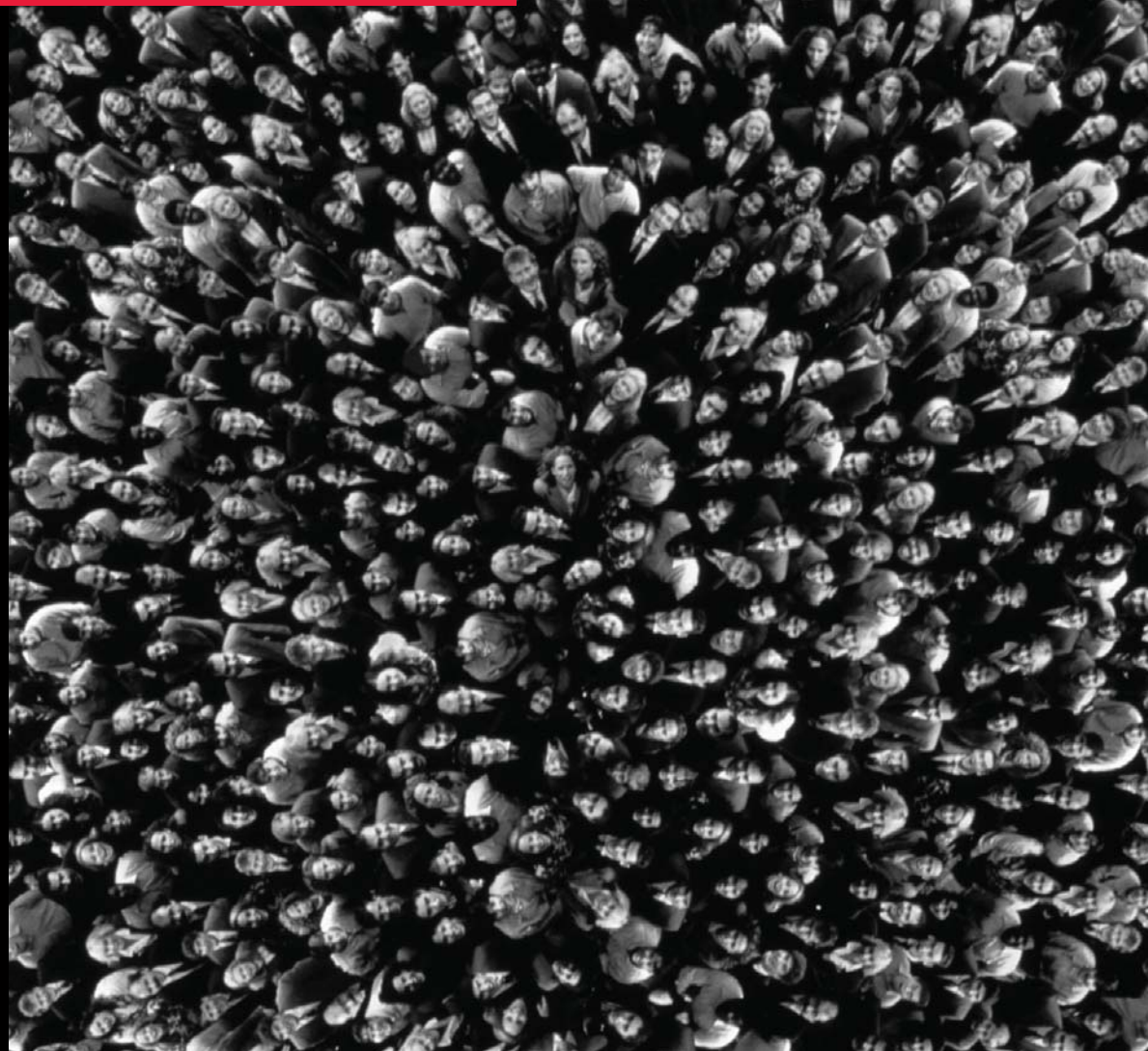# The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values

Edited by James Arthur and Terence Lovat

The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values

The academic fields of religion and values have become the focus of renewed interest in contemporary thinking about human activity and its motivations. *The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values* explores and expands upon a range of international research related to this revival. The book provides an authoritative overview of global issues in religion and values, surveying the state of the academic area in contributions covering a wide range of topics. It includes emerging, controversial and cutting-edge contributions, as well as investigations into more established areas.

International authorities Arthur and Lovat have brought together experts from around the world to examine the complexity of the field of study. The handbook is organised around four key topics, which focus on both the importance of religion and values as broad fields of human enquiry, as well as in their application to education, inter-agency work and cross-cultural endeavours:

* The conceptual world of religion and values
* Religion and values in education
* Religion and values in inter-agency work
* Religion and values in cross-cultural work.

This comprehensive reference work combines theoretical and empirical research of international significance, and will be valuable reading for students, researchers and academics in the field of education.

James Arthur is Head of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, UK, and the Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values, UK.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

The academic fields of religion and values are the focus of renewed interest in contemporary thought about human activity and its underlying motivations. Both fields of study suffered in an earlier era that saw empirical knowing privileged beyond all other knowing, sometimes to the point of any knowledge claims that could not be logically or scientifically verified being declared irrelevant to human discourse and learning. Hence, in schools and universities, mathematical and scientific curricula were seen to have a monopoly on the knowledge that mattered and by which intelligence was arbitrated.

For a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this book to deal with, this situation has changed. It seems the world of today is too complex, its issues too many and convoluted, to allow for important human knowing to be sidelined in the way described above. Whether it be in the sciences of astrophysics or neuroscience, or in the human politics implied in world conflict, the capacity of empirical knowing alone to deliver the answers is seen to be tested beyond endurance. In astrophysics, the contemporary focus on 'string theory' shows how far physics has moved from being a discipline centred on apparent empirical certainty to being speculative in ways almost beyond the bounds of most systematic theologies. In neuroscience, concepts such as 'spiritual intelligence' and even 'mystical consciousness' are now the subjects of serious scientific research. In human politics, earlier hopes that the persistent internecine conflicts of the Middle East or those newer conflicts wrought by migratory and other clashes of first and third worlds could all be resolved through the means and methods of empirical social science are coming to be seen as naïve in the extreme.

While it would be equally naïve to suggest that the answers to all these matters reside in the phenomena we are calling religion and values, nonetheless, the space that has opened up for these phenomena to be the subject of serious academic, professional and practical scrutiny has expanded significantly. The purpose of this book is to highlight and elaborate upon a range of international projects related to this expanded space and to the renewed research interest that accompanies it. It offers an authoritative overview of an array of global issues in religion and values through contributions from international experts engaged in cutting edge research. All chapters have been commissioned afresh, and so draw on innovative theory and/or original research in exploring the topic under scrutiny.

As suggested, research encompasses both theoretical and practical work. The common research theme is around a focus on both the importance of religion and values as broad fields of human

enquiry as well as in their application to human and social endeavours, be they education, inter-agency work or cross-cultural endeavours of one kind or another. The book is split into four parts, each part being devoted to an aspect of general or applied research. Each part focuses on the interface between religion and values from the given perspective.

The first part is titled 'The conceptual world of religion and values'. This part focuses on the central theme of the book, as described above. This is that, after the relative dominance of religious and values neutrality as theses in scientific, humanities and social science research, religion and values are enjoying renewed prominence as crucial areas of consideration in ascertaining issues of personal motivation, causes of intercultural conflict and efforts aimed at global harmony, to name just a few. Authors who contributed to this part are: David Carr, L. Philip Barnes, Brian V. Hill, Martin Ubani, Gary D. Bouma and James Arthur.

The second part, 'Religion and values in education', makes application of the central theme to the professional field of education, with a concentration on school education, the role of the teacher and the direction of teacher education. Central to this part are updated insights in and around religious education and values education as active and lively contemporary research fields. Authors who contributed to this part are: Andrew Peterson, Gerald Grace, Trevor Cooling, Julian Stern, Peta Goldburg, Oren Ergas, Hanan A. Alexander, Farid Panjwani, Peter Mudge, and Derek Sankey and Minkang Kim.

The third part is titled 'Religion and values in inter-agency work'. This part focuses on the importance of religion and values in any work directed at the human community. Chapters deal with the theme using examples of inter-agency work from a variety of fields, including medicine, engineering, bioethics and social work. Authors who contributed to this part are: Leslie J. Francis and Gemma Penny, Mel Gray, Patrik Fridlund, Christoph Baumgartner, Robert Crotty, Anthony J. Langlois and John Annette.

