" toward history.

<sup>18</sup>In this context consider the criticisms by Ugo Bianche, The History of Religions, of van der Leeuw (p. 179) and Eliade (p. 188). Interestingly, Eliade also criticizes van der Leeuw in the same manner

The overall claim of the phenomenology of religion that historical study can yield insight into the nature, essence, or structure of religion cannot be defended on the basis of historical studies as historical studies describe the determinant contents and import of the various religions. The phenomenology of religion seeks to address this issue by maintaining that while it is true human being is in its most fundamental sense defined by historicity, by the "situatedness" of human being, it is also true that ". . . we must not confuse the historical circumstance which makes a human existence what it actually is with the fact that there is such a thing as a human existence."<sup>19</sup> So the phenomenologist of religion is left in the unenviable position of one who ". . . knows that he is condemned to work exclusively with historical documents, but at the same time feels that these documents tell him something more than the simple fact that they reflect historical situations."<sup>20</sup> The issue then becomes one of how the phenomenologist of religion can address what is felt, the "something more." However, because of the limits which it places upon its understanding of the "historical document," this movement has no real basis to address the fact of human existence, and the insights of the phenomenology of religion remain on the level of "feelings." In other terms, because

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as he writes ". . . he [van der Leeuw] was not interested in the history of religious structures. Here lies the most serious inadequacy of his approach . . . ." (The Quest, p. 35.)

<sup>19</sup>Eliade, The Quest, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. Although he is speaking in general terms here about the "historian of religions," Eliade's comments are applicable to the position of the phenomenologist of religion in this context.



the phenomenology of religion naively holds that the materials of religions must be understood primarily as empirical actuality, it is frustrated in its attempt to achieve the goal of describing the structures or essence of religion.

In this context the peculiar nature of this movement's attempt to disclose the "peculiar intentionality" of religion can be reconsidered. Although what takes place in the effort to describe the essence or structures of religion is the arrangement of the variety of data of religions according to patterns of similarity, it is claimed that this arrangement has something to do with religion itself. How one moves from the manifold data of the variety of religions to religion remains unclear, and undefended, in the phenomenology of religion. Yet it is nonetheless the contention of this movement that there is such a phenomenon as religion. (This is the basis for its arguments against the various reductionisms.)<sup>21</sup> In the practice of the phenomenology of religion, however, there is no movement beyond the patterning of the materials of religions. The claim of the phenomenology of religion that there is something--religion--appears to stem from the sense, the "feeling," that religions offer "something more" than their particularity. But because the phenomenologist of religion is condemned to work exclusively with "historical documents"--or, more directly, within the limits it places upon the understanding of "historical data"--the "something more" remains on the level of assumption and is approached only in terms of morphological arrangement

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<sup>21</sup>Cf., Eliade, The Quest, p. 53.

of data. What emerges as the peculiar intentionality of what is now called religion is the various materials of religions organized under principles of empirical generality.<sup>22</sup>

Yet these discussions remain unconvincing as descriptions of the structures or essence of religion. And all the more unconvincing is the phenomenology of religion's attempt to describe the general relationship between religion and religions. Given the methodological assumptions of the phenomenology of religion, it seems that there is no way to address the question of the nature of religion as a dimension of human existence and the relation of this to its many positive manifestations. But at the same time it appears to be crucial to the work of this movement that there is such a relationship. In fact, it is on the basis of such a relationship that the phenomenology of religion seeks to describe homo religiosus. But what emerges from the work of the phenomenology of religion is the construction of morphologies through which the manifold data of religions are organized. These morphological arrangements may tell us something about the vast complexity of the data of religions, but they do not indicate or show whether there is anything underlying this data which might be called religion. If the phenomenology of religion does seek to address this issue, it must uncover a different manner of approaching the materials of religions.

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<sup>22</sup>On the most comprehensive level there is the elevation of certain common elements of the variety of observed materials to central significance. In this context, consider the description of the phenomenology of religion's method in Chapter III.

To this end some elements of philosophical phenomenology, particularly Husserl's phenomenological inquiries, are instructive. One of the basic problems of the phenomenology of religion is its understanding of the nature of the data of religions. As it assigns the task of identifying the materials of religions to the historical sciences, this movement does not permit itself to view the materials of religions as anything other than empirical actuality, even though it does assume that there is "something more" to be gleaned from such empirical actuality beyond or other than actuality itself. This something more is the "peculiar intentionality" of religion. If, however, the phenomenology of religion is to arrive at this intentionality of religion, it must see the materials of religions in a new light. And one must be able to ask the question of whether or not there is, in general, a type of experiencing which is appropriate to homoc religiosus.

In other words, the questions which the phenomenology of religion seeks to address must be approached on a different basis. What follows will be an attempt to explore some themes of Husserlian phenomenology in order to provide a basis for a reconsideration of the possibility of a phenomenology of religion which can provide insight into the question of the relation between religion and religions.

#### Themes from Husserl's Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Religion

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to attempt an analysis of the nature, import, and limits of Husserl's phenomenological program, there are certain elements of Husserl's work which directly address those issues which have been discovered to be problematic in the

phenomenology of religion's approach to the materials of religions. What follows will be an examination of several aspects of Husserl's phenomenology in relation to problems in the phenomenology of religion. The hope is that this will provide a basis for consideration of the ways in which Husserl's phenomenology might make a contribution to the phenomenology of religion.

A continuing theme in the reflections of the phenomenology of religion is the effort to elucidate a ground for inquiry which will avoid the distortions of the variety of "reductionistic" modes of thinking and which will be able to attend to the distinctive characteristics of religious manifestations. For the phenomenology of religion, this "neutral" ground is to be found in its description of itself as an "empirical science." The way in which this ground is methodologically guaranteed is through the use of the epoche. Husserl, too, attempts to outline a methodological foundation for a kind of neutral inquiry, and the phenomenological brackets are a crucial element in his efforts.

In Husserl's phenomenology, the epoche serves to suspend or put out of play the reflective attitude of ordinary life. This is what Husserl calls the natural attitude.<sup>23</sup> The natural attitude describes the way in which we presume the commonly experienced world to be there for us in everyday life. The surrounding world is given; it is the place of the variety of activities, perceptions, values, judgments, cultural creations, and the multitude of other elements which make up

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<sup>23</sup>Among other works, Husserl, Ideas I, pp. 101-111.

the world of everyday experience and activity. In the natural attitude we presume the world and all of its various dimensions as that, as Husserl puts it, which is simply there.<sup>24</sup> For Husserl, the natural attitude describes the fundamental givenness of the world as something which is taken to exist "out there" regardless of the validity of theoretical or practical explanations of it.<sup>25</sup> No matter what "data" of the natural world is rejected or doubted or accepted, we still find ourselves in the presumption of the natural attitude, namely, that "the world" exists or is always there.<sup>26</sup>

Now from Husserl's point of view, if the phenomenologist wishes to examine the ways in which the world is present, a change in

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<sup>24</sup>This is the world of the natural attitude which Husserl describes in Ideas I, p. 101: "I am aware of a world, spread out in space endlessly, and in time becoming and become, without end. I am aware of it, that means, first of all, I discover it immediately intuitively, I experience it. Through sight, touch, hearing, etc., in the different ways of sensory perception, corporeal things somehow spatially distributed are for me simply there, in verbal or figurative sense "present," whether or not I pay them special attention by busying myself with them, considering, thinking, feeling, willing . . . ."

<sup>25</sup>This world, according to Husserl, is not only given as a collection of things, as facts and objects, but it is also given as a world of values and goods. It is what Husserl calls a "practical world" which he describes as: "Without further effort on my part I find the things before me furnished not only with the qualities that befit their positive nature, but with value-characters such as beautiful or ugly, agreeable or disagreeable, pleasant or unpleasant, and so forth. Things in their immediacy stand there as objects to be used, the 'table' with its 'books,' the 'glass to drink from,' the 'vase,' the 'piano,' and so forth. These values and practicalities, they too belong to the constitution of the 'actually present' objects as such, irrespective of my turning or not turning to consider them or indeed any other objects. The same considerations apply of course just as well to the men and beasts in my surroundings as to 'mere things.' They are my 'friends' or my 'foes,' my 'servants' or 'superiors,' 'strangers' or 'relative,' and so forth. (Husserl, Ideas I, p. 103.)

<sup>26</sup>Concerning the "general thesis of the natural standpoint" cf., Husserl, Ideas I, pp. 105-106.

perspective is required. Or, more directly, a radical alteration of our position with regard to the natural standpoint must take place. This is the function of the epoche for Husserl. With the imposition of the phenomenological brackets, the assumption concerning the actuality of the world in its various facets which characterizes its "taken for grantedness" in the natural attitude is now put into abeyance. As this assumption is "suspended" any sort of judgment which concerns the existence of the world is also put out of action. What remains in the brackets is the entire world of the natural attitude, but it is now seen--in the context of the epoche--as phenomenon. It is important to note here that the phenomenological brackets do not intend to accomplish what Husserl maintains "positivism demands."<sup>27</sup> The epoche does not aim at establishing a science free from theory or metaphysics which finds its grounding in the data itself. In fact, this effort of "positivism" is itself placed within the brackets inasmuch as the demand of positivism bases itself upon the reality status of the data. In the phenomenological use of the epoche, all theories and all of the sciences relating to the world of the natural attitude are placed within the brackets. This is to say, they have no special claim to validity for the phenomenologist.

Another way to describe the use of the epoche in phenomenological studies is to consider its role as a methodological device employed in order to suspend judgment. The phenomenology of religion generally describes the epoche in this way as it moves to "bracket out" theological

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<sup>27</sup>Husserl, Ideas I, p. 111.

judgments, philosophical judgments, and certain judgments of the human sciences. Husserl, too, describes the epoche in terms of suspension of judgment, but, for Husserl, this bracketing of judgment is to be understood in its most radical sense.<sup>28</sup> As was indicated above, it is not intended to simply disregard particular judgments or doctrines of interpretation in order to place the phenomenon in question under the rule of some "neutral" interpretive schema, nor is it to place the phenomenon in the context of "objective" or scientific inquiries which attempt "theory-free" investigation. Instead, the suspension of judgment indicates a shift in perspective which is essential for rigorous phenomenological inquiry.

