



## Can Science Be Enchanting?

Ways to a Phenomenology of Religion in the Post-Modern Age

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# Can Science Be Enchanting?

Ways to a Phenomenology of Religion in the Post-Modern Age<sup>1</sup>

Sebastian Cölln

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- 1 Max Weber often spoke about the process of rationalization. This occurred not only in religion, where vital and unpredictable forms of religious life had been replaced by a systematized view of cosmos and of »the sacred« itself, culminating in the Protestant Ethic. Rationalization was also a common theme in the evolution of an increasingly impersonalized justice, even in the evolution of music. In his 1911 essay *Rationale und soziale Grundlagen der Musik*,<sup>2</sup> Weber thought himself to be able to spot a deep difference between the music of pre-modern »Man« and the modern (Western) way of composition, the latter being subjected to a set of calculable rules which reached their peak with the twelve-tone system, the ratio- nality of which even the most rebellious step—a move away from tonality—could negate, but never transcend to another order.
- 2 Science was a fundamental part of this slow but steady movement toward a »disenchanted world«. In *Science as a Vocation* (WEBER 1970; German *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, 1922), Weber speaks about feelings that the youth of his day held toward science. In an allusion to the cave metaphor of Plato's *Republic*, Weber describes the unbridled enthusiasm of early science as the sun of Enlightenment rose outside the dark walls of the mediaeval cavemen: how could one *not* have thought this light the sun of Plato's eternal ideas; that science would be the new and safer way to God (WEBER 1970, p. 140)!
- 3 »Today«, Weber says,
 

»youth feels rather the reverse: the intellectual constructions of science constitute an unreal realm of artificial abstractions, which with their bony hands seek to grasp the blood-and-sap of true life without ever catching up with it.« (WEBER 1970, pp. 140 f.)
- 4 The youth of Weber's day is probably no longer among us but these feelings toward science still hold true.
- 5 According to Weber, this simply has to be so. Science cannot tell us the »meaning« of the world. It cannot tell us how we could or should live. This stand has to be taken from another point, one that science should not attempt to cover by relapsing into

irrationalism or by promoting subjectivist views instead of relating objective facts (WEBER 1970, p. 142-45, cf. p. 149 f.).

- 6 From this point of view, rationalization would seem to belong to the very essence of science and disenchantment would consequently appear to be the natural expression of its own self-realization. In an extraordinary way, this process actually seems to have taken place within one particular discipline of science during the 20th century: the phenomenology of religion.
- 7 One of the most important schools of this discipline—the one of the Dutch scholar Gerardus van der Leeuw—was from the start highly interested in the »meaning« of religious phenomena. Van der Leeuw's phenomenological paradigm relied heavily upon a distinction between »explanation« and »interpretation« drawn from the hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey. Although scholars like Jacques Waardenburg have recognized Dilthey's influence on the young van der Leeuw as undisputable (WAARDENBURG 1997, p. 268), the impact of this dichotomy really has to be seen in a larger context, one in which »the call for understanding (*Verstehen*)« pervaded such different fields of research as psychology, cultural anthropology, and the philosophy of, for instance, Max Scheler and Edmund Husserl (WAARDENBURG 1997, p. 268). This distress call was raised in a time when the humanities felt a strong need to defend their independence against the natural sciences. Dilthey, for one, claimed the unique nature of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, those sciences that were able to »understand« the meaning of the creations of the human spirit (*Geist*), while the natural sciences could only »explain« them as natural objects (DILTHEY 1927). Within the study of religion, this view was adopted by scholars like Brede Kristensen, who defended not only the humanities against the natural sciences, but also religion as an entity per se among the other humanities.
- 8 Gerardus van der Leeuw was one of Kristensen's most outstanding pupils. In his magnum opus, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, he adopted several principles from the philosophical phenomenology of Scheler and Husserl to develop a phenomenological method applicable to the study of religions (V. D. LEEUW 1956<sup>2</sup>).<sup>3</sup> The goal of this study was to search for the essence of religious phenomena, or »ideal types« (*Idealtypen*), as they »appeared« to the scholar (cf. Gk *phainomai* »to appear«). In themselves, however, these ideal types were eternal, situated in a realm outside historical time (V. D. LEEUW 1956<sup>2</sup>, § 109, esp. pp. 771 f.). Only through a process of classification, of activation (*Einschaltung*) of the phenomenon in the scholar's own life,<sup>4</sup> through the unbiased observation of the phenomenon (*Epoché*) in its present essence, and a clarification (*Klärung*) of the experience through shutting out all that did not belong to the phenomenon's »essence«, could the scholar see the ideal type of which the phenomenon was an example: that is, to obtain a total »understanding« of the phenomenon (V. D. LEEUW 1956<sup>2</sup>, pp. 772–777).
- 9 But even if van der Leeuw's phenomenological school was no doubt the most influential one between 1925 and 1950 (so SHARPE 1992<sup>2</sup>, p. 229), it was not the only one. Already in 1887, P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye's *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* had been published. In a »phenomenological« part, this work dealt with the classification of religious phenomena. In this earliest use of the term »phenomenology of religion«, phenomenology was obviously not deemed a special theory, nor did Chantepie try to invoke a theory external to his work. In fact, when the phenomenological discussion was missing in the second edition of the *Lehrbuch*, it was probably due to the theoretical difficulties of this approach, which Chantepie felt would need a book of their own (SHARPE 1992<sup>2</sup>, p. 223). Nevertheless, as a reaction against the somewhat »platonic«