The fourth part, 'Religion and values in cross-cultural work', focuses on application of the central theme to cross-cultural, inter-ethnic and interfaith study, where the role of religion and values is seen to be especially crucial to understanding, education and cooperation. This part incorporates updated research in fields of interfaith theology, religious education, civics and citizenship, and global education. Authors who contributed to this part are: Andrew Wright, Eoin G. Cassidy, Liam Gearon, Zehavit Gross, Terence Lovat, Maik Herold, Daniel Fleming, Luqman Zakariyah and Kelly Al-Dakkak.

Part I

The conceptual world of religion and values

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1

Religious meaning, practical reason and values

David Carr

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Introduction

We speak easily and readily of religious values – and assume that the meaning of such talk is transparent or unproblematic. On closer scrutiny, however, the clarity and coherence of such familiar idiom may seem – philosophically and otherwise – rather less evident. This chapter aims to identify and explore some awkward issues about the very idea of religious values.

The question of religious values

What, then, could we have in mind in speaking of religious values? We might say that John handed in the lost wallet because he is honest, and honesty is one of his religious values. But, to begin with, it is not obvious that honesty is always and anywhere a religious value: since Marxists, atheists or agnostics may be equally, if not more, honest, honesty is not especially a quality of religious believers. More strongly, the idea that someone's honesty follows from his or her religious convictions may seem actually *objectionable* – if, for example, it suggests that an agent *only* behaves honestly because (say) a particular divine commandment says that he or she should. Indeed, if people only behave honestly because their god (or God) tells them to, we might want to say that they are not really behaving honestly at all. Arguably, there is something of the same trouble here as there is with any 'extrinsic' account of morality or virtue. Thus, we may object to familiar 'contractarian' theories of ethics – those that seek to justify (say) honest conduct in terms of some hope or expectation that others may see the social wisdom or prudence of reciprocating – that such prudence is not really honesty either. To be really honest, we might say, is rather to see the *intrinsic* moral value of honesty: to recognise that it is something worthwhile for its own sake irrespective of any extrinsic individual or social 'pay-off'.

To be sure, we do frequently explain the conduct or apparent commitments of agents in terms of their religious beliefs or convictions. We may say, for example, that the religious terrorists tried to blow up the plane because they believed that their god instructed them to destroy all infidels. The trouble here, however, is that it is not clear whether one should regard any and all human commitment of this kind as a matter of value in any significant sense. The basic difficulty is that genuine values would seem to be matters of voluntary or active choice for which agents might be expected to provide reasons: in short, they ought to be what I have

elsewhere (Carr, 1991, 2011) called rational or 'principled' commitments. But might it not count as a genuine reason for blowing up the plane that one has been commanded to do so by God (or a god)? On the one hand, however, if religious terrorists have been simply conditioned or indoctrinated to believe that they should behave as a god (or God) tells them, it is difficult to interpret this as a reason for (rather than a cause of) anything much worth calling rational agency. On the other hand, if we take them to be acting on a genuine reason – that God/a god decrees the destruction of infidels – we ought to seek the grounds or evidence of such a belief. If we are told that the only grounds for so believing is that it was long ago written in some ancient book, we might therefore reasonably doubt – especially, if the book commands us to do what is on the face of it wicked (see Geach, 1969: chapter 8) – whether this counts as a rationally compelling reason. In sum, there may not here be enough to substantiate significant talk of religious reasons upon which genuine values might be founded.

The nature and logic of values

Thus, the question for this chapter is nothing less than that of whether it makes much sense to talk of distinctly religious values – as opposed to those genuine values or virtues, such as honesty, that may happen to be associated with religious beliefs or practices – at all. To be clearer about this question, we need to look at some basic philosophy of value – and we begin with some attention to the notorious fact–value distinction. It is nowadays fashionable – especially on so-called idealist or anti-realist perspectives – to insist that this distinction is false or untenable. On some more radical contemporary (post-modern and other) accounts, all human discourses are socially constructed and it can therefore make little sense to suppose that there is any universal language of objective 'fact' that is untainted by local bias or ideology. However, any such extreme view seems difficult to sustain. In any human discourse the word 'fact' (and/or its equivalents in other languages) is a perfectly serviceable if not indispensable term for those statements that may be confirmed or disconfirmed by observation, such as 'humans normally have thirty-two teeth', 'frogs develop from tadpoles' and 'Everest is the highest mountain in the world'. To state a fact is just to say what is the case and it would be hard in any language to deny – against the evidence – that things simply are as here indicated. What is true is that there is some theoretical interplay or overlap between fact and explanation, so that many claims that people are inclined to call facts – such as that modern apes and humans have a common ancestor – may be at some stage of human knowledge (past or present) only provisional or tentative hypotheses. That said, it is nevertheless the more basic facts of common observation that such hypotheses set out to explain and there could be no theoretical explanation without such factual basics. So the (nowadays fashionable) idea that there are no theory-free facts is hardly credible: if there were no such facts, then there could hardly be much in the way of theories either.

In this respect, there is also a clear enough distinction – of actual logical grammar – between facts and values. To assert a fact is to offer what one takes, on evidence, to be a true description of some part of the world: to express a value is to say what one regards as of merit or worth in human affairs. Thus, whereas the basic logical form of a fact is 'p is true', the logical form of a value is 'x is good' (where 'p' stands for some proposition and 'x' designates some object). Perhaps the best-known (or notorious) modern philosophical analysis of the distinction between facts and values is that provided by David Hume in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 1969) and elsewhere. Briefly, since Hume regards values – unlike facts – as unsupported by evidence, he construes these as expressions of subjective attitude or sentiment rather than as objective data of reason and inference. For Hume and his later logical positivist heirs, whereas to recognise p as a (matter of) fact is to judge, on the basis of evidence, that p is true, to say that one values

x is to express one's liking or approval of *x*. To state a value is to appraise an object or event in terms of its personal appeal (or otherwise) in the language of 'good', 'bad', 'beauty', 'ugliness', 'right', 'wrong' and so on. The main philosophical upshot of Hume's view (sometimes called 'Hume's fork') is that none of those forms of discourse deeply implicated in evaluation or value judgement – such as, most notably, ethics, aesthetics and theology – may count as rational. A human agent could have no genuine evidence-based reasons for judging that 'it is a sin to eat pork', 'Helen of Troy was a great beauty' or 'God is good'.

The standard objection to such 'emotivist' analyses of value in the wake of Hume is that judging something to be good is not the same thing as approving or liking it. Indeed, since one may reasonably dislike something that one takes to be good, or approve of something one takes to be bad, liking is neither necessary nor sufficient for judging something to be good or valuing it. In terms of some obvious examples, a smoker may enjoy smoking while regarding smoking as a thoroughly bad habit, or a patient may regard visiting the dentist as a very good thing while utterly hating it. On an emotivist account of value – especially one that endorses a non-cognitive view of emotions – values appear to be little more than tastes that one might or might not have, irrespective of reasons. If I like anchovies, or prefer anchovies to sardines, I am not bound to justify my choice with reasons: indeed, it is less that I need not justify with reasons, more that reasons do not really enter into it. On the other hand, in calling an object, action or event good, or in counting it among the things I value, I may be asked to support my judgement with reasons: statements of value are inherently normative and frequently the site of reasoned debate, which – while no doubt sometimes inconclusive – may just as often be susceptible of right or wrong answers. To be sure, valuing something involves rather more than simply judging it to be good (bad or ugly), since – as I have argued elsewhere (Carr, 1991, 2011) – values also imply something like commitments or dispositions to act consistently with such judgements; but the judgements on which values are based might seem nevertheless answerable in principle to reason and evidence.

The problem of religious reasons

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, the great German metaphysician Immanuel Kant (1967) clearly recognises the serious shortcomings of a Humean or positivist analysis of value and value judgements. Kant appreciates that moral judgements, for example, are not simply expressions of feeling, emotion or liking, since what they enjoin often conflicts with what we might actually – prior to reflection – prefer to do. In short, moral actions evidently require reasons – though, according to Kant, these cannot be the evidence-based reasons of theoretical (natural scientific) enquiry. In the event, Kant argues that moral rationality involves a distinctive kind of non-empirical reasoning rooted in the idea of universalisable prescription: moral (as opposed to prudential) prescriptions involve judgements – concerning, for example, promise-keeping or respect for others – that no rational agent could possibly wish to be ignored or disrespected on any occasion. Thus, while Kant's non-naturalist account of moral reason is ethically controversial, he clearly shares with later ethical naturalists (such as utilitarians) the view that practical human agency – including the various value commitments of such agency – is an inherently rational matter. Still, Kant is also sympathetic to Hume's empiricist epistemology and its anti-metaphysical attitude to the unverifiable claims of theology. In short, while we may ground moral claims – that, for example, promises should always be kept – in the idea of universalisability, we cannot ground faith in God on the commandment that 'one should worship only Yahweh', since we could not possibly have epistemically reliable evidence for such a claim.

