

substance, studies in methodology without analysis, and assertions which are contradictory and meaningless.

We must, then, make our own attempt at linking a phenomenology of religion to the work of Husserl. This linkage does not produce a "new style" of phenomenology of religion but a radical departure from everything which is known as phenomenology of religion. First, as we have seen, the category, or reality, of The Sacred will either be radically revised or rejected. This will take place as a result of a denial of things-in-themselves which remain unknown. In the second place, it will not hold metaphysical or theological assertions in suspension, as if it could remain neutral to them. Instead, in defining the meaning of a phenomenology of religion it might well provide us with critical limitations or restrictions which are necessary to prevent either metaphysics or theology from becoming substitutes for a phenomenological description of religion.

Third, such a linkage might overcome what can be called the "paradox of final agnosticism" which can be found at the center of all phenomenologies of religion as we know them. This paradox is our counterpart to the problem of ethnocentrism in the human sciences. It might also be called the "nirvana paradox" in which we describe a religion, cult, or myth and then admit that we do not know its meaning because it refers to The Sacred. Few of the phenomenologists I have read hold to this paradox for long. It inevitably leads to a destructive skepticism. It is usually overcome in one of two ways: either move to the social sciences, thereby increasing the threat of relativism and "reductionism" or move to subjectivism. The first choice swallows up the term "religion," the second choice vaporizes the term "history," in the phenomenologist's task of understanding and describing the history of religions.

A fourth feature which this linkage might focus on is a new analysis of myth and ritual as religious phenomena. Here Husserl's reflections on "expression," "signification," "object" and "symbol" might prove helpful. Most historians and phenomenologists of religion are no longer influenced by the notion that myths are statements about the origin of the world in some proto-scientific sense. It is not altogether clear, however, just what significance they do have as religious

expressions. If I have analyzed the "paradox of final agnosticism" correctly, the referent of myths as sacred remains unknown. A phenomenology of religion which went back to Husserl might be able to show that myths are expressions of, a) particular psychological experiences functioning as giving sense to expressions; b) that these expressions have a sense; and c) that they have a reference to an object. It might show furthermore, that the signification of myths a) indicates how the object is meant, b) implies reference to an object and c) indicates an object by virtue of its own signification. And it would show, I think, that this signification is not sensation but has a reference to an ideal object. This would follow from Husserl's own assertion that sensations are experienced but never perceived.

The question of whether myths have any cognitive value might be determined phenomenologically on the basis of whether myths as expressions have any possible sense at all. Phenomenologically speaking, this is a contradiction since an expression has signification, or it is not an expression. This kind of analysis would precede any consideration of the relation of myths to "reality" -- in a social or psychological sense -- i.e. as "real." It would suspend this question as a question from within the natural orientation.

The analysis of myths and rituals in the social sciences usually assumes that the meaning of myths and rituals is to be determined by their reference to social reality. (We shall take a close look at this assumption in the next two chapters.) Instead of accusing such analyses of being "reductionistic," a phenomenology of religion might provide a critique of the social science approach to myth and ritual by showing that myths and rituals as expressions of religion have a significance that cannot simply be reduced to sociological or psychological theories of meaning. The phenomenologist of religion, of course, would have to determine what this significance is and then show how it is given by intentional analysis, and how this analysis is more adequate than sociological and psychological explanations of myth and ritual. This is indeed a big order to fill. Let us remember, however, that the same kind of orders have been filled in other successful human sciences. I am thinking especially of structuralism, linguistics and other cognate disciplines.