approach of van der Leeuw's phenomenological school and to other »sensitive« approaches to religion made in the footsteps of men such as Rudolf Otto and Nathan Söderblom, Chantepie's rather non-philosophical conception of phenomenology of religion was to be called to life again.

- 10 Following World War II, principally in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, a second phenomenological branch appeared within history of religion,<sup>5</sup> sometimes also considered the synchronic complement to the diachronic study of the history of religion.<sup>6</sup> This branch was chiefly represented by scholars like the Swedes Geo Widengren and Åke Hultrantz, who aimed at a purely descriptive approach. In an article about the aims and methods of phenomenology of religion, Hultrantz made it clear that he saw van der Leeuw's phenomenology as itself comprising »an ›Einklammerung,‹ a parenthesis«, between Chantepie's work and the common attitude that began to emerge among Scandinavian and Italian researchers along the lines of a strict positivist science (H ULTRANTZ 1970, p. 73). Hultrantz, for his part, defined phenomenology of religion as the

»systematic study of the forms of religion, that part of religious research which classifies and systematically investigates religious conceptions, rites and myth-traditions from comparative morphologic-typological points of view.«  
(HULTRANTZ 1970, pp. 74 f.)

- 11 According to Hultrantz, »no specific intuitive quality« was needed to grasp the meaning of phenomena. Widengren even stated the »ideal goal« of phenomenology of religion to be, not an »understanding« of specific cultural worlds, but a »general, overarching phenomenological monograph.«<sup>7</sup>
- 12 As a reaction against a basically essentialist and intuitive approach to religion, this stand is, I would say, fully understandable and, in its own way, even justified. But even if this approach constitutes a special »method«—a claim that can be criticized (cf. ALLEN 2005, p. 7086)—, the question is whether this activity, reaching neither for the »meaning« of phenomena, nor for an »explanation« of them, could ever claim to have greater aspirations than the simple satisfaction of the curious collector. Naturally, such collections and categorizations of data are what make any knowledge possible; what is questioned is not the methodology behind them, but whether they could in themselves aspire to the epithet of »knowledge« and, thus, to the role they have within the typological approach of forming a purpose in themselves.
- 13 In the meantime, phenomenology of religion seems to have lost its footing. Stretching across two branches which in reality seem to have very little in common except for their name, »phenomenology of religion« has become a term that lacks clear content. Being something like an entry-ticket into a »fashionable methodological circle« (RYBA 1991, p. xv. Cf. SPIEGELBERG 1978<sup>2</sup>, p. 3), the concept has been adopted by a continuously growing party of scholars, thus making it very hard to see wherein the »methodology« of this circle should really consist. At its widest, most watered-down definition of »phenomenology of religion«, simply denoting »an investigation of any religious phenomena« (ALLEN 2005, p. 7086), even a scholar within the field of psychology of religion could be termed a »phenomenologist«.
- 14 Perhaps because of this confused state, the quest for the historical origins of the wide spectrum of phenomenology of religion has been a frequent topic during recent decades,<sup>8</sup> as has the quest for the common traits of its actual branches. Gilhus, for instance, means

that what still unites the two extremes should be their comparative, systematizing approach:

»The phenomenology of religion is, in both its branches, the comparative discipline of the history of religions. It is this comparative character which makes it a special discipline [...]. It is used to legitimize the claim that the history of religions constitutes a special science.« (GILHUS 1984, p. 31)

- 15 To me, this wide definition seems only a reflection of the general confusion, and one might ask how such a vague meaning could »legitimize the claim« of any science as a special discipline. If one follows the trend and goes back to the roots of phenomenology as a concept in the world of Western science and culture, this becomes very clear. When the word was first introduced in German from French *phénomène* in the 18th century, it typically represented anything that appeared to the senses or, in a narrower sense, a › strange appearance« (J./W. GRIMM 1889). This usage would persist, adopted for instance by the natural sciences and employed e.g. in Newton's writings (SPIEGELBERG 1978<sup>2</sup>, p. 8). This non- philosophical branch of phenomenology also coined the narrower sense in which the word was employed by John Robinson in his article about »Philosophy« in *Encyclopædia Britannica* of 1788. Here, the term designated that part of philosophy which merely described and arranged phenomena from different comparative contexts. Similarly, the polymath William Whewell (*Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, 1847) used it with reference to that branch of certain »palaeontological [i. e., ›historical‹] sciences« which dealt with classification and whose aim was to discover »natural classes« (SPIEGELBERG 1978<sup>2</sup>, p. 9). The word was still used about comparison, classification, and arrangement of facts in the diverse field of the natural sciences of the 19th and 20th centuries; and a quick browse through any library catalogue of biology, pharmacy, or physics will show this to be true for the 21st century, as well.
- 16 Thus, comparison can obviously not be enough to characterize phenomenology of religion as a methodologically separate field. Any claim that we could be *without* comparison actually reveals a lack of insight in what we do, because, as Thomas B. Lawson (1996, p. 32) has said in respect to comparison, *we do it all the time*. The recognition of this fact probably underlies observations such as phenomenology of religion being a »method«, albeit used by several sciences (cf. BLEEKER 1959, p. 106), a statement which reveals an identification of phenomenology with comparison but also of comparison being a general trait of any science.
- 17 One answer to the methodologically dim and in part theoretically questioned condition of phenomenology of religion has been to abandon the »phenomenological project« as a whole, as one of the many dead-ends of modernity. To an extent, this has certainly meant that the study of religion has been »rationalized« in the Weberian sense. Instead of meaning, it asks for »hard facts«—or, to use Dilthey's dichotomy, instead of trying to »understand« the Other, it seeks to »explain« it. To take one example, the cultural-historical school to which scholars like Bruce Lincoln could be counted no longer uses comparison to reconstruct »eternal essences« or »ideal types«, but to find out the laws governing the formation of a religious society (LINCOLN 1981).
- 18 To answer his question whether religions are similar, given similar cultures, Lincoln still uses comparison.<sup>9</sup> But in the post-modern critique against phenomenology of religion, even the method of comparison has been questioned. Timothy Fitzgerald, for instance, has termed the discipline of phenomenology of religion a »liberal ecumenical theology«,

its comparative concepts harboring from the start a hidden ideological agenda from which we cannot rid ourselves (FITZGERALD 1997).