Unlike Hume, however, Kant (as a Lutheran) is sympathetic to the claims of (Christian) religion and to its positive human benefits. He therefore thinks that although we cannot have rationally compelling grounds for religious (Christian or other) commitment, such commitment should not be considered entirely unreasonable. For one thing, the practical teachings of Christian faith – not least the reciprocal ethics of the so-called 'golden rule' (do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you) – are not too far removed from Kant's own rational ethics of universalisable prescription. But, for another, Kant argues that his ethics of duty clearly presuppose free will – an idea also beyond actual empirical demonstration of proof – and, yet more strongly, ideas of immortality and divine judgement as necessary for the final justice of reward and punishment he supposes entailed by such moral voluntarism. Kant calls such notions of free will, immortality and God (as divine judge) 'ideas of reason': although the existence of free will, immortality and God cannot be demonstrated empirically or proved by traditional *a priori* arguments for the existence of God (which Kant deliberately sets out to refute) these may be accepted on the basis of a faith that, while not rational, is not exactly unreasonable. But what Kant's arguments do imply is that what have traditionally been taken as rational grounds for religious conduct and values – such as the claim that Jesus has divine status – cannot count as genuine reasons. One might well rationally justify Christ's injunction that we should love one another in terms of universalisable prescription, but one cannot do so on the grounds that it is divine fiat.

Kant's view that religious faith and any theistic claims upon which it might be based lie beyond the bounds of demonstrable truth and determinate sense is clearly no less 'Copernican' than the rest of his epistemology and its influence on subsequent Western – primarily, but by no means exclusively, Protestant – theology can hardly be overstated. It is clearly the prime source of a significant and vigorous tradition of fideism notably exemplified by Kierkegaard (Hong and Hong, 1980) and his numerous 'existentialist' heirs. Still, there can be no doubt that such fideism has been much welcomed by both modern and 'post-modern' theologians as a way of liberating belief in God from the constraints of reason: even if God's existence cannot be proved, belief in 'Him' may yet be justified in terms of some higher spiritual commitment that transcends reason. However, the implications of any such perspective for the current issue of making sense of religious values is clearly problematic. At first blush, any such perspective would seem to imply that there are no rational religious values, since all religious belief must involve a non-rational 'leap of faith'. But if values (as opposed to mere tastes or preferences) are forms of practical commitment that presuppose genuine agency, and what distinguishes genuine agency from mere human movement is that it is grounded in or motivated by reasons, it might be more accurate to say that there cannot *be* any religious values. Certainly religious believers may have genuine values – such as that one should never do to others what one would not wish to be done to oneself: but this is not as such a religious value. If, on the other hand, one believes that one should attend regular confession in view of humanly inherited sin, this could not count as a value, because it is not based on any kind of (true or false, right or wrong) reason.

It has seemed to some that there is one obvious philosophical way out of this impasse and that is simply to reject Kant's (or any similar) rationalist epistemology and the positivistic or 'foundationalist' conception of knowledge acquisition that it seems to have fostered in 'modern' times. Essentially, this is the strategy adopted by such nineteenth-century post-Kantian German idealists as Fichte and Hegel, by those American and other 'pragmatist' philosophers of science much influenced by idealism, by many twentieth-century European continental neo-Marxists and post-structuralists and by so-called contemporary 'post-modernists'. Briefly, the idea is that Kant and his 'modernist' heirs were just mistaken to suppose that genuine human knowledge

depends upon epistemic access to an external 'objective' world that our senses may either accurately or inaccurately discern: Kant referred to this alleged objective correlate of sense experience as the 'thing in itself' (*ding an sich*). Post-Kantian German idealists pointed out that such Kantian 'noumenal' reality could do no useful explanatory work and might therefore be abandoned as epistemically idle. For idealists and pragmatists it makes little sense to suppose that there is any mind-independent objective world of which natural or other science might give us a more or less accurate picture. Rather, what science provides is a range of perspectives on experience that are shaped by currently prevailing speculations, conjectures and hypotheses. Such hypotheses are often rival and conflicting, and they are always provisional and vulnerable to subsequent refutation or revision.

For all who take this view – from idealists to post-modernists – such perspectives are inevitably limited and provisional precisely because they are just social constructions: indeed, human scientific or other perspectives also tend to be rival or conflicting in so far as they reflect local and specific socio-cultural responses to diverse economic, social and other human problems. In Marxist or Marx influenced versions of this story – which means much contemporary continental European philosophy – all knowledge claims are essentially *ideological* and reflective of the different stories that societies and cultures tell about themselves and their intellectual or epistemic development. Indeed, on post-modern versions of this story, it has become increasingly common to refer to any account of the natural or social world that human beings might be inclined to construct in the name of scientific or other theory as a 'narrative'. Thus, for the French postmodernist J-F. Lyotard (1984), the term '*recit*' is used to refer to any story – scientific, social, moral, religious or aesthetic – that human agents may tell about themselves, their world or their relations with others. It is also easy to appreciate the appeal of such general reduction of theory to story or narrative for theologians working in a climate of post-Kantian fideism. For if 'post-positivist' or 'post-modern' scientific theories do not describe any independent 'objective' reality, but are merely more or less interesting conjectures or speculations, then they may claim no greater epistemic authority or validity than the no less interesting narratives or stories of traditional religion. On this view, there may be religious reasons for values that are no less valid than scientific ones.

Still, however tempting it may be to take this post-modern theological line, it seems ill advised. To whatever extent bygone positivists and 'modernists' may have overstated differences between scientific, moral and religious speculation or reflection, there are nevertheless differences that it is folly to ignore. Indeed, these differences are such as to render any extension of the term 'narrative' to scientific theory highly misleading. This is clearly recognised by the influential neo-idealist moral and social theorist Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1981, 1987), who rightly restricts the term narrative to those moral and religious perspectives on human life and experience that are precisely not natural scientific. As Kant rightly saw, our moral and religious narratives do not aspire to causal explanation of the workings of nature and they are not answerable to empirical evidence in the manner of such explanations. Thus, to whatever extent scientific theories are hypothetical or provisional, they are still – as we have seen – crucially determined or constrained by the observable data or 'facts' of experience. Taking contemporary new world disputes between advocates of natural selection and fundamentalist defenders of the account of creation in Genesis as a relevant illustration, it would be reckless to suppose that these are simply rival explanatory accounts of natural human origins that one is free to pick and choose between at whim – and evolutionists and creationists are equally in error if they claim that this is so. The truth is that Genesis is not a serious rival to evolutionary theory, since it is evidently not – despite any genuine religious or moral value it may have – a scientific theory: hence, any values informed by Genesis would still not be evidence-based reasons.

David Carr

Towards a narrative account of agency and value

In this light, we need to ask whether – without drowning the precious baby of genuine scientific knowledge in the bathwater of idealist or anti-realist scepticism regarding the 'objectivity' of any and all human discourse – there might be any grounds or reasons for religious conduct or values. Precisely, might we find some epistemic value or validity in discourses or narratives that are not scientific or evidence-based?

In this connection, it is noteworthy that despite the more positivist leanings of his 'foundationalist' epistemology, Kant was nevertheless aware in his aesthetic writings of the power of great art and literature to provide significant insight precisely into the kinds of ideas of reason that he saw as presupposed to our ability to understand human moral and other association. Although, for him, great literature could not be a source of the evidentially demonstrable truths of science, and while any understanding of moral conduct is not to be derived from empirical observation of human nature alone, great art can nevertheless assist us to sensitive (aesthetic) appreciation of the complexities and nuances of human association. However, a pre-modern philosopher who seems to have appreciated far more keenly than Kant the significance for human life of other non-scientific modes of reflection or wisdom was Plato's great pupil, Aristotle. Like Kant, Aristotle drew an important distinction between theoretical reason (not quite, but near enough, the reason required for 'scientific' knowledge of the natural world) and the practical reflection or wisdom that he regarded as concerned with moral conduct. Unlike Kant, however, Aristotle's practical wisdom is not primarily concerned with determining the right thing to do (although it is also concerned with this): rather, it is concerned with the formation, or development of character of the exemplary moral agent. The point of moral wisdom is not to discover truths about the world, but to help us become morally good characters (Aristotle, 1941a).

