Religion, Phenomenology of

Bedes A C F 1931 The History of Peace. G. Bell, London

D. Martin

Religion, Phenomenology of

Phenomenology of religion is an academic approach to analyze religion predominantly within religious studies. It is documented in a series of monographs and handbooks, but it is also defined by a 'scholarly method' that utilizes principles of phenomenological philosophy. For the purpose of this paper, we shall distinguish: (a) the descriptive phenomenology of religion which refers to the classification and systematization of religious phenomena and the creation of typologies which account for different types of religion; and (b) the analytical phenomenology of religion which, in addition to the goals of descriptive phenomenology, is based on some explicit understanding of the philosophical background and methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics developed in the tradition of Edmund Husserl, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Ricoeur.

1. Historical Development, Institutions, and Representants

Whereas the notion of phenomenology had been proposed by philosophers also preoccupied with religion, such as J. H. Lambert (1721–71), I. Kant (1724–1804), and G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), the contemporary notion of phenomenology of religion refers to a specialized field within the academic study of religion. The origins of this field go back to the Belgian historian of religion P. D. Chantepe de La Saussaye (1848–1920). Referring to Hegel's work (which includes the Phenomenology of Mind), he divided the science of religion into the history of religion and the philosophy of religion. With respect to the latter, he wanted the phenomenology of religion to not only avoid dogmatics, but to systematically order the main groups of religious phenomena according to the feature of the historical material. The most decisive breakthrough in the field has been due to the work of the Dutch professor of religious history, Gerardus Van der Leeuw who, in 1924, suggested phenomenology of religion to be a special method for the history of religion. Since then, the phenomenology of religion has produced, on the one hand, a series of 'monumental' contributions which provide systematic overviews on a broad variety of religions, or, on the other hand, monographs on typically basic features of single religious phenomena. Therefore, topics of the studies include general issues, such as the distinction between the 'sacred,' and the 'profane,' the 'numinous' or the experience of power, and on the other hand comparative studies on more specific religious phenomena, such as prayer, piety, or religious ceremonies. In the 1950s, phenomenology of religion became increasingly established in the academic studies of the history of religions, so that it became institutionalized as a specialized branch within Religionswissenschaft, Comparative Religion or Religious Studies. Although one should not ignore Britain (James 1938) and France (the Rumanian scholar’s Eliade’s (1949) first important book has been published in French), the main centers of development have been The Netherlands,
Religion, Phenomenology of

Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, and North America (cf. Pettersson and Akerberg 1981).

2. Approach and Method

Phenomenology of religion differs from theology as well as from other specialized disciplines preoccupied with religion (philosophy, sociology, psychology, etc.) by its history and its method. Historically, phenomenology of religion opposed positivist and evolutionist approaches to religion by integrating historical knowledge of the facts with phenomenological methods. Whereas the sociology of religion, which developed almost simultaneously, focused on the external, public aspects of religion, the phenomenology of religion turned towards the essential aspects and started systematically to classify religious phenomena.

2.1 Descriptive Phenomenology of Religion

Phenomenology of religion draws on the impressive amount of data collected by the history of religion, but also on data collected by sociology, anthropology or the psychology of religion. Therefore, it can be said to be empirical. The basic method of descriptive phenomenology is the comparison of religious phenomena. It assumes that religious phenomena are comparable across different cultures and religions, and that the comparison does not only yield generalizable features but allows us to grasp the general features of religion. In analyzing the empirical forms of historical religions, phenomenology of religion tries to abstract from specific religions, and to then develop ideal types of religious phenomena, such as 'sacrifice,' 'fetish' or 'mysticism,' 'prophecy,' 'priest,' or 'cult.' Therefore, it can be said to be systematical. In order to pursue this task, phenomenology is considered to provide the method for finding the common denominators covering the diversity of empirical data. Religious phenomena include manifestations of the sacred, such as sacred places, mountains, buildings, active realizations of the sacred, such as rituals, prayers, holy words, religious beliefs, such as revelation, redemption, transcendence, and experiences, such as vision, ecstasy, or miracles.

The data on these phenomena are not to be observed from an external point of view, as in most sciences of religion. On the contrary, phenomenology of religion is nonreductionistic in identifying the specifically religious features of religious data. This is the reason for turning to philosophical phenomenology that is expected to analyze the meaning of religion to the person. At the basis of phenomenology of religion lies the analysis of religious experience rather than religious ideas, the beliefs, or morals. The accentuation of the lived experience may be one of the most important contributions of phenomenology to the study of religion.