- 19 Where do we go from here? What is the role of cross-cultural comparison in the post-modern age? Can science be enchanting? Or is disenchantment the necessary consequence of science being scientific?
- 20 As much as I agree with Weber with the point that science should not revert to subjectivism or the anti-empirical tendencies that have been criticized within the nomenclature of religion at least since the death of Gerardus van der Leeuw in 1950, I am reluctant to see this as a dead end. On the contrary, I think it could be worthwhile to consider the possibilities of dealing scientifically with meaning, with the potential of science to expand beyond the bonds of rationalization. But then, a third way has to be found, one in which the quest for meaning does not involve the irrationalism of the »sensitive« way to understanding.
- 22 I would begin with questioning the very dichotomy that from the outset propounded this distinction between (subjective) understanding and (objective) explanation which has accompanied the search for meaning since the days of Dilthey. For Dilthey, the concept of *Verstehen* was not viewed as a goal but as a process, involving feeling etc. I think this distinction has to be rejected from the start, because what we arrive at at the end of an investigation is always, hopefully, an »understanding« of the phenomena, no matter if we see them as part of a natural order or an order of semantic meaning. And, conversely, there can never be a scientific understanding lest it is preceded by explanation. »Explanation« literally means: to make plain, or clear. It always involves a disclosure of structures and relations that somehow exist in a given context. To »understand« a phenomenon is to have »explained« any structure in and through which it exists.
- 23 Admittedly, this is more or less what Weber's »verstehende Soziologie« aimed at. But defining *Sinn* (meaning) as the intention of the acting subject (WEBER 1947<sup>3</sup>, esp. § 1.1), this approach—like the modern hermeneutics of Betti or Hirsch—remains caught with a subject-dependent method (»ask the believer!«), which must end up either with an infinite number of specific perspectives, or with abstracted generalizations, much like van der Leeuw's *Idealtypen*. Furthermore, the possibility must be considered that there simply is no clearly definable subjective intention—and this is not the least the case when it comes to religious actions: in the solemn prayer, in the traditional ritual, during the ecstatic trance. And, even if there is one, any claim by the subject to be the authoritative interpreter can be seriously called into question. It is a familiar fact that one and the same person can look at her/his actions in completely different ways from different positions in her/his life: why would one of them be more true than the other—or, for that matter, more true than that of the detached observer? There is a certain metaphysics in this way of thinking, even if just the old metaphysics of the subject as the source of meaning and truth. But, precisely because we hardly notice it, this metaphysics—as a discourse, as a way of thinking—has been so hard to escape. To transcend this pattern of thought would seem to imply a turn away from the most obvious object of study for any interpretive cultural science: the human being.
- 24 But is this not what the »explaining« sciences have already done in turning to the natural, e.g. the economical or biological causes of actions and behaviour patterns? Would this, therefore, be the »objective way to understanding« intended through the destruction of the »understanding-explaining« dichotomy? And, if that is so, and if

»understanding« can still claim to escape rationalization, why does scientific explanation still seem to disenchant its objects? Wherein does this fatal spell of rationalization lie, and how can we avoid it—if avoiding it is possible, at all?