Furthermore, though Aristotle (unlike Plato or Kant) subscribed to a naturalist ethics, according to which the development of human moral dispositions (the 'virtues') is an expression of natural human potential, he seems to have held that the growth of such potential requires a broad liberal education in which contemplation of poetry and other arts may play a significant role. Nearer our day, Alasdair MacIntyre's version of virtue ethics effectively amplifies this point about the human significance of art, literature and other human narratives (MacIntyre, 1981, 1987). While MacIntryre's account seriously departs from Aristotle's in its social constructivist conception of virtue, it also draws on mid-twentieth-century neo-Aristotelian action theory in arguing that human agents make sense of their lives through the narratives they relate about themselves and others, rather than through the causal explanations of natural science. Human agents understand themselves and their moral or other practical projects more as characters in stories than as blind products or effects of impersonal material causes, and the great narratives of myth, creative art and literature contribute crucially to such understanding of self and others. In this regard, the work of MacIntyre and other recent advocates of the human import of narrative is immensely important for reclaiming the profound educational significance and rightful place of literature and the arts in general education and religious education in particular. Moreover in the present context it is notable that MacIntyre clearly regards religious myths and stories as among the most important of identity-constitutive human narratives.

Indeed, we may here observe that if we follow the reasoning of Aristotle and those who have followed him in this, reasons for action – including the reasons that underpin values – are always *practical* rather than theoretical reasons. In this respect, there is an important point in Hume's notorious claim that reason is in and of itself incapable of inspiring action and that (theoretical) reason is merely 'the slave of the passions' (Hume, 1969). To be sure, effective action requires accurate evidence, information or facts if our everyday human projects are to

succeed: we need to know – through scientific experiment if necessary – the levels of ground pollution if we are to have safe water supplies or the correct geographical locations of places if we are to get to our meetings on time. But such information cannot in and of itself direct or guide action for which we need reasons in the sense of motives or intentions: as Hume also observed, one cannot derive ought from is (a slightly different, if related, distinction to that between fact and value). My sense of what I should or ought to do is conditioned by what I actually want or desire: information about the levels of ground pollution will be relevant to me only if I want to have safe water, and of accurate geographical location only if I want to attend the meeting. So the scientifically or otherwise experientially acquired information about the world that we need in order to get successfully around in it cannot itself be the source of the desires, motives and values that give us reasons for acting. It is for these desires, motives and values that MacIntyre and others have sought explanation in non-scientific narratives.

But how can the narratives celebrated by MacIntyre and others as pivotal for human comprehension of self and agency be regarded as reliable sources of reasons for action and value if they are not the 'objective' reasons of scientific or other evidence-based enquiry? In short, if knowledge of ground pollution is not sufficient to engender search for safe water – since I also need a *motive* to seek safe water – how could a written (biblical or other) narrative that (for example) says that God tells me to seek safe water (or avoid pork) count as a valid reason, failing evidence-based or other objective grounds for believing that it is true? Indeed, the bible or any other religious text apart, we know that many stories regarded as morally or spiritually valuable by narrative theorists are the quite deliberate fictions of novelists, poets and dramatists. How, then, can such fictions serve to illuminate our moral condition or help us guide moral action? To be sure, MacIntyre's own chief inspiration in this respect Aristotle certainly held that such imaginative fictions do have significant moral power, arguing in his *Poetics* that poetry 'is something more philosophic and of graver import than history', since it is addressed to matters of 'universal' more than particular human concern (Aristotle, 1941b: 1464). For Aristotle, the poetry and other literature of his day (in which Greek gods turned up with some frequency) is precisely a source, unlike evidence-based theoretical reason, of profound insights into a universal human moral and spiritual condition.

But it should also be clear from this quote that Aristotle takes a rather different view of the moral value of imaginative literature and art from MacIntyre. Thus, while the kind of idealist or communitarian perspective on moral virtue to which MacIntyre and others are inclined tends to regard morally significant narratives as expressions of local solidarity, Aristotle's more 'global' view seems supported by the observation that much truly great literature – Euripides, Dante and Shakespeare are obvious examples – has often been precisely critical of tribal allegiances in the name of a higher transcendent justice. In this vein, Henrik Ibsen's drama *An Enemy of the People* explores a conflict of interest in a Norwegian spa town in which local prosperity depends on attracting tourists to the waters. However, Stockmann, the local health official, has discovered that the sources of water supply are contaminated and that to proceed with development of the baths is likely to lead to death or epidemic. The ensuing drama focuses on the conflict between local civic leaders motivated by short-term economic interest and Stockmann, who is driven to expose the hazards in the name of a higher justice that looks beyond such self-interested concerns. Through the mouth of Stockmann, Ibsen presses the point – made by many past prophets, sages and philosophers (see, for example, Rousseau, 1973) – that there is a universal moral truth and justice that compels respect no matter what inconvenience of suffering it may cause us in the short term: precisely that, in the words of Christ in the Gospels, it may not profit one to gain the whole world yet lose one's soul.

However, Ibsen is also concerned to show that Stockmann – no less than other personae in *An Enemy of the People* – is a flawed character who does not always act in a temperate or balanced way. Indeed, much of Ibsen's dramatic output is concerned to explore the psychological complexities of characters who may aspire to do the right thing but, because of what St Augustine (1961) referred to as 'disordered passion and clouded intellect', merely mire themselves in deeper human confusion and distress. In short, Ibsen's work, like so much serious past and present imaginative fiction – for modern examples one might mention almost any works of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Iris Murdoch or Toni Morrison – is precisely addressed to exposing the complex anatomy of human heart and mind, motive and character, that constitutes what would readily be referred to in religious or theological terms as the *soul*. Much serious imaginative literature is precisely concerned to point us beyond the darkened glass of human vanity, hubris, egotism, self-delusion, hypocrisy, backsliding and avarice to possibilities of spiritual wisdom, honesty, humility, purity, love and compassion. But it should be clear enough that great religious narratives are of a similar purpose and continuous with such wider literary search for spiritual and moral flourishing and salvation. Indeed, it is not just that much if not most religious narrative is great literature, but that much wider literature has often been religious narrative. For example, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Dante's *Inferno*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* are no less religious narratives than Genesis, St John's Gospel or The Book of Revelations.

Religious narrative, motive and value

It would appear, then, that the scriptures or texts that form the basis of great past and present day religions such as Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam should be regarded as narratives in MacIntyre's sense rather than as any kind of scientific or evidence-based theory. To be sure, the faithful of some religions – such as orthodox Christians – have long insisted that their sacred scriptures and gospels are historical documents of literal truth. But any such claim is highly dubious, if it does not just miss the spiritual point. To begin with, modern textual analysis, biblical criticism and archaeology have shown fairly conclusively that substantial parts of the Old and New Testament could not be accurate records of actual past events: that, to be sure, what may be presented as early history is much closer to later religious ideology. Indeed, without belief in miracles as occurrent supernatural interventions in the natural order, much of the bible – taken literally – is simply incredible: the stories of Noah, Jonah and prophets surviving fiery furnaces defeat any literal reading and evidently cry out for more figurative or allegorical interpretation. But such literal readings may also seem anyway irrelevant, since it is clearly the more figurative, metaphorical and mythical constituents of biblical narratives – Christ's parables are here a clear case in point – that are the true bearers of spiritual meaning and religious truth: we do not have to believe that the Gospel stories of the good Samaritan, prodigal son and workers in the vineyard are actually true in order to appreciate the spiritual lessons they aim to teach.

Thus, whether or not divinely inspired, the sacred scriptures and myths of religion are of clear human authorship, and – since they were almost certainly not so intended – do not have the objective status of scientifically established truth. From this viewpoint, many contemporary authors (Armstrong, 2010; Martin, 2010; Freke and Gandy, 2005) have argued – powerfully and persuasively – that one of deepest and most fatal errors into which religious belief and faith has fallen is a fundamentalism that takes religious narratives and doctrinal claims to have the same literal meaning and objective truth as scientific hypotheses and propositions. Here, as previously seen, we do not need to deny the legitimacy of scientific aspirations to empirically verifiable knowledge of a real world of objective fact; we just have to appreciate that the theory

of natural selection – which does seek to explain something of how the natural world works – and Genesis or The Bhagavad Gita have different contributions to make to the understanding of humans of their nature and world. Genesis and The Bhagavad Gita are both narratives (in MacIntyre's sense) and myths. But, as students of human nature of the stature of Carl Jung (see Segal, 1998) have argued, to say that a story is a myth is not at all to say that it is untrue – or, as Kant suggested, that it is something that we can only find worthwhile or of value on the basis of faith *as opposed to* reason. On the contrary, as argued by Aristotle and Macintyre, myths are certainly significant sources of insight, but they are sources of *practical* rather than theoretical wisdom and deliberation. While they cannot, like evolutionary theory or aerodynamics, give us objective knowledge of the world of nature, they may, in the light of open and sympathetic reflection, be indispensable sources of insight into what we might find morally and spiritually worthwhile and how we might best live in the light of such appreciation. A distinction is sometimes made in this connection – by, for example, the popular theologian Karen Armstrong (Armstrong, 2010) – between *logos* and *mythos*: but this can be misleading in downplaying the role of reason in narrative thinking.