Basically, religion is the opposite of phenomena; religion posits what it believes to be as existant, whereas phenomenology brackets exactly this belief in order to investigate how it may be constituted by consciousness. Thinking of others, in religion (or parapsychology), gets close to telepathy (think of the dead), in phenomenology, the others are but constructions. Almost simultaneously, J. W. Hauer developed a phenomenology of religion mainly on the basis of data on illiterate cultures. Among the major contributors to phenomenology of religion one has to mention Allen, Bleeker, Blohn, Hultkrantz, Kristensen, Lanszkowski, Pettazzoni, Wach, Waardenburg, Widengren, etc.

2.2 Phenomenological Methods

Whereas the descriptive and typological branch of the phenomenology of religion remains silent about the methods by which it arrives at results, the phenomenological branch is characterized by additional methodological considerations that are based in philosophical phenomenology.

From the perspective of phenomenological philosophy, experiences are the processes by which consciousness is constituted. As consciousness is always intentional, i.e., consciousness of something, experiences, too, are characterized by intentionality, i.e., the fact that they are related to something else. Also religious experience is experience of something. To give an example: as Chantepie de La Saussaye has already stressed, it is only the meaning of the act that allows us to distinguish between the sacrificial priest and the butcher.

In order to arrive at the meaning of religious experience, Husserl recommended to perform what he called 'epoché': the bracketing or suspension of all our unexamined assumptions, preconceptions, and prejudices about the phenomena under consideration. In performing the epoché, analysts are expected to turn 'to the things themselves,' i.e., to the phenomena as they are experienced. That is to say that phenomena, such as visions, auditions, or miracles, are to be understood according to the ('religious') meanings they have about the experiencing consciousness and not according to, e.g., a neutral scientist's observations. As an additional method, religious phenomena, such as 'snake symbolism,' can be made subject to 'free variation'; by mentally varying aspects of this symbol, one attempts to arrive at the essential features of the 'Wesenanschau.' On the basis of these methodological operations, descriptions of the phenomena are considered to yield typical structures, essential meanings or even the 'eidos' of religious phenomenon.

Attempts to understand the essential meaning of religious phenomena, finally, presuppose hermeneutics, i.e., the method of understanding ('Verstehen').
the subjects of religious experience. According to Van der Leeuw (1948), understanding is achieved by empathy: the investigator tries almost to re-experiences the religious phenomenon in order to describe these experiences. Understanding, moreover, includes reflecting the context of the interpreters, accounting for the interpretive framework, and explicating their pre-interpretations. To some representatives of the phenomenology of religion, such as Eliade, hermeneutics has become a leading principle of their method that allows us to unveil the deeper structure of the experiences of mankind. On these grounds, religious studies have also been equated to a hermeneutic anthropology.

Basically, one can distinguish three related approaches: a descriptive school which is preoccupied with the systematization of religious phenomena; the typological school which tries to distinguish different types of religion, and the phenomenological school in the specific sense of the word that applies methods borrowed from philosophical phenomenology.

3. Criticism

From its beginnings there has been a series of critical objections against the phenomenology of religion.

(a) Especially the phenomenological approach of Eliade is the target of Wagner’s (1986) criticism who objects that his concept of the *homo religiosus* is guided by a notion of ‘natural religion.’ He argues that it presupposes some unwarranted knowledge about the religious situation in what Eliade considers to be ‘archaic cultures.’

(b) With respect to religion, phenomenology of religion takes a decidedly substantialist position (Luckmann 1983). Moreover, critics charge that this substantialism is based on nonempirical, extra-phenomenological, and theological assumptions and intentions enter into the analyses of such classic representatives of phenomenology of religion such as Kristensen, Eliade, or Van der Leeuw.

(c) To many critiques, this is due to the fact that methods are rarely unveiled. Despite the reference to phenomenological methods, the basic presuppositions often seem arbitrary, and also theoretical reflections are criticized to fall short of the diligent collection and classification of data.

(d) Since phenomenology provides the basic methodology for phenomenology of religion, it is particularly consequential that phenomenology of religion lost contact with the developments in philosophical phenomenology from about the 1950s. As a result, phenomenology of religion rarely is considered of importance in the analysis of religion within the tradition of phenomenological philosophy (Guerrière 1990).

(e) The phenomenology of religion has been criticized for ignoring the social and cultural contexts of religious phenomena. Moreover, as phenomenology in general has been criticized for its naive attitude towards language and cultural perspectivism, also the phenomenology of religion is subject to criticism as to the linguistic and cultural bias implicit in the analysis of ‘phenomena’ and ‘symbols.’ Thus, the results of free variations depend on the phenomenologists’ cultural background (Allen 1987).