From this point of view, two aspects of the character of the epoche should be noted. In the first place, what the imposition of the epoche "brackets out" is the straightforward acceptance of the object of investigation which accompanies reflection in the natural attitude. That is, the "taken for grantedness" of the reality of the object is suspended. This negative aspect of the use of the epoche is of fundamental consequence for Husserl as it points the way to a different avenue of investigation. With the bracketing of the "taken for grantedness" of the reality of the object under investigation, the goal of reflection in the natural attitude which is to establish the "true being" of the object (or, that which makes our knowledge of the object independent of the "merely subjective" manners of appearance) is also "bracketed out."<sup>29</sup> For Husserl, both the "true being" of the

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-111.

object and the "merely subjective" appearance become, with the imposition of the epoche, two versions of the object as experienced or "as meant." These "versions" are not to be measured by further reference to anything. Instead, they are to be brought into descriptive focus.

This bringing into focus describes the positive dimension of the application of the epoche, what is left "inside" the brackets. For Husserl, even as the task of phenomenological inquiry is not to hold up the experienced object for critical evaluation by reference to some arbitrarily chosen objective criteria, it is to bring out clearly what Husserl calls the "givenness" of the object. It is to describe the object by reference to the act of meaning which is essential to it and which belongs essentially to the experience in which it is given.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>This is Husserl's notion of intentionality, "the universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something." (Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. by Dorion Cairns [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960], p. 33.) The primary characteristic of consciousness is that it is directed or active. There is, for Husserl, an indissoluble unity between consciousness and that of which it is conscious. Prior to any consideration of the various relationships between subject and object, mind and body, self and world, or any other kind of dichotomy, there is the intentional structure of consciousness. This recognition of the immediate relatedness of consciousness points to the way in which experience can be viewed in its concreteness. Once consciousness is seen in terms of its intentional structure, reflection can be directed to the particular structures of meaning through which consciousness is related to its meant object. As Husserl describes this process: "Each cogito, each conscious process, we may also say, 'means' something or other and bears in itself, in this manner peculiar to the meant, its particular cogitatum. Each does this, moreover, in its own fashion. The house-perception means a house--more precisely, as this individual house--and means it in the fashion peculiar to perception; a house-memory means a house in the fashion peculiar to memory; a house-phantasy, in the fashion peculiar to phantasy . . . ." (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 33.) As Husserl recognizes that every consciousness and every conscious process is, in itself, consciousness of something no matter what ontic status this "something" may have, the two-sided concern of intentionality--the noetic-noematic correlates--becomes evident. The polar structure of



What is left inside the brackets are the "ways" in which natural reflection of all kinds measures the real, according to which the illusory is rejected and the objectively true is established. In short, with the imposition of the epoche the world of the natural attitude is seen in a new light. Following Husserl's procedure, it is possible to examine how objects are taken to be illusory, beautiful, religious, valued, recollected, etc.. The effort of phenomenological description, then, is to do just this. It is to describe how objects meant in different regions of reality are meant in different ways, how different acts are involved in each type of experience in order to establish the status of the experienced object.

Even from this brief description of the phenomenological epoche it is evident that the phenomenology of religion's understanding of the brackets stands in contrast to that of Husserl. While the

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consciousness points out the possibility of describing the ways in which the processes of consciousness are united with the object(s) of these processes. The noetic side is focused upon the subjectivity of acts of consciousness, and the noematic side is concerned with whatever belongs to the constitution of objectivity in relation to the subjective acts. In other words, the intentionality of consciousness suggests that experiencing, by its very structure, is an activity of meaning through which consciousness is related to its objects in a variety of ways. For Husserl, the noetic is not identified with psychological activities, but with the meaning of those processes. And the noematic is not identified with the empirical object, as such, but with the object as meant. On the basis of the fundamental property of consciousness, on the basis of this "gift of meaning" (Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 257), phenomenological method is established as that which is to describe the structures of experience without recourse to preconceived notions concerning the status of the objects of experience or the psychic and material conditions of experience. (This is one sense of what it means to describe phenomenological philosophy as a "presuppositionless philosophy.") In turn, the intentional structure of consciousness provides a framework through which the radical understanding of the epoche in Husserl's phenomenology can be approached.

phenomenology of religion intends to avoid certain modes of thinking which apparently distort or predetermine the sense of manifestations of religion, it also sees the possibility (and necessity) of a "neutral" attitude in its claim to be an empirical study. In the context of this movement, the language of epoche is employed as a kind of guard against a variety of particular doctrines of interpretation--viz., theological, philosophical, reductionistic--but its application does not modify the position of the phenomenologist of religion with regard to the status of the materials of religions as "taken for granted" in reality. So the phenomenology of religion becomes an "empirical science" which seeks to establish the materials of religions in their "true being" apart from their particular and contingent contexts.<sup>31</sup> This is the effort of the phenomenology of religion to construct morphologies and typologies which are held to describe the essence, or "peculiar intentionality," of religion. From the point of view of Husserl's analysis, however, the phenomenology of religion's application of the epoche remains in the standpoint of the natural attitude. The use of the brackets in this movement corresponds to that of the "demand of positivism." In other words, this movement aims at

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<sup>31</sup>The phenomenology of religion's quest for the "true being" of the phenomena is the effort to uncover the religious meaning of the materials at hand in contrast to the particular and determinant meanings of cultural and historical milieux and that of the claims of specific religions. The phenomenology of religion does not naively seek some "objective" statement of religion in the facts themselves--this is the effort of the "reductionistic" approach. Instead, it seeks, in its conception of itself as an empirical study, a point of view which is not dependent on particular theoretical standards or theological commitments and as such establishes on "neutral" grounds the "true being" of religious manifestations as religious manifestation.

establishing a method which is theory-free and which finds its foundation in the actuality of data itself. But what the phenomenology of religion is not conscious of is the methodological consequences of its acceptance of actuality as the measure of "theory-free" investigation. It does not see that actuality taken as a guarantee for neutral inquiry is in itself yet another way in which reflection in the natural attitude means its objects and which needs to be self-consciously brought into descriptive focus.

Husserl's conception of the epoche and its relation to the world of the natural attitude brings into view both the over-all impetus of his phenomenological program and specific limits of the phenomenology of religion. The connection between Husserl's program and the work of the phenomenology of religion can be better understood by considering a preeminent theme in Husserl's work, his attempt to address a crisis of thought which characterizes the contemporary situation.<sup>32</sup> In the context of our present reflections, this crisis can be described in the following manner.

One result of the vast accomplishments of research in the human sciences has been to show that thought and the principles of thought are the result of various conditionings. Taken to its radical

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<sup>32</sup>Husserl, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man"; Husserl, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. For discussion of the significance of Husserl's understanding of this crisis cf., Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics, trans. and ed. with an Introduction by James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 43-95.

consequences, reason itself can be viewed as that which is determined by combinations of external contingent circumstances--by cultural, psychological, and historical frameworks. The result of this insight on the part of the human sciences has been to, in principle, restrain from all "valuative positions" and to become "fact-minded."<sup>33</sup> The problem, however, is that the radical skepticism implied in such a position undermines the foundations and justification of the human sciences themselves.<sup>34</sup> This brings us to the crisis of the human sciences. As all positions, and even reason itself, are understood to be determined by various external conditionings, the claims and positions of the sciences themselves are also brought into doubt as even these can be seen to be the result of external processes. One might consider it possible to respond to this crisis by seeking out a special and independent realm for thought and its intrinsic truths, the realm of philosophy. But this too falls to the kind of skepticism attending the

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<sup>33</sup>The terms are taken from Husserl's The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p. 7, where he describes the standpoint of the human sciences in the following manner: "As for the humanistic sciences . . . all the special and general disciplines of which treat man's spiritual geistig existence, that is, within the horizon of his historicity; their rigorous scientific character requires, we are told, that the scholar carefully exclude all valuative positions, all questions of the reason or unreason of their human subject matter and its cultural configurations. Scientific, objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world, the physical as well as the spiritual geistig world, is in fact."

<sup>34</sup>Consider Merleau-Ponty's ("Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," p. 44) analysis: "If, indeed, the guiding thought and principles of the mind at each moment are only the result of external causes which act upon it, then the reasons for my affirmation are not the true reasons for this affirmation. They are not so much reasons as causes working from the outside. Hence the postulates of the psychologist, the sociologist, and the historian are stricken with doubt by the results of their own researches."

human sciences as soon as the philosopher realizes that this independent realm of reason has nothing to do with the actually experienced world about which it intends to speak.<sup>35</sup> The path phenomenological reflection must follow, according to Husserl, is one between the ultimately skeptical methods of the sciences and the dogmatism of a philosophy which attempts to place itself in a realm of ideas separate and distinct from experience. The path is a return to concrete experience, but concrete experience understood in a particular sense. This particular sense is exemplified by Husserl's understanding of the distinctive function of the epoche. In his use of the epoche, Husserl attempts to open the way to a truly radical reflection which uncovers and clarifies the assumptions established in and by the surrounding world. Moreover, the epoche is intended to allow the phenomenologist to describe the types of experiencing which characterize the multiplicity of ways in which we are in the actually present world.

In the context of this discussion of the crisis in the human sciences, a primary difficulty with the method of the phenomenology of religion is uncovered. Despite the fact that the phenomenology of religion criticizes the various "reductionisms," the theoretical standpoints of its predecessors in the study of religion, and the dogmatism and speculation attending theological and philosophical approaches, this movement does not go far enough in its critical reflections. It is not enough for this movement to retreat to the materials of religions and call itself an "empirical science." Even as the phenomenology

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<sup>35</sup>Husserl, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, Part I, especially pp. 5-14.

of religion recognizes the dangers in interpretations of the materials of religions it nonetheless naively supposes that the facts themselves, identified as the data, are untainted by speculative or theoretical assumptions and that the de facto world is the place where certain knowledge can be legitimately based. This position leads the phenomenology of religion itself to the skepticism which is implied in the thesis of empiricism. And, more directly, this movement's method includes a "non-rationalism" which does not permit evaluation of its claims.