To say that religious narratives have mythical rather than literal truth should not, moreover, be regarded as a covert attempt to reduce the spiritual or moral aspects of human life and association to mere 'subjective' experience, or to deny any empirically transcendent spiritual or divine reality into which such narratives afford insight. On the contrary, the point is that religious myths draw us towards a world of divine agency or providence that cannot be grasped other than through the figurative and imaginative language of metaphor, analogy, allegory or moral ideal. The point is precisely that the narratives of religion and wider literature and art give us the only available glimpse – albeit through a darkened glass – of a world of soul, purpose and agency that is no less mysterious in its human than in its divine or providential aspect. Thus, while the freedom of human will and agency that Kant regarded as indispensable to making sense of human morality is clearly beyond the explanatory scope of science (which, for Kant, is just an observation about the general logical grammar of scientific knowledge and explanation), it may nonetheless be regarded as a practical, moral and spiritual reality. Further to this, while those ideas of God and immortality that Kant invokes to make sense of moral freedom and responsibility also cannot (by definition) be scientifically known, explained or comprehended, they nevertheless may be – and have been – explored by great religious narratives in a wide variety of insightful ways. Indeed, religious narratives and discourses are key sources of human understanding of those humanly significant concepts of love, sin, guilt, remorse, atonement, redemption and salvation through which we readily comprehend the spiritual meaning and substance of our lives. At all events, the present view is that many (though not all) religious texts and narratives – including Genesis, The Bhagavad Gita and (of especial note) the New Testament Gospels – should be counted among the most spiritually and morally meaningful narratives ever constructed. But this is only so, as to date insisted, in so far as they are not taken as literally true. This is not necessarily, of course, to *deny* that such narratives *may* contain literal or historical truth – as many Christians may well want to say that the New Testament Gospels do. It is rather to say that it is only on a more figurative, metaphorical, mythical reading that their spiritual or moral truth can be fully appreciated. But it should also be grasped that the most spiritually rich and enduring of such narratives are those open to diverse reading and interpretation. They are not literally true and it is not their prime purpose to tell us what to do in any world where moral agency depends on freedom of choice. Thus, for example, the stories of Genesis have had lasting human appeal precisely because of such open interpretation – as evident in disputes between ancient gnostic and 'orthodox' Christians. Simply put, on an 'orthodox' interpretation of Genesis, humankind's expulsion from paradise is a punishment for

disobedience of God; on a gnostic interpretation, eating of the tree of knowledge is the route to spiritual liberation – including reconciliation with the one true God – that human ignorance often impedes. (For a wonderful modern gnostic re-interpretation of Genesis, see the 1998 movie *Pleasantville*.) Which of these interpretations is true? Recalling Aristotle's profound insight into the context sensitive nature of practical deliberation, it is surely the beginnings of wisdom to see that they may *both* be true: that humans may err either though disobedience, *or* through passive subservience or culpable ignorance. But great religious narratives and myths – if approached in a non-dogmatic and tolerant spirit – have power to teach such human wisdom as well as any great human literature might.

Conclusion

To conclude, the present verdict on the question of whether the very idea of religious values is a coherent one seems to be – perhaps mostly in line with customary usage and intuition – that it is. However, insofar as values are not reducible to non-rational preferences, religious values – like moral and/or aesthetic values – would have to be as far as possible supported by reason and reflection. This would go some way towards upholding our earlier point that the more fanatical forms of apparently religiously motivated conduct that we observe in the contemporary world – conduct stemming from uncritical obedience to the authority of un-interpreted scripture or dogma – is hardly expressive of genuine religious values. At the very least, indeed, we may and do question the religious values of those who commit vicious murder in the name of a god or prophet who is also held to be the soul of love and forgiveness. However, we may also be confident that reason often plays a role in the decisions of believers or unbelievers to convert from one faith to another or to accept or reject faith as such. But, as we have seen, the reason and deliberation on which agents should base their religious values is not the evidence-based reason of natural or social science, but the practical reason of moral and spiritual life and narrative. Since such practical wisdom lies squarely in the realm of freedom of choice it must be ever open to possibilities of change and development and cannot have the rational or epistemic closure of scientific–technical reasoning. This does not mean that there cannot be better or worse reasons for our moral or religious choices – and we are likely to be convinced that our reasons are better than most. Moreover, if there is a place for truth in moral wisdom, we might even be right. But insofar as we can never be certain that we have the final and finished truth on moral and spiritual matters, we should also remain ever open in a spirit of reasonable tolerance towards other possibilities.

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Values and the phenomenology of religion

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Introduction

This chapter analyses and assesses the contribution that phenomenology and the phenomenological method make to identifying and interpreting religious values and to providing a foundation for religious education that is appropriate to the challenges of today.

Phenomenology: An initial orientation

> . . . one may well use the word 'phenomenology', but not have the things for which the word stands.
>
> *Husserl, 1913: 216*

These words of Edmund Husserl, who is widely regarded as the founder of the phenomenological movement in philosophy (see Schroeder, 2005: 183), from which the phenomenology of religion finds inspiration and takes its name, constitute a salutary warning for those who are about to embark on a discussion of phenomenology as it has been applied to the subject of religion. Moreover, Husserl was writing in 1913, which is before the contributions of Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alfred Schutz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas, all of whom are widely regarded as representative of the phenomenological tradition in philosophy. What ideas and commitments unite this diverse group of thinkers? And if there is a range of interpretations of philosophical phenomenology, there is equally a range of interpretations of the application of phenomenology to religion. Any list of influential phenomenologists of religion would include Gerardus van der Leeuw, Rudolf Otto, Max Scheler, Brede Kristensen, Friedrich Heiler, Mircea Eliade, C.J. Bleeker and Ninian Smart; again it would be difficult to identify what it is that unites this group. One response might be that they employ the same phenomenological methodology. However, this raises the critical question how the same methodology yields different analyses of the nature of religion. While Otto's (1923) notion of the Holy (*das Heilige*, which could equally appropriately be translated into English as 'the Sacred') is widely regarded as capturing what is distinctive about religion, there is disagreement on the nature of the experiences that reveal and manifest the Holy. Some like Otto correlate experience of the Holy to a common,

essential religious experience, which he calls 'numinous' experience (Latin *numen*, 'spirit'): a numinous experience is one in which the transcendent Other appears as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that is, as a mystery before which individuals both tremble and are fascinated, and (we should add) are simultaneously attracted and repelled. Other phenomenologists recognise a range of structurally different religious experiences. Ninian Smart (1958), for example, distinguishes between numinous encounters and mystical experiences, and interprets these as representing two complementary but opposite poles of religious experience, that of felt otherness from God and that of felt union or identity with the divine. By contrast, Peter McKenzie (McKenzie, 1988: 295–307), a British phenomenologist of religion, much influenced by Friedrich Heiler (Heiler, 1961), identifies eight 'basic' forms and five 'supernormal' forms of religious experience in Christianity alone.

Already our discussion has identified a number of important interpretative questions that bear on the issue of the values and commitments that are central to the phenomenology of religion. What is the relationship of the phenomenology of religion to philosophical phenom-enology? Which individuals should be regarded as representative of the phenomenology of religion? Does the diversity of voices not challenge any attempt to identify common values? The issue is further complicated if the discussion is extended to include interpretations and applications of the phenomenology of religion to the classroom situation. Even the critical question about the extent to which the phenomenology of religion faithfully reflects the nature of religion takes on a deeper meaning in a school context, where political and social aims compete alongside (and often gain priority over) purely intellectual or educational aims.