- 25 To Weber, the intellectualization of the world, in which science is part, means that there are »principally no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation« (WEBER 1970, p. 139). What happens each time I start my car may be a mystery to me, but in principle, it is not one. »This means«, says Weber, »that the world is dis- enchanted.« Everything is predictable. Everything works after rules and structures that are long known, or could be known, if I only wished to learn them (WEBER 1970, p. 139). Or, to allude to a theme from Nietzsche (1966<sup>5</sup>, p. 248), everything taught from the past is already well known from the present, and even trivial.
- 26 But it is doubtful whether familiarity or predictability would be disenchanting as such. A ritual of magic may be just as predictable as the proceedings of logic. The fact that we »understand« something or learn to »come to terms« with it does not mean that the phenomenon inevitably becomes less captivating. Rather, it is a question of what we understand it as.
- 27 Here is the bifurcation where the traditionally »explaining« sciences and a hermeneutic phenomenology part and where the turn away from the subject as the traditional object of study to the *work* or *act itself*, may become productive. In actions, in language, in all the different kinds of cultural products that a society brings forth, relations between human beings and their world, their culturally situated being, come to expression and, thereby, into existence. As words, acts, things, they exist, and, as expressions, they speak. To listen to this speech means not to listen to an underlying »essence« which now comes into existence: this dichotomy, too, needs to be transcended. Speaking is not primarily an archetypal pattern or an ahistorical structure, but the historically situated human's relation to his/her existence, human understanding of the bordering world. What exists is, so to speak, already in itself »essential«.
- 28 This world of human beings, which is also the world of their works of poetry, of their edifices, and of public decorative art, harbour structures that are only in part collectively readable: they may also be exclusive. The complex symbolism of an Iron Age bracteate might not have been understood by all, even if everyone could admire the value of the workmanship. To some, it would be a riddle. Dug up by an archaeologist one and a half millennia later, the same piece of artistry is understood simply as a relic. If the archeologist is not also a historian of religions, his/her interpretations will be based on a completely different system of meaning, which cannot relate to, cannot »disclose« the world which, metaphorically speaking, lies hidden in the beaten metal.
- 29 Nevertheless, all of these ways of disclosing structures are »true«. This is not a matter of subjective relativism—what someone *thinks* that the object is—, but of asking what it is *factically*<sup>10</sup> in the context-determined way in which it exists and in which we deal with it. What is important is that this particular »way«, this »how«, is in a significant way always dependent on the historical world within which it exists. Some of these worlds, however, will always be able to open up for a thing more possible ways in which it can be. The axe, for instance, could be used as a hammer, the temple as a mall; but neither would exploit the full possibilities of either object. Here lies the importance of regaining the original world of a myth, a relic, a ritual object, of reconstructing its possible references: not



because this context will bring the only »true« meaning of the object of study, but because it will probably render the richest one.

- 30 Hence the need for the scholar to be a good listener, a good anthropologist, a good historian: only because of her/his knowledge of the culturally specific context might s/he be able to disclose the structures of the different worlds centered upon a specific object of study, *preserving*, thereby, the multivocality inherent in every cultural object, that is to say, its potential to mean different things to differently situated human beings.
- 31 A rationalized view of the same things would, on the other hand, mean that the phenomenon would be reduced to its *factual* existence, to what it *materially* is, to certain predicates or to the causal laws that govern its functioning. This second view seems to open up the possibility of a mutual understanding: we can »agree« on the things the bracteate is constituted. But at the same time, this view closes the factual world of the aristocrat who carried it, of the farmer who admired it, and of the archaeologist who unearthed it.
- 32 Rationalization, to Weber, meant a systematization of our world-view, a tendency to analyze everything in terms of unchangeable mechanistic laws. But there is a »magic« in every foreign system of thought, not only in religious ones, but also in chemistry and mathematics—different ways of thinking, new ways of existing and relating to existence. If there is a problem here, it is not the
- 33 »rationality« of those systems of explanation, but rather that their explanation always remains *factual*. Because, when all of existence is reduced to the causal workings of nature, the most important way of existing is forgotten: *human'sown*, namely, their understanding way of being in the world, which they express above all through language and which ultimately separates them from plants or stones. Access to this way of existing is access to the magic of life, a magic we cannot afford to lose.
- 34 Disenchantment, then, does not simply mean that things become predictable; that the workings of gods and demons are replaced by the workings of mechanics. That science »disenchants« means that it closes off worlds of meaning, even though it harbours the possibility of opening them.
- 35 But it is not only disciplines which explicitly and because of their particular field of interest deal with factual explanation that tends to neglect the existential worlds of meaning; the same thing also happens within the interpretive branches of science of religion, i.e., those branches that have human beings and their world of meaning as their explicit object. Eliade, for instance, in realizing the possibility of applying Otto's concept of »the sacred« to the study of religious traditions and rituals from all over the world, even believed himself to have the foundation of a »New Humanism« within his grasp (e.g., ELIADE 1961). But I am at a loss to see any substantial difference between, for example, the *interpretatio iudaica*—the Jews' interpreting other peoples' gods merely as forms of their own—and Eliade's search for »the sacred« as the universal expression of *homo religiosus*. Both views are in my eyes equally metaphysical. In both views, we are prevented from seeing how humans exists with their gods and see instead an ahistorical »essence« as fundamental.
- 36 The post-modern criticism of the comparative method within phenomenology of religion has been particularly severe on this point. It has been claimed that our working across borders essentially leads to what has simply been called a »colonization of the Other«,<sup>11</sup> where »understanding« really means the forcing of the foreign into familiar structures.