These observations require further explanation. As has already been noted, the phenomenology of religion is not empiricist in the sense that it straightforwardly argues that all knowledge is dependent upon sense experience.<sup>36</sup> But this movement does assume that the data of religions provides both the material and necessary evidential basis for inquiry into the nature of religion. Moreover, it assumes that this is the only means by which one can legitimately inquire into the structure and meaning of religion. This is the latent empiricist presupposition of the phenomenology of religion. What this, in turn, presupposes is an uncritical affirmation of data (as identified by the historical sciences) as the epistemological ground for reflection. Outside of its proper function which is limited to ordering and classifying data, constructing morphologies and typologies, reason is seen to be at the service of nonrational ends--this is the basis of the phenomenology

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<sup>36</sup>The phenomenology of religion argues against this narrow kind of definition of empiricism as an element of its critique of the "positivist ideologies" of its predecessors. Cf., Eliade, The Quest, pp. 12-36.

of religion's criticism of theological, philosophical, and "reductionistic" approaches. As classification is the legitimate function of reason, this movement indicates that ordering itself is tantamount to describing the nature of religion.<sup>37</sup> This is why the phenomenology of religion insists that the historical sciences must go beyond the mere "gathering of data" or "stock-taking" to find their completion in the phenomenology of religion's morphologies and typologies.<sup>38</sup>

But these assumptions on the part of the phenomenology of religion give rise to a skepticism as it becomes evident that there is no adequate way to evaluate the various systems of classifications. As Joseph Kitagawa has observed concerning the history of religions as a whole, "The lack of data is not at all our problem. Our real problem, to use a phrase of G. van der Leeuw, is that the manner in which data are 'significantly organized' inevitably varies according to the personal sensitivity, religious outlook, and scholarly training of the individual historian of religions."<sup>39</sup> In the case of the phenomenology of religion, it is this inevitable variance in manners of organization which stands outside of the realm of evidential requirements which are

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<sup>37</sup>As this movement limits the legitimate function of reason in its definition of the empirical basis of the task of the phenomenology of religion, the movement from construction of morphologies of religions to statements concerning the "peculiar intentionality" of religion differ only in degree of generality. In this context consider again the discussion of the method of the phenomenology of religion in Chapter III.

<sup>38</sup>van der Leeuw, *Einführung*, p. 6; and Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," p. 19.

<sup>39</sup>Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The Making of a Historian of Religions," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 36 (September 1968): 200.

necessary for adequate evaluation. Yet, at the same time, it is the significant organization of data which is said to describe the meaning and structure of religion.<sup>40</sup>

When this movement criticizes the "reductionisms," it rightly sees that these ways of understanding religious manifestations distort the materials of religions, they uncritically raise one aspect of religions to central importance.<sup>41</sup> But what the phenomenology of religion fails to see is that the location of the basis of understanding in empirical materials itself gives rise to skeptical conclusions. The problem is not merely the particular theories which the reductionists embrace, rather it is the inability of the data, simply as actuality, to provide the sole foundation upon which the nature of religion can be discerned. Although particular efforts to describe the nature of religion are disregarded, the phenomenology of religion does not go far enough in its methodological reflections. This movement does not see that insight into the structure and meaning of religion

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<sup>40</sup>According to van der Leeuw, structure is "reality significantly organized" (Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 672). The task of the phenomenology of religion is to describe the structures of religion through its systematic classification of the materials of religions (cf., Ibid., p. 674 and, more generally, his Einführung, pp. 1-12).

<sup>41</sup>An example of this is found in Durkheim's (The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life) treatment of Australian totemism and his conclusion that the sacred and religion are essentially an expression of the social life. All particular religions are then seen as variations of expression of this primary social element. It is the movement from one aspect of a particular religious expression (social bonds in one form of Australian totemism) to the conclusion that this expresses the essence of religion which the phenomenology of religion finds characteristic of the "reductionisms" and untenable.



cannot be achieved on the basis of classification of facts alone.<sup>42</sup> The idea of religion itself is based upon insight into something which is not simply empirically given, and no arrangement of the empirically given will uncover the nature of religion. As the phenomenology of religion understands religions and their elements to be constituents of religion, this movement is forced to seek some unifying element--some idea of religion--through which the parts can be seen in terms of the whole.<sup>43</sup> It is on the basis of this unifying element, religion, that the contingencies of cultural forms which history shows are distinguished from the perduring or essential elements. These presuppositions need to be critically apprehended, they need to be questioned, if the goals of the phenomenology of religion are to be achieved. But such presuppositions cannot be clarified and brought into focus if they are understood as fundamentally matters of "personal sensitivity." This is the sense in which the conclusions of the phenomenology of religion are considered to be, from the first, determined by those non-rational factors which cannot be critically evaluated. By what criteria

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<sup>42</sup>Narrow historiographical work is criticized in order to emphasize the "hermeneutical task" of the phenomenology of religion (cf., for example, Eliade, *The Quest*, pp. 29-30, 55-64). But this criticism itself is based on the presupposition that arrangement of the materials of religions can yield more than historiographical knowledge. In this context, recall again the discussion of the method of the phenomenology of religion in Chapter III.

<sup>43</sup>This is the sense in which, in the phenomenology of religion, the "religious meaning" is uncovered only when the various religions are compared. It is in the context of bringing together the various constitutive parts (the materials of religions) in terms of the whole (religion) that the parts, in a sense, receive their meaning as religious--in contrast to Buddhist, Muslim, etc.. This whole way of understanding religions as constitutive parts is clearly problematic and will be considered again, in greater detail, below.

can one's "personal sensitivity," "religious outlook," etc., be evaluated? How can the facts elucidate and correct such prejudices when the facts themselves have been identified according to those various values and norms which arise from the prejudices of the individual historian? Is there any sense in which the phenomenology of religion can be something other than reflections concerning one's own prejudices and perspective?

This is all to say that the investigation of the facts of religions inevitably becomes confused unless one has attempted to determine what religion might be by means of reflection which is not only of the empirical order. As a matter of fact, the phenomenology of religion's investigations of the empirical order themselves already, and necessarily, presuppose some understanding of the nature of the objects which they intend to investigate. These presuppositions cannot simply be dismissed, but need to be brought into critical focus inasmuch as they serve to found the work of this movement. But in the phenomenology of religion, these presuppositions are identified with the contingencies which establish individual perspectives and, as such, are not accepted as playing a foundational role.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the

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<sup>44</sup>The tendency in this movement is to finally dismiss foundational concerns and instead to turn to the scholarly importance of investigations of specific religions. Consider the general import of Eliade's reflections:

"One may or may not agree with Ananda Coomaraswamy's personal conviction with regard to philosophia perennis and the universal, primordial 'Tradition' informing all pre-modern cultures; what ultimately matters is the unexpected light that Coomaraswamy throws on the vedic and Buddhist creation. Likewise, one may not share Henry Corbin's "anti-historicism," but one cannot deny that thanks to this conception, Corbin has succeeded in disclosing a significant

reflections of Kitagawa are appropriate.<sup>45</sup> If the way in which the materials of religions are "significantly organized," the way in which the structures of religion is described, is determined by individual scholarly training and personal sensitivity, can there be any sense in which the phenomenology of religion can describe the meaning of religion as a dimension of human existence? It does not seem possible. The goal of the phenomenology of religion to describe the relation between religion and religions is frustrated if this movement persists in its insistence that the facts alone are the measure of rigorous thought and must provide the basis for understanding the nature of that which is nowhere given in the data.

This, then, is the crisis in which the phenomenology of religion participates and which has been described by Husserl as a general crisis of the human sciences. As the phenomenology of religion seeks to inquire into the nature of religion while avoiding interpretive distortions of the materials of religions, it naively turns to the data

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dimension of Islamic mystical philosophy previously almost ignored by Western scholarship.

"Ultimately, the work of an author is judged by its contribution to the understanding of a specific type of religious creation." (Eliade, The Quest, p. 36.)

<sup>45</sup>Kitagawa concludes his reflections on the task of the historian of religions by stating that the scholar must be wary of falling to the temptations of becoming either a "quasi-theologian" or an "Orientalist." Instead, ". . . we must be clear in our own minds that the primary object of the history of religions is the scholarly task of 'integral understanding' of the structure and meaning of man's religious history . . ." (Kitagawa, "Making of a Historian of Religions," p. 201.) In the context of the phenomenology of religion, it is the possibility of critically examining the foundation and character of this "middle way" between historiography and the postulates of existential commitment and speculation which has been ruled out from the beginning.

itself as the guarantee for neutral, theory-free inquiry. There is a failure, however, to see the methodological consequences of this turn. In the first place, this movement is open to a radical kind of skepticism as it restricts its investigations to the data of religions in the hope of attaining a neutral ground for inquiry. If the claims of reflection are understood to be determined by external factors, the claims of the phenomenology of religion itself are open to the same critique. Secondly, the phenomenology of religion is unable, on its own terms, to evaluate its own descriptions of the structures of religion as these are seen to be the result of individual and personal perspectives which are not related to the materials of religion. In this way, the work of the phenomenology of religion remains without a foundation and its efforts to describe the nature of religion either remain on the level of empirical generalization or are seen as outside of the realm of rigorous inquiry.

#### Summary

The thesis of this chapter is that the phenomenology of religion's efforts to describe the nature of religion are frustrated because of the limits of its own methodological decisions. As the phenomenology of religion maintains that the only adequate way in which one can inquire into the nature of religion is on the basis of investigation and arrangement of the concrete materials of religions, understood as data, it sets the limits of its reflections in such a way as to make it impossible to adequately address the way in which religion is a dimension of human existence. Even as this movement endeavors to remove

unfounded theories and speculations which do not arise from the complexity of the vast variety of materials of religions, it also assumes that the data of religions which have been identified by the historical sciences have the capacity to reveal the nature of religion. The assumption, to put it more directly, is that through the complexity of concrete cultural forms and multiplicity of data, there runs a strain which can be described as religion, and which is not reducible to any particular religion or any cultural or historical setting. In order to describe the meaning and structures of religion itself the phenomenologist of religion can proceed to uncover general patterns of similarity among the multiple data of religions. However, these patterns of similarity, as we have seen, remain on the level of empirical generality. As such they do not and cannot show more than patterns of empirical generality. They cannot arrive at the nature of religion.

The intrinsic limits of the method of the phenomenology of religion recall again the paradox of foundation in the general science of religion and this movement's inheritance of the basic assumptions of its predecessors. It is the legacy of these assumptions which remain unquestioned and unclarified, and which finally serves to defeat the efforts of the phenomenology of religion to achieve its goal. Here, these assumptions have been described as generally empiricist in nature. These empiricist presuppositions provide the framework for the way in which this movement employs phenomenological method as a tool used to construct morphologies and typologies of the data of religions. Considered in this manner we have seen that the work of the phenomenology of religion, instead of being a radical kind of inquiry which

attempts to address the fundamental issue of the relation between religion and the concrete materials of religions, participates in all of the problems associated with those kinds of inquiry which attempt to glean from actuality (within the evidential limits of that which is empirically given) more than knowledge of actuality.