It is necessary to take account of these interpretative and critical questions in any academically serious or convincing attempt to identify, describe and evaluate the values exemplified and conveyed by the phenomenology of religion. In addition, it is necessary to take account of the intellectual context in which the phenomenology of religion both emerged and rose to prominence within religious studies.[1] This is because values are always both discursive and social. Values do not exist in a vacuum or emerge without historical antecedents. Values are constructed and constituted by their relationship to other beliefs and other values, and these beliefs and values are 'part of an activity, or of a form of life' (Wittgensten, 1958: par. 23); values are embodied in social and political (ideological) institutions and practices, and this in turn connects to the nature and exercise of power and authority in a given society. Furthermore, it is not simply that different values are expressed in different discursive and social ways: different groups and institutions may claim to express the *same* values in different discursive and social ways. For example, different methodologies in religious studies often profess to express the same basic values and commitments – objective, descriptive, non-confessional, faithful to the nature of religion and so on; yet when these values are considered *in situ*, in the context of other beliefs, embodied practices and other values (with their particular contextual interpretations), it becomes clear that what 'objectivity' or 'description' means and entails in one methodology is different and perhaps even inconsistent with the meaning attached to the same professed values in other methodologies. The point may be illustrated by reference to a particular example. In a recent defence of Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach to religious education, Kevin O'Grady appeals to Smart's commitment to professional and democratic values: the implication being that those who criticise the position of Smart and phenomenology are somehow opposed to professional and democratic values in education (O'Grady, 2009). But this may not be the case. O'Grady has conflated commitment to the position of Smart and his particular interpretation of phenomenology with commitment to professional and democratic values. What O'Grady does not consider, or what he is reluctant to consider, is that professional and democratic values may not be the exclusive property of one particular methodology in religious studies or in religious

education. In fact some of the critics of Smart and phenomenology state that their criticisms are motivated and inspired by commitment to professional values and efforts to create a more inclusive, respectful society (Barnes, 2009a). The lesson to be learnt from this example is that professions of commitment to particular values within one methodological approach to religion need not entail that rival methodological approaches espouse different values or even that these different approaches are not more successful in instantiating these values.

These preliminary observations are helpful in identifying the content and in determining the structure of the discussion of the nature and role of values in the phenomenology of religion that follows. Accordingly, at the outset, attention is given to tracing the historical antecedents of the emergence and rise to prominence of both the phenomenology of religion and of phenomenology as a general philosophical movement; this will enable us to appreciate the relationship of the phenomenology of religion to philosophical phenomenology and to recognise the values that they both aim to embody and the values and commitments that they consciously reject. This leads naturally into a consideration of the phenomenology of religion proper: its beliefs and commitments and its distinctive terminology and orientation; at this point attention is also given to the contribution of different figures and to something of the diversity of viewpoints that exists within the phenomenology of religion. Yet while acknowledging diversity, there are common values and commitments among phenomenologists of religion, and the stage is reached where these values and commitments can be identified and considered. The essay concludes with a brief evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the values that the phenomenology of religion seeks to instantiate and to impart to others.

Historical antecedents of the phenomenology of religion

The roots of the phenomenology of religion can be traced to the emergence of Liberal Protestant theology at the end of the eighteenth century. A defensible starting point is the publication of *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers* by Friedrich Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher, 1958) in 1799 (the date of the first edition). It marks the transition from Enlightenment characterisations of religion, with their emphasis upon reason and morality, to Romantic representations of religion that centre on religious experience. Theology turned inward, to the experience of the divine within the self.

Schleiermacher disagreed with Kant's twofold division of knowledge into pure and practical reason, and in *On Religion* he attempted to show how religion has 'a province of its own' (Schleiermacher, 1958, p. 21) distinct from morality or metaphysics. Religion has its own peculiar form of consciousness and judgements, and its peculiarity derives and finds its origin in 'our feeling of absolute dependence' (*das schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*) – this is how he describes it in his later study, *The Christian Faith* (Schleiermacher, 1928; see Rohls, 1997: 396). 'The feeling of absolute dependence' is the ground and essential source of religion; from it religious assertions gain their meaning and content, although beliefs and doctrines are derivative and secondary to the original experience, and are as a consequence contingent and revisable. Theology turned inward, in a move that aped the Cartesian foundationalist quest for inner epistemic certainty. Schleiermacher simply extended the range of 'inner' justifying experiences to include religious experiences. The heart of religion was, according to George Lindbeck (Lindbeck, 1984: 21), relocated in the 'pre–reflective experiential depths of the self', and the public or outer features of religion came to be regarded as 'expressive and evocative objectifications (i.e. nondiscursive symbols) of internal experience'.

The intellectual and apologetic commitments of modern, Liberal Protestant theology were integrated into the phenomenological approach to religion through the work and writings of

van der Leeuw, Otto, Kristensen, Heiler and Eliade. Almost without exception the original founders and practitioners of the phenomenology of religion were Liberal Protestants who looked to (inner) religious experience and not morality as the determining and justifying heart of religion; and this for a number of reasons. First, a connection between religion and morality is not found in many early and in some later forms of religion; and second, the rich diversity of religious phenomena (and with colonialism and travel in the nineteenth century came increasing knowledge of 'other' religions) simply cannot be reduced without loss or remainder to Kant's notion of 'pure moral faith' (Kant, 1998a: 120). Religion in the service of morality loses its vitality, immediacy, diversity and its power of self-authentication.

The identification of the origins of the phenomenology of religion with Liberal Protestantism alerts us to its apologetic orientation, and this apologetic orientation included defending religion against the pretensions of science. A naturalistic view of science came to prominence in the nineteenth century, of which the theory of evolution played no small part, and it threatened both to reduce all knowledge to scientific knowledge and to explain all of reality in (deterministic) scientific terms. Natural science presumed to account for all of reality and to do so in a way that not only rendered appeals to the divine (or any cause external to the universe) otiose but also to account for human beliefs and values in terms of impersonal processes, which are susceptible to causal, deductive nomological (or 'covering law') explanations (see Hempel, 1965: 331–496). On this understanding human freedom is a chimera, for human choices are fully explicable in terms of casual, impersonal laws. The shadow of determinism and the loss of human freedom thus characterise the modern self. The problem, of course, is anticipated in Kant, and his distinction between the *noumenal* world, where human freedom is required to vindicate the moral law, and the phenomenal world, where human behaviour is fully explicable in scientific terms, is one attempt to overcome it, though one beset with philosophical difficulties (see Acton, 1970: 53–9).[2]

The negative impact of the (presumed to be) inevitable march of science and naturalistic explanation is captured by Max Weber, when in *Science as a Vocation* (Weber, 1946 [1918–19]: 155), he spoke of '[t]he fate of our times' as the 'disenchantment of the world', which the social historian Alex Callinicos (2007: 155) glosses as 'the collapse of transcendent religious interpretations of reality'. Weber observes here (and more fully elsewhere; see Weber, 1949) that the human condition in modern societies is characterised by the loss of meaning at both the personal and the social levels; largely as the result of the emergence of a 'scientific' mentality that divests the human person of purpose and value. Weber (1978 [1922]: 24–5) distinguishes between instrumental rationality (*Zweckrational*), which is concerned with natural causes, cost/benefit efficiency and the means to achieve chosen ends, and 'value rationality' (*Wertrational*), which is concerned with human ideals, ends (*teloi*) and meaning. The 'progress' of modernity is the gradual undermining (and pluralisation) of values and (for the most part) their reinterpretation in terms of instrumental, impersonal rationality. For reasons that need not detain us, Weber believed that while the covering-law model of science (and natural science generally) cannot capture the individuality and contingency of the historical process, the nature of this process is captured by the construction of 'ideal types', which portray in heightened form characteristic social relationships and behaviour. These ideal types, in turn, serve to illuminate and conceptualise complex social realities (Weber, 1949: 90–7).

It is at this point that the interests of both philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion converge, for both are attempts to affirm human meaning and purpose over against scientific determinism and the reduction of reality to impersonal laws in which 'man' simply becomes a 'cog in the machine'. Both can be interpreted as seeking to maintain the value of the individual and lived experience over against 'scientism' and its efforts to go

beyond appearances ('phenomena') to identify some deeper reality accessible only to a scientific methodology and explicable in exclusively naturalistic terms. By contrast, philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion seek to prioritise phenomena, that is, to prioritise the lived world of experience (what Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schütz and others refer to as *die Lebenswelt*, 'the Lifeworld'). The world of experience as it 'appears' to us is much more than an object of scientific curiosity and in seeking to understand this world we are often more interested in the meaning and relation of other human subjects and objects to ourselves than in their constitution and causality. As persons we are more interested in looking for the meaning of events than in identifying their cause. Science is concerned with explanation, whereas phenomenology is concerned with meaning and purpose; and central to meaning, according to phenomenologists, is the concept of intentionality. Human experience is intentional experience, experience directed towards something, namely towards another human subject or an object, and it is the encounter with this something that conveys meaning and significance to the experiencing subject; as Husserl says (1931: 119), intentional experience is 'a consciousness of something' and its attendant meaning.

This orientation to persons, intersubjectivity and lived experience (*Erlebnis*)[3] is characteristic of all schools of phenomenology, secular and religious, and consequently it is maintained that 'the study of man and society' requires a different methodology from the study of nature and external processes (this distinction in content and in methodology began to be denoted in Germany in the nineteenth century by the use of two different words, *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*). The essential function of the human sciences is interpretive, as efforts are made to gain an understanding (*Verstehen*) of the subjective meaning (for individuals) of objects and actions; such an understanding is gained through 're-living' (*nacherleben*) the experience of others by stepping into their shoes on the basis of 'empathy', or what Husserl calls 'transcendental empathy' and interprets as entering into the other's cognitions and establishing an intersubjective transcendental consciousness.