- 37 I would agree that the legacy of Eliade's »humanism« was an intellectual imperialism but this was not because its explanatory model would necessarily have been less »valid« than those of, say, structuralist anthropology or, to take a more far-fetched example, the principles of mathematics: we can certainly study »the sacred« in different cultures. But we must be aware that this ethnocentric approach closes other worlds of meaning; that it covers rather than dis-covers the Other in its unique historical being.
- 38 If humanism can be understood as an attempt to caringly preserve, to cultivate, or to explore the »humanity« of human beings, then a humanistic phenomenology of religion will not seek to understand human existence from a given essence: for instance, *humanitas* being interpreted as the *religiositas* of *homo religiosus*. Instead, it will seek to uncover the structures existing within the human activity or state of »being religious«, to reach a deeper understanding of their »religious world«, meaning a culturally specific, historically dependent structure of meaning ordered around phenomena we—as scholars in the Western tradition of »doing religion«—term »religious«.
- 39 In this activity, comparison is an irreplaceable tool, as in any activity involving the faculty of »understanding«. For instance, already the very young child develops the ability to tell the difference between animate and inanimate objects, which necessitates the ability to compare; and one of the most important conceptual activities of the human child already involves the process of classification (LAWSON 1996, p. 31). The ability to abstract, to compare, and to recognize similarity and difference between the content of objects and concepts belongs to the requisites for learning and using language: that is, for acquiring *meaning*.
- 40 The role of comparison, however, need not work only as a tool to establish universal laws or to find the cognate in the strange: it can help us see diversity; question our traditional categories and even, for a moment, makes us strange to *ourselves*, thus letting us redefine our existing concepts. It does not serve to find proofs for a given thesis, but instead helps us discover precisely those structures we could not have expected to find. Comparison in the post-modern study of religion helps us open up previously overlooked worlds of existence.
- 41 The starting-point of such comparison is always and inevitably similarity: but similarity is not identity. It is the responsibility of the scholar to determine from her/his knowledge of the emic sources, the language, and the cultural context whereof her/his object of study has been part whether the relationships hinted at by a comparative structure are really there also in the context of the phenomenon itself. Culturally specific knowledge thus remains the determining factor for the validity of her/his study and is what must articulate the material. But without raising her/his eyes above the margins of this cultural horizon, this study may well deteriorate into factual atomism and the material, for all that it has to say, remains silent.

## Summary

- 42 I have tried to indicate a way between the »imperialistic« tendencies of modern history of religions and the threat of arbitrary subjectivism in the post-modern alternative, where »the Other« is more often than not placed on the opposite side of an unbridgeable gulf. Both perspectives no doubt have good intentions: the former wants to understand, the latter to respect. But both perspectives also harbor an alienating aspect, closing the

possibility of understanding between worlds of meaning in this physical world we all have in common. My answer has been a return to the roots of hermeneutical phenomenology through Heidegger's notion of factual understanding and a method of comparison that does not seek to identify causal relations but whose aim is to reveal structures of meaning. My intention has certainly not been to claim that this is the best even less the only way of studying religious phenomena. I have only wanted to show a way in which science could escape rationalization without rendering it »unscientific« or subjectivist: a way in which *science can be enchanting*.