Husserl's conception of phenomenological description as rigorous science and his effort to describe the crisis which plagues the foundations of the human science contributes further to our understanding of the phenomenology of religion and to the character of its method. Specifically, the phenomenology of religion uses the restraint of judgment, the epoche which is also a crucial element of Husserl's method of description, to rule out certain kinds of judgment but this movement does not see the importance of investigation of its own presuppositions. Instead, the phenomenology of religion attempts to seek out a "theory-free" approach which can be used to measure and analyze the materials of religions. In this context, the presuppositions of the phenomenology of religion surface again as the data of religions, because it is data, is held to be that which can remain free from the various manipulations of theory and existential commitment. From the point of view of Husserl's understanding of the human sciences and the crisis which attends them, two related problems in the phenomenology of religion are uncovered.

In the first place, because of its assumptions concerning the place and limits of reflection, the general conclusions of the phenomenology of religion regarding the nature of religion are relegated to the contingencies and subjective factors which determine individual

perspectives. In other words, because the phenomenology of religion understands the proper role of reflection to be determined by the evidential criteria outlined by certain empiricist presuppositions of the historical sciences, its own statements as to the structures and meaning of religion which cannot fall within the purview of these criteria are put in the context of those "non-rational" factors which define individual approaches. As such, the phenomenology of religion's descriptive efforts to uncover the nature of religion are not open to the evaluative criteria this movement considers necessary for rigorous thought. Finally, then, this movement must recognize that, given the limits of its method, it is not possible to adjudicate the differences between various descriptions of the structures or nature of religion.

While this position presents certain practical kinds of difficulties for the work of the phenomenology of religion, it also presents a more fundamental issue. Inasmuch as the phenomenology of religion's goal is to describe the nature of religion (as it sees its task to be the "completion" of the work begun by the historical sciences), and insofar as its statements concerning the structures of religion finally must be taken as outside of the realm of evidential criteria, this movement participates in a radical skepticism which finally undermines its own foundation.<sup>46</sup> Fueled in part by the suspicions the phenomenology of religion inherits from its predecessors, there is presupposed a separation between the "physical" and social situation

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<sup>46</sup>This points again to the difficulties encountered by any science which attempts to secure its foundation in its own practice. Consider again the discussion of Chapter IV.

(the actualities with which the historical sciences deal) and the life of thought (the worlds of theory, speculation, and existential commitment). With this separation, thought and the capacities of reflection in general come to be understood as that which is radically conditioned by circumstance and hence has no intrinsic value. What is placed into jeopardy here is not only the work of particular scholars in this movement but also the possibility of describing the structures of religion at all. In other words, as all positions are finally seen to be determined by external circumstances, the possibility of discovering the nature of religion at all is brought into doubt. This is the "crisis" of the phenomenology of religion. Given the presuppositions and method of this movement there can be no critical reflection which is not infused with skepticism.

Up to this point it has been shown that although the assumptions and method of this movement often operate only implicitly, it is nonetheless the case that certain methodological decisions of the phenomenology of religion have established a framework for inquiry through which efforts to address the question of the relation between religion and religions are inevitably frustrated. Or more directly, given the restraints which the phenomenology of religion imposes upon reflection, even the possibility of approaching the issue of how religion is a dimension of human existence is brought into doubt. The efforts of the phenomenology of religion are not, however, without value. This movement has succeeded in underscoring the significance of the general issue of religion and religions and has pointed out the necessity of seeking new ways in which to secure a foundation for a phenomenology



of religion. This is the task to which we will now turn.

## CHAPTER VI

### RELIGION AND RELIGIONS: AN INTRODUCTION TO A PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

Still general convictions carry little weight when one cannot give them a foundation; hopes for a science signify little if one is incapable of envisioning a path to its goals.

Edmund Husserl,  
"Philosophy as Rigorous  
Science"

#### Introduction

The crucial methodological issue which has been encountered again and again is whether or not there is any way in which investigation of the complexity of materials of religions can lead to understanding of the meaning and structure of religion itself. The question is one of the means by which we are to uncover religion as that which is present in the vast variety of cultural forms and traditions which are religions. The issue, then, is both of the nature of religion and the relationship of this to the multiple data of religions, and of the method by which this matter can be addressed. The question of the nature of religion is especially crucial as the goal of the phenomenology of religion has been to uncover a method of inquiry which would describe the essential characteristics of homo religiosus, describe religion as a dimension of human existence. The way to this description, for this

movement, has been through consideration of the variety of materials of religions. Yet the methodological assumptions of the historical sciences which are embraced in the phenomenology of religion and in its predecessors in terms of the understanding of the foundational role of comparative inquiry have proved inadequate to achieve this goal. If the central issues which the phenomenology of religion has uncovered are to be dealt with, these fundamental questions need to be considered in a new light.

In order to address these matters, the concluding discussions of this chapter will have two closely related foci: the one methodological and the other having to do with the locus of the issue of religion and religions. Although what follows is little more than suggestions for further reflections, still the effort here will be to constructively state the methodological requirements for a phenomenology of religion, to offer several methodological proposals, which can in turn provide a more adequate elucidation of the general issue which has motivated this inquiry, that of religion and religions. In other words, by focusing on certain methodological issues which are crucial for a revised phenomenology of religion, the general issue of religion and religions should receive renewed statement as well.

In the Logos article of 1910-1911, Husserl describes what he considers to be the fundamental issues confronting the human sciences and human knowledge as a whole.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, Husserl criticizes three intellectual attitudes which attempt, but fail, to understand the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," in Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, pp. 71-147.

These attitudes are: naturalism, historicism, and the Weltanschauungsphilosophie of Dilthey and others.<sup>2</sup> The last two are of direct concern to our investigations here as they reflect the ways in which the phenomenology of religion has pursued its own methodological reflections.

According to Husserl, the problem with the attitude of historicism is that it considers knowledge as only a product of human history, as a set of facts of cultures. Historical consciousness recognizes as primary the changing situations of various cognitive claims and in doing this relativizes them; they tend to be viewed genetically, only according to the particularity of their situations. The result of this attitude is that distinctions between cognitive claims as cultural facts and as knowledge become confused. Or, to put the matter differently, the historicist does not see that cognitive claims are about something as well as being reflections of particular historical and cultural situations. From the point of view of historicism, the cognitive contents of what are seen primarily as cultural facts--science and philosophy in Husserl's terms--are nullified.<sup>3</sup> Given the position of the historicist, the idea of science or of philosophy as an object of epistemological evaluation is not possible. Historical facts of development do not provide the basis for adjudication of ideas. As Husserl concludes, ". . . historical reasons produce only historical

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<sup>2</sup>In Leszek Kolakowski, Husserl and the Search for Certitude, The Cassirer Lectures (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 35, these attitudes are described more generally in terms of scientism, positivism, and relativism.

<sup>3</sup>Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," pp. 123-126.

consequences. The desire either to prove or refute ideas on the basis of facts is nonsense--according to the quotation Kant used: ex pumice aquam."<sup>4</sup>

Now although it may seem that the Weltanschauungsphilosophie escapes the difficulties of historicism as it attempts to give expression to personal, cultural, and historical values, these values--from the point of view of the Weltanschauungsphilosophie--can be understood as valid only for the specific contexts which they reflect. Although certain values and claims are recognized in this attitude, these values cannot aim at any universal validity. From the start, they are considered to be tied to the distinctive contexts out of which they grow. Because of this Husserl concludes that the "world-view" philosophies cannot establish the validity of something outside of their particularity--the person, the community, or the historical period. They cannot aim at the infinite task of expressing what Husserl calls the "transfinite" sense of humanity.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the Weltanschauungsphilosophie are seen to be in fundamentally the same relativising position as the historicists.<sup>6</sup> The general conclusion is that empirical sciences, whether they take on the attitude of the historicist or attempt

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-136.

<sup>6</sup>Husserl emphasizes this in a footnote commenting on Dilthey's philosophy: "Dilthey too . . . rejects historic skepticism. I do not understand, however, how he thinks that from his so instructive analysis of the structure and typology of Weltanschauungen he has obtained decisive arguments against skepticism. For as has been explained in the text, a humanistic science that is at the same time empirical can argue neither for nor against anything laying claim to objective validity." (Ibid., n., p. 127.)

to give expression to values in the manner of the "world-view" philosophies, can yield only empirical understanding.

Husserl's critique of these attitudes in the human sciences also helps bring to light the limits of the method of the phenomenology of religion. Even though this movement repeatedly rejects the conclusions of radically historicist approaches, along with other reductionisms, it nonetheless assumes that the basis upon which one understands the essence of things is given in the presuppositions of empirical studies.<sup>7</sup> It is this assumption which describes a fundamental methodological problem in the phenomenology of religion. Even as Husserl has shown that neither radically historicist approaches nor the more encompassing Weltanschauungsphilosophie can yield more than empirical knowledge, the phenomenology of religion also erects a methodological barrier between concrete religious phenomena and the goal of describing the structures of religion as this movement restricts reflection to the task of constructing typologies of the data of religions. What underlies this, in the work of the phenomenology of religion, is a fundamental

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<sup>7</sup>This perspective is generally descriptive of the approach of the phenomenology of religion (as has been discussed in the above Chapters), but is especially evident in Eliade's work. He repeatedly rejects the conclusions of historicism (as in Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp. 147-154, the section titled, "The Difficulties of Historicism"), but also repeatedly insists upon the "concreteness" of investigation in "historico-religious facts" (Eliade, Shamanism, p. xv) because ". . . there is only one way of approaching religion--namely, to deal with the religious facts." (Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 29.) It is this kind of investigation which, according to Eliade, will lead us to an understanding of the "sacred" as an "element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness." (Mircea Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas: Vol. 1 From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries, trans. by Willard R. Trask Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. xiii.) On this general issue in Eliade cf., Cain, "Mircea Eliade: Attitudes Toward History": 13-16.

confusion between that which this movement intends to describe, concrete experience or the distinctive features of homo religiosus, and this movement's allegiance to its self-understanding as an empirical and historical science. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that in terms of its assumptions and method, the phenomenology of religion tends to identify religious experience with the data of religions as it is uncovered by the historical sciences. In doing so this movement assumes the manner of its investigations of religious experience is limited to certain criteria of knowledge given by empirical studies.<sup>8</sup> The result of this attitude is that the phenomenology of religion's claims concerning the nature or structures of religion finally cannot be supported. They have the status either of empirical generalizations or of unfounded speculations which find their origin in something other than the "facts."<sup>9</sup> Given the methodological assumptions of the phenomenology of religion, claims like, "The 'sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the

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<sup>8</sup>Husserl describes this kind of position in terms of the empiricist assumption that all valid knowledge and all valid judgment must take the form of that appropriate to the "natural" or "real world" [Wirklichkeit] which thereby identifies the "fact world" [Wirklichkeit] with the possibility of rational or "neutral" judgment and places everything else, or what Husserl calls "ideas," in the realm of opinion or mere imagination. The world of ideas from this point of view is then seen to be one of "philosophical spooks" or "metaphysical ghosts." (Husserl, Ideas I, p. 82.) According to Husserl, this assumption needs to be clarified as the empiricists' world is not the only world and as there are various types of experience and judgments whose foundations are given with validity in "originarily giving intuitions." (Husserl, Ideas I, p. 83, translation varied, in the English, "primordial dator intuitions.")