The two movements of philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion share much, and the direction of influence is chiefly from the former to the latter. This does not mean, however, that phenomenologists of religion slavishly followed philosophical phenomenology. Phenomenologists of religion appropriated the insights of philosophical phenomenology for their own (often apologetic) purposes and incorporated them into their own liberal understanding of the nature of religious faith and commitment.

The phenomenology of religion

The actual term 'the phenomenology of religion' was coined by Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye of the University of Amsterdam in his *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, first published in 1887 (the term was not retained in subsequent editions). His aim was to bring together and describe common themes across a number of religions, what he called 'groups of religious phenomena' (*Gruppen von religiösen Erscheinungen*): such themes as sacrifice, prayer, and the object of worship. The main stimulus for Chantepie's attempt to organise religious phenomena along typological lines was Hegel's distinction between the essence (*Wesen*) of a thing and its manifestations (*Erscheinungen*) to consciousness; ironically, however, not for the purpose of elaborating the essence of religion in Hegelian terms but for the purpose of underlining the varied nature of religious phenomena, which, while diverse, is (Chantepie believed) susceptible to cross-cultural typological analysis.

The distinction between essence and manifestation is foundational to the phenomenology of religion proper as it merged in the writings of Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Friedrich

Heiler and Mircea Eliade. These writers identified experience of the Sacred (or the Holy) as central to religion, and some of them also attempted to identify the defining characteristics of particular forms of religious experience and behaviour (as a consequence, typology or Weberian 'ideal types' is a feature of much phenomenology of religion). There is therefore a double focus on 'essence' in some phenomenologies of religion: the notion of the essence of religion, coupled with the notion of the essential form of some particular religious phenomenon. In this latter sense, van der Leeuw believed that cross-cultural comparisons of the 'same' phenomenon would identify the constituent structural laws (or essence) of particular types of religious experience and these could be used (as ideal types) to distinguish pathological or aberrant from authentic forms. This he believed is not inconsistent with presenting an accurate, descriptive account of religious phenomena, provided the criteria for judging the phenomena are not arbitrary or drawn from one specific religious tradition (such as Christianity). The aim is to allow a religion, or more accurately religious believers, to speak for themselves and open-mindedly (by the exclusion of prior assumptions and prejudices) to 'enter into' the life-world of the religious believer. This orientation naturally focuses the phenomenology of religion on the experiential side of religion and on contemporary or living religion rather than on the historical, political or institutional development of religion, or on the origins of religion.

A critical issue for phenomenologists of religion is how to enter into the religious world of others and 'relive' their experience. There are subtly different answers to this, though many have been influenced by van der Leeuw's appropriation of Husserl at this point. In order to gain an understanding of the meaning conveying in immediate experience, Husserl employed what he called the methodology of transcendental or phenomenological reduction, and central to it are the principles of epoché and eidetic vision. Epoché is derived from the Greek verb *epecho*, 'I hold firm', and according to Husserl (Husserl, 1931: 110) involves 'a certain refraining from judgement' and the 'bracketing out' or 'holding in abeyance' of (what he calls the) 'the natural thesis' that receives and interprets the world as part of the natural order of things. Accordingly, epoché has come to mean the suspension of judgement and the adoption of a neutral stance, while giving attention to the phenomenological content of particular human experiences of the world and making a conscious effort to enter into and 'contemplate' the religious object. It is often characterised as the principle of methodological neutrality or objectivity. Ideally, in relation to religion, all prior beliefs, commitments and value judgements should be bracketed out. This strategy is aimed at preserving the integrity of the believer's point of view. Complementary to this is the principle of eidetic vision (from *to eidos*, 'that which is seen', thus form, shape, or essence), that is, the ability to grasp the 'essence' of religious phenomena by means of intuition and empathy (*Einfühlung*). The focus is on 'seeing what the believer sees – trying to enter the thoughtworld of [religion]' (Smart, 1979: 8).

For phenomenologists, religious understanding (*Verstehen*) is an intuitive process, which although facilitated by the use of a phenomenological methodology, does not automatically result from following the method. Religious understanding is, as van der Leeuw (1964: 679) states, 'more an art than a science'. This is because religious empathy is the ability to enter into the emotions and feelings elicited by religious phenomena in the religious participant, and such an ability admits of lesser or greater degrees; equally not everyone is able to suspend value judgements when attending to religious phenomena. Yet if the task is difficult and requires concentration and commitment, it is achievable. Van der Leeuw believes that it is possible to enter into the experience of others, not in the sense of experiencing the event through them, but in experiencing the same event within oneself. He refers to this as the 'interpolation of the phenomenon into our own lives' (ibid.: 674); we relive the experience 'intentionally and methodically' (ibid.). The phenomenology of religion is able to give 'the trained observer' access

'to the reality of primal experience [which is] itself wholly inaccessible' (ibid.: 673); to gain such access is 'to testify to what has been manifested' in religious phenomena (ibid.: 677–8). In this way, the phenomenologist of religion gains 'a second experience of the [sacred] event' (ibid.: 678). The reality and power of religion is felt within the inner self 'in our own consciousness' (ibid.: 675).

Interestingly, van der Leeuw does not consider his application of philosophical phenomenology to religion and his use of the principles of epoché and eidetic as theoretical. He does not believe that he is developing or propounding a theory about religion. His account of religion, he avers, is descriptive and objective; and his methodology is intended to reveal the nature of religion as it is, unobscured by *theoretical* assumptions. In his preface to the German edition of *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* he voices his 'opposition to theories': 'I have tried to avoid, above all else,' he tells us, 'any imperiously dominating theory, and in this Volume there will be found neither evolutionary, nor so-called anti-evolutionary, nor indeed any other theories' (ibid.: vi). He is concerned with 'the facts' of religion.

> This entire . . . procedure [i.e., the phenomenological methodology] . . . has ultimately no other goal than pure objectivity. Phenomenology aims not at things, still less at their mutual relations, and least of all the 'thing in itself.' It desires to gain access to the facts themselves, and for this it requires a meaning, because it cannot experience the facts just as it pleases. This meaning, however, is purely objective. . . . It [phenomenology] holds itself quite apart from modern thought, which would teach us 'to contemplate the world as unformed material, which we must first of all form, and conduct ourselves as lords of the world.' It has in fact one sole desire: to testify to what has been manifest to it. This can be done only by indirect methods, by a second experience of the event, by a thorough reconstruction. . . . To see face to face is denied us. But much can be observed in a mirror; and it is possible to speak about things seen.
>
> *Ibid.: 677–8*

In this passage van der Leeuw is clearly criticising a Kantian (idealist) approach to knowledge and understanding, according to which human experience is (necessarily, *a priori*) conformed to the limiting structures imposed by the mind on the material of the senses in such a way that there is no perception of the true nature of reality. Like Kant, van der Leeuw denies that we can enjoy experience of the 'thing in itself' (*Ding an sich*), if by this is meant a 'direct' and unmediated experience of reality, but unlike Kant he believes that human experience is open to experience of the transcendent, and that phenomenological analysis requires us to take seriously what is reported in experience by religious people. For van der Leeuw the focus of religion is the objects and events that are experienced as religious: 'sacred power' becomes manifest through events and objects. It follows that the focus of the study of religion should not be chiefly on religion per se, its beliefs, practices, history, and so on, but on religious phenomena as experienced by religious subjects as sacred and 'other'.

The claim by van der Leeuw that he is not theorising about religion but simply describing and uncovering the facts is difficult to maintain, chiefly for the reason that all description (even factual) involves or presupposes some theoretical assumptions and commitments. The positive intention behind his distinction between describing and theorising, however, can be appreciated without necessarily endorsing the dichotomy he posits. Clearly van der Leeuw wants to maintain that religion must be understood on its own terms: religious phenomena provide a framework of meaning and interpretation for believers; it is the felt quality or 'facticity' (Husserl) of the Sacred in phenomena that confers religious meaning.