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## NOTES

1. A shorter version of this article was originally given as a paper at the 13th Students' Symposium on the Study of Religions in Marburg on May 27th 2006.
2. Weber's essay and his »sociology of music« are discussed by FEHER 1987.
3. 1st edition 1933. See esp. »Epilegomena«, pp. 768–798, which expound van der Leeuw's methodological-theoretical »program«.
4. Here, refers to Dilthey's »Erlebnis eines Strukturzusammenhanges«, as well as to Usener, who stated that, »Nur durch hingebendes Versenken in in diese Geistesspuren entschwundener Zeit, ... vermögen wir uns zum Nachempfinden zu erziehen; dann können allmählich verwandte Saiten in uns mit schwingen und klingen, und wir entdecken im eigenen Bewußtsein die Fäden, die Altes und Neues verbinden.« (V. D. LEEUEW 1956<sup>2</sup>, p. 773.)
5. E.g., the second branch of phenomenology of religion in ALLEN 2005<sup>2</sup>, p. 7086, dealing simply with »the comparative study and the classification of different types of religious phenomena.« See also GILHUS 1984, p. 26 f., who distinguishes the same branch as the »typological« counterpart to the »hermeneutic« school within the comparative (phenomenological) discipline of the history of religions.
6. So WIDENGREN 1942, who considers phenomenology of religion the synthetic and systematic complement to the analytical studies of »genetic« (homologue) problems within history of religion, although he mentions that, at his time, this purely classificatory »complement« was already beginning to reach the status of an independent branch.

7. »[en] allmän, allt omspännande fenomenologisk monografi.« WIDENGREN 1942, p. 22.—For an alternative ecological approach, see BURHENN 1997, pp. 116 ff., where the »mono- directional theories« of Hultkrantz are contrasted with the »functional theory« employed by, among others, Roy Rappaport.

8. See JAMES 1985. See also RYBA 1991, who ventures to find the »common semantic core« of the actual »phenomenologies«. Being of the opinion that the importance of Husserl's phenomenology for the study of religions has been exaggerated, Ryba makes his research an explicit attempt to find the extra-Husserlian roots of philosophical phenomenology, treating scientist and philosophers such as John Robinson, Friedrich Hegel, William Whewell, and C. S. Peirce.

9. The task is stated at p. 12. Lincoln's comparison covers cattle breeding cultures in East Africa and in the old Indo-Iranian area. In this way, Lincoln arrives at a point from which he is able to »explain« how similarities in each culture could develop without ever having influenced each other; see esp. pp. 172 ff.

10. The concept derives from Heidegger (e.g., HEIDEGGER 1963<sup>10</sup>, esp. § 38, p. 179; § 12, pp. 56 f.), to whose thinking I owe the main thoughts of this article. However, I have preferred not to use his philosophy more explicitly here, in part because of its complex nature, being very hard to »use« in a context where the basic concepts are not already familiar, and in part because I make no claim to follow it, only to be inspired by it.

11. In her article, How new is really the »new comparativism«? Difference, dialectics and world-making, Marsha A. Hewitt simply calls the »old comparativism« of the Eliadean school a »colonizing practice«. (HEWITT 1996.)

## ABSTRACTS

Writing dissertations, papers, or articles on a variety of religions, often foreign to us, sometimes even extinct, we more often than not find ourselves between two opposing theoretical camps, each deprecating the other, one being accused of »colonizing the Other,« the second of promoting a boundless relativism. Why does scientific explanation tend to »disenchant« its objects (Weber)? And what is the option, assuming we want to revert neither to the romantic *Nacherlebnis* of Dilthey, nor to the relativism inherent in much post-modernist work? I would like to speak about possible ways between these camps and will venture a third option, one that tries to evade the old and influential dichotomy of (subjective) interpretation and (objective) explanation.

Beim Verfassen von Abschlussarbeiten, Vorträgen oder Artikeln über Religionen, die uns oftmals fremd oder sogar ausgestorben sind, finden wir uns nicht selten zwischen zwei gegensätzlichen, sich einander ablehnenden Lagern wieder: das erste ist der »Kolonisierung des Fremden« angeklagt, das zweite wird beschuldigt, für einen grenzenlosen Relativismus zu werben. Weshalb neigen wissenschaftliche Erklärungen dazu, ihre Objekte zu »entzaubern« (Weber)? Und worauf würde unsere Wahl fallen, angenommen wir wollten weder in Diltheys romantisches »Nacherlebnis« noch in den in zahlreichen postmodernen Schriften inheränten Relativismus zurückfallen? Dieser Artikel bespricht Möglichkeiten zwischen beiden Lagern und will einen dritten Weg wagen, der versucht, die alte und einflussreiche Dichotomie der (subjektiven) Interpretation und (objektiven) Erklärung zu umgehen.

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