<sup>9</sup>The latter point is a frequent source of criticism of the phenomenology of religion. Cf., for example, Baird, Category Formation and the History of Religions, pp. 152-153.

history of consciousness" do not seem to have any basis.<sup>10</sup> They can neither be refuted nor supported on the basis of the materials of religions. But statements such as this do demand a foundation and evaluative criteria if they are to be taken as other than random speculations or unsupportable prejudices.

Certain matters need to be made specific here. The goal of the phenomenology of religion is to uncover and elucidate the nature of religion. But religion, in this movement, is taken to be neither a thing nor an ideal form of some sort. Rather, it is seen to be a mode or dimension of human existence. This movement intends to describe the generic features, the distinctive structures, of a kind of experiencing. This is why the phenomenology of religion speaks of homo religiosus and the structures of religion. Understood as a dimension of human existence, the phenomenology of religion sees the possibility

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<sup>10</sup>Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, 1: xiii. It should be noted in this context that Allen (Structure and Creativity in Religion) persuasively and creatively argues that it is possible to discern a "hermeneutical framework" (with certain similarities to existential phenomenology) which provides a foundation for Eliade's method and that this signifies a certain advance in Eliade's work over that of other phenomenologists of religion. It seems to me, however, that Allen's "reading" of Eliade is, in fact, a "reading into." Eliade himself, as Allen also recognizes, does not present this foundation nor does he formulate--or seem to operate on the basis of--a critical methodological analysis in which the movement from the particular materials of religions to the universal structures of religion is clarified. Rather, his works tend to emphasize the importance of "religious documents," the arrangement of which somehow yield the structure of religion itself. It is this uncritical reliance on the "data of religions" and a general reluctance to participate in methodological reflection which characterizes the phenomenology of religion as a whole. Moreover, it is this "negative foundation" of this movement which serves to frustrate its goal of describing the structures of religion. Still, insofar as Allen's notable reading of Eliade attempts to bring a degree of methodological clarity to his work, Allen has provided a significant contribution to the phenomenology of religion.



of describing homo religiosus without preconceptions and without prejudice. This movement's ideal of valid knowledge and evidential criteria, however, is given in its empiricist presuppositions. This is the unacknowledged inheritance of the phenomenology of religion and the source of its methodological confusion. Because of the way in which the phenomenology of religion understands neutral and valid description, it takes the data of religions to be equivalent to the concrete--it identifies concrete experience with facts. It is this identification which frustrates the attempt to elucidate the structures of religion.

The phenomenology of religion, understood in terms of its conception of itself as the completion of historical studies, has not provided the groundwork or foundation for discussions of the nature of religion. Instead it has participated in an attitude which fundamentally confuses certain of its assumptions with that which it intends to describe. This is partly because of the assumptions of the phenomenology of religion, and partly because of its particular method of inquiry. While such a confusion is not unique to the phenomenology of religion--as Husserl shows with his critique of various attitudes in the human sciences--it is nonetheless crucial to the work of the phenomenology of religion that this confusion be clarified. In other words, if a phenomenology of religion is to achieve its goal, a more adequate foundation and method of inquiry must be sought. The efforts of this final chapter will be to explore the ways in which some insights of Husserl's phenomenology can provide the means by which such

a foundation can be secured thus making a contribution to the phenomenology of religion.

How Can Husserl's Phenomenology  
Make a Contribution to the  
Phenomenology of Religion?

As the "negative foundation" of the phenomenology of religion has been criticized here, the unquestioned self-understanding of this movement which calls itself an empirical science has been rejected as a way of approaching the structures or essence of religion.<sup>11</sup> Yet even as this movement is not able to finally achieve its goal of adequately elucidating the structures of religion, it has pointed out the central question of the relationship between the multiplicity of materials of religions and the essence of religion. This question will be considered here in terms of the relationship between the modes of appearance of religion, concrete experience, and the essence of religion. So as our investigations continue, it is important to note that the criticisms of the phenomenology of religion offered above are not intended to lead to the supposition that one can simply intuit the essence of religion without regard to the concrete "facts" of religions. Or, more accurately, the issue at hand is not one of a choice between actuality and speculative intuition.<sup>12</sup> This would be to put the matter

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<sup>11</sup>The "negative foundation" of the phenomenology of religion is its efforts to restrain "theoretical judgments" and reflective considerations in general from its work. Partially because of these restraints this movement has remained blind to the "theoretical" assumptions it employs as it names itself an empirical science.

<sup>12</sup>It is a common criticism of the Husserl of Ideas I and the Logos article, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," that he seems to hold that one can simply intuit the essence of things apart from their actual appearance.

too simply and to distort the way in which the issue of religion and religions must be approached. And, more importantly, it would be to continue to participate in the paradox of foundation which characterizes the work of both the general science of religion and the phenomenology of religion.

The general import of Husserl's phenomenological method, however, does point to a direction of thought which moves between various dualities, including those with which the phenomenology of religion has wrestled. Husserl's phenomenology is not a "science of fact" in the sense that there is any prior commitment to actuality or existence, but insofar as phenomenological inquiry proceeds by means of intuition which puts one in the presence of the "things themselves," there is the effort to attend directly to the ways in which any phenomenon is experienced.<sup>13</sup> When phenomenological method is viewed as a radical procedure, how one attends to these "things" is of central methodological concern. It is this "how" of taking the "things" which is neglected, not brought into clarity, in the reflections of the phenomenology of religion.<sup>14</sup> And it is to this issue that Husserl's phenomenological method can make a contribution.

While Husserl's own phenomenological program from the period of Ideas I on is one of transcendental philosophy (which is, for Husserl,

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<sup>13</sup>Recalling here the leitmotif of Husserl's phenomenology, "zu den Sachen selbst." Cf., for example, the conclusion to "Philosophy as Rigorous Science."

<sup>14</sup>Here pointing again to the premature identification of "things" with empirical "data" and the related issue of the general reluctance on the part of the phenomenology of religion to participate in methodological reflection.

a science of transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity), another focus for phenomenological investigations is also described.<sup>15</sup> This is the "eidetic reduction" and eidetic phenomenology.<sup>16</sup> The possibilities of these eidetic inquiries are of most direct concern for the effort here to describe the methodological requirements for a phenomenology of religion. According to Husserl, an eidetic science--based on the eidetic reduction--can focus upon any act of consciousness and its intentional object without regard to its "reality status." The one requirement for such a descriptive effort, though, is that one must attend to the object or realm of reality which is focused upon as it is intended by the act of consciousness which constitutes it. In other words, a basic methodological requirement for eidetic studies is the objects of different kinds are to be approached in different ways, according to the ways in which they are intended by the subjects of these acts.<sup>17</sup> Generally, eidetic studies are those which describe the kinds of experiencing which correspond to these various

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<sup>15</sup>Penner, "Is Phenomenology a Method for the Study of Religion?," describes Husserl's phenomenology only in terms of the transcendental program.

<sup>16</sup>These two aspects of phenomenological studies, the transcendental and the eidetic, are described directly in the "Author's Preface to the English Edition" of Ideas I, pp. 11-30; and in Husserl's Britannica article, "Phenomenology."

<sup>17</sup>The language of intentionality is not meant to conjure psychological interpretations--as are evident in some efforts of phenomenologists of religion to locate criteria for evaluation in the "believer's intention" (cf., for example, Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, pp. 13-15; and W. C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why," p. 42). Instead intentionality is used here in the Husserlian sense, pointing out the intrinsic meaningfulness of experience and the nature of consciousness as directed.

specific objects or realms of reality. But, just as important, what is also discovered through such investigations is the corresponding character of the method of inquiry which originates in each of these realms.<sup>18</sup> So the idea of eidetic phenomenology is that, first, it is possible to focus on any object or realm of reality at all, and second, that there is a corresponding method of inquiry which is determined by the particular aspects of the object of investigation.

Eidetic inquiry, then, is characterized from the first by an anti-dogmatism. An eidetic science, as such, embraces no particular technique of investigation or specific set of analytic tools. Instead, the distinctive characteristics of each kind of inquiry arises from the particular realm which is investigated.<sup>19</sup> And no category of interpretation or method of inquiry which is not determined by the particular object of inquiry can be imposed upon it. Guided as they must be by their objects of description, different realms of reality will demand different kinds of inquiry. So, for example, a phenomenology of the body (as found in the work of Merleau-Ponty) will not have the same characteristics as a phenomenology of religion. This anti-

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<sup>18</sup>Edmund Husserl, Ideen zu einer Reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie, III ed. by Marly Biemal Husserliana V (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952) hereafter cited as Ideas III, pp. 21-94. Also see, Alfred Schutz, "Die Phaenomenologie und die Fundamente der Wissenschaften, (Ideas III by Edmund Husserl)," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 8 (1953): 506-514.