The notion of understanding religion on its own terms is characteristic of much phenomenology of religion, Otto and Eliade, for example, as well as van der Leeuw; and it is Eliade who has explored the idea most fully in relation to the issue of methodology and how religion is to be interpreted. For him, encounters with the Sacred ('Hierophanies' in his terminology) are *sui generis* – encounters that are unique in form and content, autonomous and therefore explicable only in their own terms: 'a religious datum reveals its deeper meaning when it is considered on its plane of reference, and not when it is reduced to one of its secondary aspects or its context' (Eliade, 1961: 5–6). This means that 'to try to grasp the essence of . . . a [religious] phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred' (Eliade, 1996: xvii). Eliade moves from the claim that through phenomenological analysis ('reduction') the essential nature of religion as experience of the Sacred is identified to the assertion that the true nature of religion is not explicable in non-religious terms. But if religious experience is explicable in religious terms alone, this amounts to the conviction that religious experiences are an experience of a unique religious object, which is equivalent to the conclusion that the experiences are genuinely cognitive. The endorsement of the truth of religion (and not just its capacity to confer and convey meaning) by Eliade is quite explicit. It is equally explicit in the writings of other prominent phenomenologists of religion, Otto, Scheler and Heiler, for example, and less explicit (though present) in the writings of van der Leeuw and Ninian Smart. At this point, according to its critics, the apologetic interests of the phenomenology of religion become clear and betray their Liberal Protestant origin, not in the sense that all phenomenologists of religion are Liberal Protestants (though most of the major early and mid-twentieth-century exponents were) but in the sense that religion is conceptualised in experiential terms that mirror nineteenth-century Liberal Protestant attempts to meet philosophical, historical and moral criticism by removing what is important in religion to the 'inner' realm of private encounter.

The values and commitments of the phenomenology of religion

For our purpose values can be defined as those beliefs, ideas and commitments that regulate personal and social existence, including academic institutions and disciplines, chiefly because they are 'valued' and regarded as important. While there are concerns about the nature and ontological status of values, our discussion of them in relation to the phenomenology of religion need not await philosophical resolution. The chief task is to identify and describe the values and commitments that characterise the phenomenology of religion. This should be relatively straightforward now that the assumptions, beliefs and methodology of the phenomenology of religion have been outlined. Some brief attention will also be given to criticism, and to the strengths and weaknesses of the phenomenology of religion as it has been applied in schools, largely as a result of the influence of Ninian Smart in *Working Paper 36: Religious Education in the Secondary School* (for commentary and discussion see Barnes, 2000).

As our analysis has already revealed, the phenomenology of religion is deeply marked by the context in which it emerged. Against a backdrop of increasing intellectual and social scepticism about religion and the rise of scientism – the belief that all of reality can be explained in terms of causal, scientific laws – the phenomenology of religion, along with philosophical phenomenology, represent an affirmation of the values of personhood and human meaning. Over against naturalistic explanations of human behaviour, which are interpreted as essentially nihilistic, phenomenology affirms the reality and importance of human choice and freedom,

the significance of intentional experience and the need for individuals to identify themselves with goals and purposes that instil a sense of the sacredness of life (albeit understood differently by secular and religious phenomenologists; for the former in some metaphorical sense and for the latter in some literal sense that affirms the reality of a sacred, transcendent order of being). Life is not without purpose and meaning as naturalistic science supposes. Meaning in life is revealed by attending to human (intentional) experience and its felt significance for the individual; and this in turn directly impacts on how we perceive and describe the world and its objects, 'for our descriptions of things will always bear the mark of human feelings and human response' (Dooley, 2009: 76). Personhood is an ineradicable feature of the world and this recognition impacts on how we view and interpret the world.

The obverse side of this affirmation of religious meaning and purpose in life by phenomenologists of religion is opposition to reductionism and all attempts to explain religion in non-religious terms, thereby reducing religion to something else: for Feuerbach and Freud to 'reduce' religion to the illusionary exaggerations of the human psyche to fashion God after its own image, or for Marx to 'reduce' religion to a form of false consciousness that supports and validates an ideological superstructure that seeks to naturalise and rationalise class differences. The phenomenology of religion insists that religious data are accepted on their own terms; as Douglas Allen (2005: 197) has stated, 'the phenomenologist must respect the "original" religious intentionality expressed in the data'. The concept of intentionality is clearly closed linked to the value of anti-reductionism and the aim to allow 'the facts' of religion to speak for themselves and not to subject them to an alien framework that seeks to explain and account for religious experience in more (so-called) basic terms. The religious act has its own distinctive motivation and meaning.

In turn, to speak of allowing the facts of religion to speak for themselves highlights the emphasis placed upon description, neutrality and objectivity by phenomenologists of religion. They view their classifications, typologies and accounts of religious phenomena as descriptive and hence properly scientific and objective. For some writers it is this commitment to the values of description and objectivity in phenomenology that qualifies it as a *scientific* approach to the study of religion. This conclusion, however, is not uncontroversial. Much recent writing in the field of Anglo-American religious studies has questioned the objectivity and neutrality of 'descriptive' phenomenology of religion (see McCutcheon, 1997). The fact that most of the original pioneers of the phenomenological approach to religion were liberal Protestants who believed in the validity of religious experience and who regarded it as justifying a religious view of life has given rise to a range of criticisms. One important criticism alleges that Christian confessionalism, which dominated nineteenth-century academic accounts of religion, simply gave way in the twentieth century, under the guise of the phenomenology of religion, to a new form of liberal religious confessionalism, which embraced all religions and regarded all as true. Support is often claimed for this interpretation by pointing out that by setting aside all presuppositions, through the use of the principles of epoché and eidetic vision, an uncritical attitude to religion is institutionalised. The true purpose of the phenomenological methodology, it is alleged, is to create the conditions whereby the observer of religion 'relives' the original experience and in reliving the experience grasps the power, vitality and *truth* of religion. According to its critics, the phenomenology of religion is a form of liberal religious confessionalism masquerading under the values of neutrality and objectivity.

While the adoption of a phenomenological approach to religious education in schools duplicates most of the same values and raises many of the same criticisms as does the phenomenology of religion as an academic discipline and methodology, there are nevertheless additional critical issues unique to phenomenology in the classroom.[4] The first focuses on the

issue of whether a methodology originally intended for mature students and scholars of religion, which requires practitioners to 'relive' the experiences of others, can be successfully translated into a credible pedagogy for pupils. Serious doubts have been raised by educational psychologists whether primary school pupils and some secondary school pupils have the mental capacity to do what the methodology requires (see Kay, 1997). The second issue is the extent to which a phenomenological approach to religion in the classroom facilitates the development of respect for others and contributes to liberal educational aims. The introduction of the phenomenological approach in schools was heralded by its supporters and exponents as uniquely equipped to promote religious tolerance and challenge intolerance and discrimination. The results are less obvious and there is no convincing evidence that other forms of multi-faith religious education or even confessional religious education are any less successful in promoting positive personal and social attitudes to religious difference than phenomenological religious education (see Barnes, 2009b: 22–4).

Conclusion

Contemporary scholars of religion are, in the main, disparaging of the strengths of the phenomenology of religion. The late Eric J. Sharpe (who by the way was instrumental in translating the phenomenology into educational terms for use in schools) is typical of many, when he writes:

> 'Philosophical' phenomenology aimed at the elimination of subjectivity (and hence dogmatic bias). . . . As such the ideal was and is unattainable, and it was unfortunate that for a time in the 1970s, a few phenomenological catch words (*epoché*, . . . eidetic vision, . . . as well as 'phenomenology' itself) found their way into the vocabulary of the study of religion.
>
> *Sharpe, 2005: 36*

My own view is that this judgement is too negative and overlooks much that is positive about the phenomenology of religion: its commitment to the values of objectivity and to taking the perspective of the religious believer seriously; its openness to religious truth; its opposition to reductionism in the study of religion; its defence of the legitimacy and validity of human values over against naturalistic nihilism; and so on. Certainly there are serious problems associated with the role and use of the principles of epoché and eidetic vision. Equally, there is a tendency among phenomenologists to draw too sharp a distinction between experience and language (which can be traced to Husserl) and to use this to advance the theological thesis of the essential unity of all religions (see Flood, 1999: 91–116; also Barnes, 1994). What is positive in the phenomenology of religion, however, when these criticisms are acknowledged and appropriate revisions made, is the value of taking what religious people say about human existence and religion seriously and interpreting what they say in terms that reflect the believer's perspective; only when this is done does the exacting task of using the insights of different disciplines to interpret and evaluate religious phenomena begin.

Notes

1   It is not possible in this context to consider the social context of the emergence of the phenomenology of religion, except to note the importance of the historical process of secularisation and the loss of religious meaning at the individual and at the social levels.
2   Kant famously argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998b) that objects of human experience are all subject to complete causal determinism, yet at the same time he affirmed belief in (libertarian) free

will, which is necessary for moral accountability: the phenomena/noumena distinction is his attempt
to solve this apparent contradiction.
3   This is a somewhat technical term in modern German speaking philosophy; see Gadamer (1975: 55–63).
4   A debate between T. Lovat and me in the journal *Religious Education* considers the strengths and
    weaknesses both of philosophical phenomenology and of its application to religious education; see
    Barnes (2001a, 2001b) and Lovat (2001).

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