4. Recent Developments

As a reaction to these criticisms, there has developed what Waardenburg calls the new style of the phenomenology of religion (Waardenburg 1973–1974). According to Waardenburg, this new style of investigation shares a series of assumptions: (a) religious phenomena are characterised by a variety of meanings and intentionalties which are the result of different, often materially based perspectives on the world; (b) religions are coherent, but essentially open systems of signs and symbols, the elements of which are selected according to the corresponding relevance systems; (c) religious phenomena are considered to be human constructions which are subject to social processes (as, e.g., traditionalization, institutionalization, or canonization). At this point, the phenomenology of religion overlaps with positions which have been developed within those branches of the sociology of religion rooted in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz (Berger and Luckmann 1963). This ‘phenomenologically orientated sociology’ regards religious experiences as, first, based on the profane transcendendencies of everyday life, and second, subject to processes of the social construction of multiple realities. By focusing on the communicative processes by which this social construction is accomplished, this approach tries to bridge the gap between empirical research and methodological reflections on this research. Moreover, in admitting that linguistic and cultural background knowledge enters into the phenomenologist’s background knowledge, several of the new approaches to the phenomenology of religion accept an orientation towards a ‘reflexive phenomenology.’

See also: Hermeneutics, History of; Phenomenology in Sociology; Phenomenology: Philosophical Aspects; Religion: Definition and Explanation; Religion, Sociology of; Religiousity, Sociology of; Schutz, Alfred (1899–1959); Semiotics

Bibliography

Religion, Phenomenology of

Eliade M 1949 Traité d'histoire des religions. Paris
Eliade M 1958 Patterns in Comparative Religion. Sheed & Ward, New York
Saussaye de la P D 1987 Chantepie, Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte. Muhr, Tübingen, Germany
Van der Leeuw G 1948 Inleiding tot de Phenomenologie van den Godsdienst, 2nd edn. Sven F. Bohn, Haarlem
Wagner F 1986 Was ist Religion? Studien zu ihrem Begriff und Thema in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Mohn, Gütersloh

H. Knoblauch

of the mind, including psychoses and neuroses, emotional maladjustments, etc." (p. 1147). In contrast, psychology is defined as 'the science dealing with the mind and emotional processes' and 'the sum of the actions, traits, attitudes, thoughts, mental states, etc. of a person or group' (p. 1147). From these definitions, it is clear that the realms of both these fields have considerable overlap in the questions they address about human behavior, and in many cases, knowledge that is garnered in one field is frequently shared and absorbed into the ensuing theoretical development of the other discipline. Hence, for the purposes of this article, which addresses the theoretical underpinnings rather than the actual practices of each profession, the ideas from psychology and psychiatry will be used interchangeably, except where otherwise denoted as specific to their field.

2. The Question

The question about the need for relationship between psychiatry and religion has emerged as a predominantly twentieth-century concern. The movement to inter-relate the two disciplines evolved as participants who believed strongly in the importance of religion in people's lives were concerned by the lack of religious involvement in modern medicine's approach to healing. Many adherents to this movement to intertwine the two fields reject the dualism of body and soul, believing instead that mind and body are inter-related and true healing is best realized when a holistic biopsychosocial-spiritual approach is utilized.

As such, in recent years a growing number of psychiatrists and other physicians, psychologists, clergy, theologians, and religious philosophers who have not been satisfied with mainstream traditional and institutionalized efforts at healing have sought to combine the best of modern psychiatric medicine with religion/spirituality to develop an alternate method of healing to relieve mental and emotional distress. These practitioners are joined by religiously committed persons who are seeking treatment. At the same time, a number of traditionalists, both psychiatrists and clergy, are critical of incorporating religion and psychiatry into a single treatment mode. They raise the question whether religion and psychiatry should both be considered in aiding individuals, advocating rather that the two remain separate in their approaches to problem solving and actual practice.

3. Defining the Problem

In his book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970), Thomas Kuhn defines a paradigm as a nascent model for looking at the universe in a specific manner, and answering questions from within that particular framework's perspective. Furthermore, according to

Religion: Psychiatric Aspects

1. Terms

According to Webster's New World Dictionary, psychiatry is defined as 'the branch of medicine concerned with the study, treatment, and prevention of disorders

13096
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-8-043076-7 (set : alk. paper)
1. Social sciences—Encyclopedias. I. Title: International encyclopedia of the
social and behavioral sciences. II. Smelser, Neil J. III. Baltes, Paul B.
H41.158 2001
300'.3—dc21
2001044791

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-8-043076-7 (set : alk. paper)