<sup>19</sup>Husserl's demand that the particular method of eidetic science originate in the distinctive characteristics of that which is investigated recalls again the importance and centrality of Husserl's understanding of intentionality for phenomenological inquiry. Intentional analysis is necessarily guided by that which is under investigation, by the distinctive qualities of the intentional act complex and its intended object.

dogmatism, however, is not simply a negative position. On its positive side, the claim is that criteria for descriptive judgments can be uncovered and the foundations for various regions of inquiry can be established through eidetic phenomenology.

The way to this foundation, if we follow the path suggested by Husserl, is through eidetic phenomenology and, more specifically, through the elucidation of "regional ontologies."<sup>20</sup> The task of elucidating regional ontologies can be described generally in terms of the relationship between phenomenology and the empirical sciences. According to Husserl, every empirical science or material region of inquiry consciously constitutes itself as a particular region. This is to say that any region through which objects are determined as one kind or another has a presentable a priori. All discoveries of these empirical or material regions take place within the frame of an a priori and, as such, the methods of these empirical sciences are to be determined by the general structure of the realm of reality to which the sciences refer. The dogmatic empirical sciences on their own terms cannot grasp these essential structures, but must already presuppose them in their practice. This framework or structure is, however, accessible to the methods of eidetic phenomenological inquiry. The examination of these structures in terms of their particular constitution leads to ontologies of each specific realm. There exists, according to Husserl, as many ontologies as there are regional concepts and the particular character of the sciences of each region depends

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<sup>20</sup>Cf., Husserl, Ideas I, pp. 64-66, and the Britannica article, "Phenomenology," pp. 81, 88.

upon the concept of the region--such as "thing," "psyche," etc.--and its cognitive essence which can be disclosed by means of eidetic intuition.<sup>21</sup>

As the phenomenology of religion intends to describe the nature or structures of religion by means of a method which attends to the concrete manifestations of religions, it declares itself to be a material science of religion. Earlier (Chapter II) it was shown that the general science of religion also operated in the manner of an empirical science as it recognized the materials of religions to constitute a distinctive subject matter, and took comparative method to be both the foundation and method of its practice. And, finally, we have also seen (Chapters III and IV) how the dogmatic assumptions which attend this approach were taken over, in modified form, by the phenomenology of religion.<sup>22</sup> The place of these assumptions describes the difference between the method of the phenomenology of religion and that of an eidetic phenomenology which is called for here.

Insofar as the phenomenology of religion ascribes to the function of comparative method as both its foundation and method of practice (and to the attending suspicions of the capacities of reflective intuition), this movement cannot pursue its investigations to the ways in which the region or realm of reality, religion, is apprehended.

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<sup>21</sup>See, Ideas I, pp. 411-415, where Husserl gives an example of this kind of inquiry in an analysis of "thing." See also, Ideas III, Chapter 3, pp. 76-93.

<sup>22</sup>Briefly put, the assumption is that something--here, religion--can be established as certain knowledge by observation and comparison of individual affairs, the materials of religions.

This is because the phenomenology of religion proceeds to treat that which it intends to describe, religion, in terms of the dogmatic guideline which serves to determine the investigations of this movement from the first. The phenomenology of religion cannot be the "completion" of the history of religions, and, at the same time, attend to the distinctive ways in which religion might be a dimension of human existence. Instead of proceeding to arrange the materials of religions, the phenomenology of religion--as a phenomenological inquiry--needs first to ask the question of whether or not there is a type of experiencing which is appropriate to homo religiosus and which distinguishes it from other manners of experiencing.<sup>23</sup> Instead of "completing" the task of the history of religions, the phenomenology of religion needs to provide a foundation for it. In other words, the focus of attention needs to be directed to the realm of reality within which religious apprehensions take place in order to uncover its essential features or structures.

As an eidetic phenomenology of religion is called for here, the suspicions of the general science of religion and the phenomenology of religion's own attempt to avoid various presuppositions and "reductionistic" approaches surface again, but now disclosing two aspects of the kind of methodological reflections in which a phenomenology of

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<sup>23</sup> Eliade's basic sacred/profane distinction seems to be a step in this direction. However, this distinction needs to be further elaborated in terms of the kind of experience which is appropriate to apprehensions of the world in the mode of the sacred. The distinction itself is not enough. This kind of experience needs to be described in terms of its particular realm of reality, that which is not given but may be presupposed, in arrangements of the materials of religions.



religion must be engaged. On the one hand, we are presented with the methodological dangers of theological commitments, speculative proposals, and the reductionistic theories of the human sciences. But in considering the results of these negative arguments we are also directed, on the other hand, to some important requirements for a phenomenology of religion.

In the previous discussions of the limits of the negative foundation of the phenomenology of religion, it has been shown that the method of this movement requires an epistemological foundation as well as a material foundation in the "facts" of religions. But one lesson learned from the phenomenology of religion, put in its positive and most simple form, is that religion presents itself in the diversity of concrete social existence. So when the phenomenology of religion argues against specious proposals of speculative philosophy and reductionistic theories in the human sciences, it attempts to turn away from abstractions of all sorts and turn toward the concrete. When the starting points of theological studies are rejected as ways of understanding religion, attention is directed to the concrete and, particularly, the diversity of concrete existence. A phenomenological inquiry into the essence or nature of religion, then, must not begin with preconceived notions of religion or particular existential commitments, and it must attend to the distinctive way in which religion appears in the variety of concrete social existence. Although we have seen that certain assumptions of the historical sciences, embraced by the phenomenology of religion and by its predecessors, do not provide an adequate basis for describing the structures of religion, we are

not left without resources to envision a phenomenological inquiry.

On the basis of an understanding of the capacities of reflection to grasp the intrinsic meaningfulness of experience, it is possible to describe the structures of religion, or the ways in which religion is a dimension of human existence, without recourse to some extrinsic idea of "objectivity." This is the task of an eidetic phenomenology of religion. Such a description of the structures of religion, the type of experiencing which describes homo religiosus, can provide the foundation for further inquiry into the vast variety of the diverse materials of religions. In other words, the promise of an eidetic phenomenology of religion (the description of the religious act and its object) is one of providing the framework through which the distinctively religious character of the historical and cultural variety of materials of religions can be understood. This "religious character" will not be an empirically identifiable thread which runs through the materials of religions, but it nonetheless offers the possibility of describing the region within which the empirical studies of religions take place.

Preliminary Methodological Proposals:  
Between Facts and Speculation

Although it is beyond the scope of this work to offer an eidetics of religion, some preliminary methodological proposals can be put forth in an effort to take the first steps toward a revised phenomenology of religion. Relying upon Husserl's essential insight into the directed nature of consciousness, its intentional structure, the positive

sense of the use of the phenomenological brackets has been uncovered.<sup>24</sup> While the epoche rules out the orientation of the common sense world and arbitrary commitment to any particular theory of interpretation, its employment also turns the phenomenologist to the residuum which remains "inside" of the brackets. This is the stuff with which the eidetic reduction, to use Husserl's term, is concerned. An eidetic phenomenology looks to that which remains inside the brackets as a sort of "purified" material from which the essence of that which is investigated can be grasped. This is accomplished by attending to the distinctive character of the given and by therefore separating that which is contingent from that which gives itself as universal.<sup>25</sup>

The claim, underlying the critique of the phenomenology of religion and the call for an eidetic phenomenology of religion, is that it is possible to rigorously inquire into the essence of religion without falling to the dangers of speculation and without being wedded to empiricist presuppositions. Moreover, it is also the claim that an eidetic phenomenology can, and must, attend to the concrete character

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<sup>24</sup>There is a sense in which an eidetic phenomenology relies upon the discoveries of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, most specifically the universal character of consciousness as intentional. It is this discovery which accounts for the possibility and provides the rationale for eidetic description. For discussion of the general structure of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, the nature of the "eidetic reduction" and its relation to the transcendental, see, Maurice Natanson, "Introduction," *Essays in Phenomenology*, ed. by Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 1-22.

<sup>25</sup>Clearly, this is also the aim of the phenomenology of religion and of its predecessors. The important difference between the phenomenology of religion and a proposed eidetics of religion lies in the character of that which remains in the brackets, the character of the universal, and the way in which it is discerned.

of religion's appearance. This is one lesson learned from the efforts of the phenomenology of religion. But if these claims are to be convincing, it is necessary to outline a way in which the phenomenologist can travel between speculation and facts, to consider the manner in which the phenomenologist can seek the essence of religion in the context of its diverse and concrete character.

#### Variation and the Method of Free-Phantasy

As the method of the phenomenology of religion has been investigated here, the importance of variation and comparison has been repeatedly underscored. In the phenomenology of religion, the effort is to uncover as many instances as is possible of the occurrence of religion in the various materials of religions in order to compare them, to seek empirical variation, and thereby discover which elements are contingent and which perdure. By this means, the structures or essence of religion is supposed to be elucidated. The sense of variation in the phenomenology of religion is determined by its commitment to actuality as a guarantee of neutrality and by its confidence in the role of comparative inquiry as foundation and method of practice.

In Husserl's phenomenology the theme of variation also plays a central role as it is a necessary element of the phenomenological method which aims at uncovering essences. But, for Husserl, the importance of variation for phenomenological description ". . . must be understood, not as an empirical variation, but as a variation carried on with the freedom of pure phantasy and with the consciousness of its purely optional character . . . . Thus understood, the variation

extends into an open horizon of endlessly manifold free possibilities of more and more variants."<sup>26</sup> This is the starting point of Husserl's idea of variation as descriptive of phenomenological method and its particular character. Variation, as a key aspect of phenomenological method, is determined by its freedom from the limits of empirical variation, turning instead to the fruits and possibilities of the method and aims of a variation carried out with the freedom of phantasy. If the meaning of this "free-phantasy variation" is explored, we are brought to the heart of Husserl's phenomenological method as well as to its distinction from and contribution to the phenomenology of religion.

The significance of free-phantasy variation can, perhaps, best be explored by a brief comparison with the kind of variation which characterizes the work of the phenomenology of religion, that of empirical variation. The decisive element of empirical variation is its restriction to variation of actualities. So, for example, by considering and arranging the variety of the data of religions, the phenomenology of religion intends to describe the structures or essence of religion with all of the "neutrality," "objectivity," and "concreteness" which is guaranteed by the de facto world. In this way the phenomenology of religion intends to provide a foundation for its work in its practice. This commitment to actuality or existence, to the beforehand acceptance of facts, describes both the limits and

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<sup>26</sup> Edmund Husserl, Formal and Transcendental Logic, trans. by Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 247-248.

possibilities of the method of this movement.<sup>27</sup> But if, by contrast, we are freed from the a priori restriction of empirical variation, from the comparison of actualities as actualities, a whole new world of variation and a different kind of methodological reflection is open to us. This is the world of "free-phantasy variation" and the method appropriate to eidetic phenomenology.<sup>28</sup>

Once phenomenological method is liberated from the determination of variation given in its empirical version, the sense of what it is that is varied is transformed. In other words, in terms of its methodological significance, the process of variation takes on a distinctive role for the phenomenologist. Instead of investigating "facts" understood in terms of actuality, what is considered are "examples" and the focus of attention, so crucial in phenomenological inquiry, turns to "what is exemplified."<sup>29</sup> The example, however, is not dismissed as

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<sup>27</sup>Most directly the limits of this method is found in the assumption that it is necessary to bring in from somewhere else, here the material world, a principle by which experience can be organized. Because of this the phenomenology of religion is in the peculiar position of seeming to suggest that religions have no meaning as religion until they have been compared or arranged. Consider the discussions above in this context as they describe the liabilities and possibilities of comparative method, generally, and the particular version of the method in the phenomenology of religion.

<sup>28</sup>Consider Husserl's discussion of the importance of "free-phantasy variation" as "fiction": ". . . the element which makes up the life of phenomenology as of all eidetical science is 'fiction,' . . . fiction is the source whence the knowledge of 'eternal truths' draws its sustenance." (Ideas I, p. 201.) Cf., also, Richard M. Zaner, "Examples and Possibles: A Criticism of Husserl's Theory of Free-Phantasy Variation," Research in Phenomenology 3 (1973): 29-43, for an excellent description of the theory of free-phantasy and discussion of its importance in Husserl's phenomenology.

<sup>29</sup>Cf., Husserl, Formal and Transcendental Logic, pp. 245-250, describing the difference between "inductive empirical inquiry" and

"mere example," but retains its significance as the way into description of the given. Or, it is through consideration of particular examples that the phenomenologist discerns "what is exemplified."<sup>30</sup> This emphasizes both the "concreteness" of phenomenological inquiry and also its goal of describing the essential features of that which it investigates. Because attention is directed to what is exemplified, and because this can be discerned through an infinity of examples, there is neither any necessity nor any advantage for the phenomenologist to restrict inquiry to those examples which happen to be actual. As a matter of fact, in the context of phenomenological method, commitment to actuality must be recognized as, at best, arbitrary commitment which holds no evidential weight in eidetic descriptions. The important point here is that when it is recognized that the goal of inquiry is to describe the essence of what it is that is exemplified, to describe the essential features of what is given in particular kinds of experiences, the phenomenologist can observe no a priori commitments to actuality or to the restrictions which empiricist presuppositions place upon inquiry. Any example, fictional, actual, or possible, can provide a beginning for inquiry into that which persists through all variations which is the invariant, the eidōs, of the kind of phenomenon in question.<sup>31</sup>

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its form of variation, and the sense of example in phenomenological method as it inquires into essences.

<sup>30</sup>Or in this context, though all commitment to the actuality of the materials of religions is relinquished, still the effort is to consider directly what is presented, or exemplified, in religions. In other words, religion is "given" in and through its "examples."

<sup>31</sup>It is this sense of example which is seen in Husserl's

The method of free-phantasy variation itself is descriptive of phenomenological inquiry as a "rigorous cognitive process"<sup>32</sup> which intends to uncover and describe the eidos of types of phenomena. And, like the phenomenological brackets, this sense of variation has both negative and positive dimensions. On the one hand, the phenomenologist cannot be committed to individuality or to actuality as a guarantee for judgments. Phenomenological inquiry, in this sense, is concerned only with possibility, whether or not that which it examines is "real" or "actual."<sup>33</sup> Since what is chosen serves to direct attention to the essential characteristics of the kind of phenomenon which is given in the example, the initial example itself is, to use Husserl's term, "purely optional" and the universal essence which is finally described must be that ". . . by which all 'imaginable' variants of the example, and all variants of any such variants, are restricted. This invariant is the ontic essential form (a priori form), the eidos, corresponding to the example, in the place of which any variant of the example could have served equally well."<sup>34</sup> On the positive side, though, this sense of variation provides the phenomenologist with a way to inquire into

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recognition that the phenomenologist ". . . can draw extraordinary profit from what history has to offer us, and in still richer measure from the gifts of art and particularly of poetry." (Husserl, Ideas I, p. 201.) Cf., also Husserl, Formal and Transcendental Logic, pp. 247-248 for description of the relation between "example" and "eidos."

<sup>32</sup>The phrase is taken from Zaner, "Examples and Possibles": 34.

<sup>33</sup>Edmund Husserl, Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic, rev. and ed. by Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 348-352.

<sup>34</sup>Husserl, Formal and Transcendental Logic, p. 248.



the essence of any phenomenon without prior commitment or recourse to some extrinsic limiting factor of the object under investigation.<sup>35</sup> So as phenomenologist, one is both "free" and obligated to elucidate and clarify the phenomenon. But at the same time, as there is an infinity of possible examples and as one is directed to that which is exemplified, one is also free to, at any time, put an end to the process of variation in order to describe the character of that which is given through the variation. In other words, "free-phantasy" is not a matter of free fancy (or, in the terms of our previous discussions, mere speculation), but the rigorous inquiry into the possibility of the occurrence of a phenomenon of one kind or another.

Husserl's understanding of the importance and sense of variation provides a radical understanding of the possibilities for the use of a kind of comparative method in a phenomenology of religion. Moreover, it points to the fundamental role of a phenomenology of religion in relation to the history of religions, and more generally, to the contribution which a phenomenology of religion can make to the issue of the relation between religion and religions.

Actuality and Possibility: A New  
Meaning for Comparative Method

Approached in terms of Husserl's understanding of phenomenological method, and particularly in terms of his understanding of variation as "free-phantasy," it is possible to envision a kind of comparative

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<sup>35</sup>This, it can be recalled, is one point which both the phenomenology of religion and its predecessors find necessary for the study of religion to be an independent discipline.

method which escapes the liabilities which have been discovered in the work of the phenomenology of religion.<sup>36</sup> Once it is recognized that actuality--the fact as fact--has no particular methodological or epistemic claim, the phenomenologist of religion can move to the realm of possibility. With a turn to possibility, the gathering and arrangement of data cannot be viewed as the goal of inquiry.<sup>37</sup> Nor can the methods which are appropriate to the work of gathering and analyzing data be viewed as those which describe the limits of inquiry into the structures of religion. The eidetic phenomenologist of religion must instead be concerned with the elucidation and clarification of the meaning of religious phenomena as religious phenomena, accounting for their possibility as religious. This is the distinctive role of a re-visioned phenomenology of religion. The work of such an eidetic inquiry is that which precedes and provides a foundation for historical and morphological studies. The task of the phenomenology of religion should be to reflectively disclose that dimension of human existence which is religious.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Although the term, comparative method, is used here, the character of this "comparative method" is radically transformed as it is understood in terms of the conception of free-phantasy variation. The effort, in using the term at all, is to connect the work of an eidetic phenomenology of religion with the goal of the phenomenology of religion to describe the essence or structures of religion and to elucidate a method which is appropriate to this task.

<sup>37</sup>The phenomenology of religion does not explicitly view the arranging of data as its goal, but insofar as this movement limits its inquiries by its notion of actuality, it cannot go "beneath" the materials of religions taken as data.

<sup>38</sup>This again emphasizes the difference between an eidetic phenomenology of religion and that of the movement which has been discussed in preceding chapters. The task of a phenomenology of religion is not

If such an effort to elucidate the meaning of religious phenomena is to lay claim to rigorous inquiry, however, it must at least address one problem which has been repeatedly encountered in the phenomenology of religion's use of comparative method, viz., the apparent inability of this movement to adjudicate various arrangements of the materials of religions or various statements of the structures or essence of religion. This inability is rooted partly in the phenomenology of religion's understanding of the materials of religions, and partly in the way this movement takes its conclusions to be determined, from the first, by extrinsic factors. So if the method of variation which is proposed here is to advance the work of a phenomenology of religion, its minimum requirement must be the inclusion of a concept of evidence which will permit judgment of its descriptive efforts. The position here is that Husserl's understanding of the nature and role of variation employed in an eidetic phenomenology of religion would include a basis to judge descriptions of religion, but that this idea of evidence does not find its basis in the actuality of materials of religions.

The method of Husserlian phenomenology is reflective. As such it does not intend to make judgments about the reality of particular states of affairs. Rather it is reflectively concerned with the description of these affairs as they are experienced, whether or not they are "true" or "real."<sup>39</sup> In other words, it is the contention of

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that of "completing" the work of the historical sciences, but of providing a foundation for them as it elucidates the religious a priori.

<sup>39</sup>There is a sense in which the phenomenology of religion exempts itself from reality judgments as well insofar as it does not intend to judge the reality of the claims of the various religions. But at the

Husserlian phenomenology that there is a type of experiencing which attends states of affairs which are taken to be of a kind, and that the way to bring this type of experiencing to reflective awareness is through the reflective variation of particular examples of the kind. This is to describe the intentional, noetic-noematic, structure of the kind of experiencing under consideration.

An eidetic phenomenologist of religion, then, describes what religion is by considering the ways in which religious experience can take place, the kinds of objects which can be taken as religious, etc. One begins by taking an example (including the sense of the arbitrary character of any example) and varies it in terms of other possible examples (whether "real" or "imagined") in order to reflectively grasp the nexus of the type of experience which is given through all possible examples of the type. This is the essence of religion. From this point of view, there is no great mystery about where religion resides. Religion is "ideal" in the sense in which an eidetic phenomenology is concerned with the possibility of the object and type of experience which is religious. But this sense of ideality is not something which stands over and against the "real,"<sup>40</sup> instead it is that which describes the possibility and sense of the religious given in experience and disclosed through variation of examples. In this way, religions--whether

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same time, it does hold that a phenomenology of religion must only deal with actual occurrences of religions.

<sup>40</sup>It is the opposition between "real" and "ideal" which gives rise to the paradox of foundation in the general science of religion and which describes the limits of the phenomenology of religion's use of phenomenological method. Consider, in this context, Chapter IV.

historical, imagined, living, dead--can reflectively present religion. As the aim is to describe "what is exemplified," the distinctive modifications of the type which are also present in the example are not a matter of focus. Taken out of the context of actuality, the particularities of individuality do not present themselves as problems for an eidetic phenomenological inquiry.

There are two closely related issues under consideration here. One is of the place of an eidetic phenomenology of religion and its tasks, and the other is of the methodological considerations appropriate to it. The task of an eidetic phenomenology of religion should be to provide a foundation for historical and morphological studies in the history of religions. As such, it must disclose the religious dimension of human existence, or in terms of the previous discussions, its task is to elucidate the religious a priori. The method appropriate to this work which precedes and founds that of a "material science of religion" (or, the history of religions) is not restricted by any beforehand acceptance of actuality as criteria for its descriptive judgments. Instead, as it seeks to disclose the kind of experience which is religious, it must rigorously avoid all such arbitrary commitments. So all "examples" which are focused upon are taken as examples of a type of experience. Free-phantasy variation is the way in which the phenomenologist proceeds to describe that which is given in the type of experience under consideration. As the focus of attention is turned directly to the distinctive features of a kind of experience, historical materials as historical hold no weight in descriptive judgments. But these materials can serve as examples of a kind of

experience which are subjected to the process of variation in order to disclose the structures of a kind of experience. Within the phenomenological brackets, then, these materials no longer stand as historical materials but as examples. This is the movement to the realm of possibility and this is the sense of comparison as variation. The method itself provides no foundation, but it is the way in which that which is given in a kind of experience can be reflectively grasped.

This approach transforms the position in which the phenomenology of religion finds itself as this movement seems to assert that religion is present only when religions are compared; that religion is somehow the "product" of morphological studies.<sup>41</sup> Instead, because of the fundamental tie between "example" and "what is exemplified," religion can now be understood as that which is "actually present" in (that is, given in) religions, and which can be reflectively brought to focus by the method of variation. Significantly, once the tie with the commitment to fact as fact is broken, once the phenomenologist is liberated from the sense of being ". . . condemned to work exclusively with historical documents . . ."42 the issue of how one can describe the structures of religion achieves renewed possibilities. And also,

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<sup>41</sup>This becomes an important problem in the phenomenology of religion because of its sense of the fundamental importance of the data of religions understood as data and because of its intent to, at the same time, glean more than knowledge of data from this material, avoiding also what it takes to be the specious proposals of its predecessors. This is the sense in which the phenomenology of religion makes radical the already present empirical orientation of the general science of religion.

<sup>42</sup>Eliade, The Quest, p. 53.

through this circuitous route, the nature of evidence appropriate to an eidetic phenomenology of religion can be brought into focus.

The evidence which is appropriate to the kind of phenomenological inquiry proposed here is tied to the reflective work of free-phantasy variation. Because any statement of the essence of the phenomenon under investigation is one concerned with the realm of possibility, if there exists even in conceivability any example at all of the phenomenon under examination which does not display the discovered invariant, the description of essence loses its justification. In other words, if the invariant which has been described is not found in every possible example of the phenomenon, every example of religion, it must be the case that the claim to essence is wrong, or that it has never been the case.<sup>43</sup> The examples, then, are elements of phenomenological inquiry itself serving to confirm or cancel suspected eidetic features of the phenomenon under examination. This sense of evidence, located in the realm of possibility, refers us to the center of the process of variation itself. Or, as Zaner maintains in his discussion of Husserl's understanding of evidence in phenomenological inquiry, ". . . 'evidence' is strictly a process of considering affairs as examples in order to determine whether the claimed invariancy is as claimed or supposed. 'Evidence,' Husserl repeatedly says, is an 'encounter' (Erfahrung). By the same token, 'intuitable' can only mean the very same process of variation, the systematic considering of

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<sup>43</sup>Cf., Husserl, Formal and Transcendental Logic, pp. 156-159, 247-248.

actual and possible individuals in respect of what is 'common' to them."<sup>44</sup> It is this sense of what is "common," the invariant, which provides the basis for uncovering what here has been called a new meaning for comparative inquiry in a phenomenology of religion.

As the phenomenologist of religion no longer seeks the basis of evidence for description in actuality, as the phenomenologist of religion is removed from the context of actuality "for its own sake," the sense in which things are to be compared receives a new meaning and a new vitality. It is not the case that the act of gathering the materials of religions, comparing and arranging the various elements of the historical forms, will somehow show what religion is. But it is possible to apprehend religion through the rigorous reflective process of free-phantasy variation. By focusing upon "what is exemplified," the phenomenologist of religion can begin to reflectively uncover the structures of religion given in the examples. In one sense, the end of this "comparative analysis" is never reached as all descriptions of the essence of religion take place within the open horizon of possibility. Or, all conclusions have a certain tentative character as they necessarily include an openness to examination, criticism, and further clarification. But it is this very "tentativeness" which describes a process of evidence and the possibility of reflective criticism which is essential to an eidetic phenomenology of religion and which has been found lacking in the work of the phenomenology of religion examined here. So although it is maintained that religion, as the invariant, is present in religions, as possible examples, it is

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<sup>44</sup>Zaner, "Examples and Possibles": 36-37.



not understood as some sort of hidden empirical thread running through the data which can be produced by morphological arrangement. The examples are not those materials which result from survey of the many religions. Instead, the examples are of what occurs in the kind of experiencing which is religious. It is the "intentionality of religion" which describes the possibility of the occurrence of religions as religions.

This, then, is the vitality of "comparative method" reinterpreted as "free-phantasy variation." It aims at describing the essence of religion through rigorous reflective variation of examples of the phenomenon or type. As the restrictions of empiricist presuppositions are removed from its method, and relying upon the intrinsic meaningfulness of experience which is available to the capacities of reflection, an eidetic phenomenology of religion has as its material all of the discoveries of the historical sciences as well as all of the discoveries of the imagination.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, such an eidetic phenomenology of religion has as its promise description of the essence of religion, its a priori form, which offers the possibility of providing a foundation for the history of religions.

#### Conclusion

Consideration of the foundational studies of the general science of religion showed the paradox in which any material science attempting to secure a foundation in its own practice participates. This same paradox of foundation has continued to plague the work of the

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<sup>45</sup>Cf., Husserl, Ideas I, pp. 200-201.

phenomenology of religion as it has implicitly accepted the assumptions of the general science of religion. But it need not do so. Employing some insights of Husserlian phenomenology, we have seen that underlying and supporting any material science there exists a presentable a priori of its region of inquiry, the elucidation of which determines the methods appropriate to the material science. When the phenomenology of religion undertakes the examination and description of those external characteristics and cultural achievements which are considered expressive of homo religiosus, this movement must already presuppose the nature of that which it intends to describe. But unless the distinctive features of homo religiosus, the nature of religion as a dimension of human existence, are brought into clarity, the descriptions and statements of the phenomenology of religion are without a foundation. In other words, what is required of the phenomenology of religion, beyond the materials of history, ethnology, and anthropology, is a foundation in a philosophical anthropology which discloses that dimension of human existence which is religious. The proposal here is that this task of describing the religious a priori, and thus providing a foundation for the material science of religion or the history of religions, is that of an eidetic phenomenology of religion.

When an eidetic phenomenology of religion is understood as that which must provide a foundation for the history of religions instead of that which "completes" it, the phenomenological brackets can be employed in a radical way. The use of the epoche removes from consideration judgments of the reality status of religious phenomena and also, and perhaps more importantly, commitments to any beforehand

presuppositions and methods, including those of the history of religions. The fact that something is a fact exerts no special claim on the eidetic phenomenologist of religion. This understanding of the epoche makes it possible to address the phenomenology of religion's suspicion of the starting point of existential commitment and the procedures engendered by the "reductionistic" theories of the human sciences. The use of the epoche rules out both of these approaches. Moreover, by focusing upon what remains within the brackets, investigations need not fall to the dangers of unfounded speculation. This is because the phenomena present their own essence which can be critically grasped through the reflective procedures of "free-phantasy variation." In other words, when the work of the phenomenology of religion is no longer defined by the historical document, the phenomenologist is free to reflectively seek religion in the phenomena, the type of experience and its object which is religious.

This is the place and character of an eidetic phenomenology of religion. As an eidetic phenomenology of religion undertakes to discern the structures of religion as a mode of human existence, to describe the particular characteristics of the religious act and its object, it can no longer entertain empiricist presuppositions, but an eidetic phenomenology of religion can turn to the "concrete" nature of religion's appearance on a different basis. This is the significance of the phenomena for an eidetic phenomenology of religion. With the imposition of the epoche, the materials of religion can be approached in a new light. No longer defined by the fact of their actuality, the materials of religions can be viewed in the realm of possibility and

along with other possible examples of religion can be critically and reflectively examined as religious phenomena. It must be remembered, however, that the goal in any such examination is that of disclosing the nature and sense of religious experience as a mode of human existence. Given this task, the method of this examination is of central importance.

An eidetic phenomenology of religion is concerned with the realm of possibility. As such it is neither bound by nor can it accept the restriction which the phenomenology of religion has placed upon its understanding of comparative method. But there is a sense in which the eidetic phenomenology of religion proposed here would employ a kind of "comparative method," and this in terms of "free-phantasy variation." The method is called comparative because it aims at what the phenomenology of religion has shown is crucial for descriptions of religion, direct consideration of the phenomenon, religion. But because the goal of inquiry is the critical description of religion as a mode of human existence, this method views all of its materials as "examples" which direct attention to "what is exemplified." Through critical description of "what is exemplified," the essence of religion is exposed. But here, within the realm of an eidetic phenomenology of religion, this essence includes description of the particular structures of human existence which constitute the possibility of experiencing religious phenomena as religious. In this context, the eidetic phenomenologist of religion adopts a method of inquiry which can make use of the discoveries of the historical sciences as well as the resources of the imagination, all as means of discerning those essential features of

religion given in experience.

The thesis of this study is that an eidetic phenomenology of religion can provide the necessary foundation for what has been shown to be the empirical phenomenology of religion, but that this is a task which is yet to be accomplished. In order to achieve this, we must leave behind our attachment to the "facts" as the basis for descriptive judgments of the nature of religion, and turn first to the realm of possibility in order to expose the ways in which religion occurs as a mode of human existence. Only with the elaboration of this ontic essential form, can we begin to rigorously and reflectively seek religion.

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