

Lecture 1 Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion

Rev Dr Sahaya G. Selvam
Catholic University of Eastern Africa,
Nairobi



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Different Approaches to the study of Religion

THEOLOGY :

- Faith seeking understanding. A systematic formulation of religious beliefs.
- “A rational inquiry into the nature of God and religious truth and an organized, formalized body of opinions concerning God and his relationship to human beings, but usually from within a particular religion or religious structure.”

THEODICY :

- To demonstrate rationally the existence of God. (Usually apologetic- founder: Liebniz)

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION :

- Focuses on the essence of religion (what makes it be what it is most fundamentally) without getting lost in particularities of various religions.
- Tries to define religion
- Discusses the nature of religious truth.
- Subject matter: God, Religious Experience, Religious language (God-talk), Religious Truth etc
- Philosophers: Schleiermacher, Tillich, Kierkegaard, Ramsey,

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PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION :

- Using the methods and theories of psychology, it examines the elements that influence and how they influence human mind and behaviour.

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION :

- Examines the social nature of religion, for instance, its social functions. Examines those elements of religion that are related to the social nature of man; place of religion in the social structure...
- Also related to anthropology (examples of topics: rites of passage...); Communal aspects of religion (feasts, liturgy...)
- Thinkers: Durkheim, Peter Berger

Different Approaches to the study of Religion

COMPARATIVE RELIGION:

- Examines elements common to all religions, and things peculiar to particular religions, but always paying attention to details.
- Thinkers: Micea Eliade, Zaehner et al.

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Terms related to the study of Religion

- FIDEISM: A position that denies that it is possible to establish the truth or reasonableness of religious beliefs by unprejudiced arguments. This position stresses the commitment of faith in theological understanding.
- THEISM: Belief in a Supreme Being
- ATHEISM: Denial of and the non-belief in the existence of the Supreme Being
- AGNOSTICISM: An absence of belief or an indifference to the existence or the non-existence of the supreme being.
- DEISM: Holds that God created the universe but not active in what he created.

Terms related to the study of Religion

- PANTHEISM: Identifies God and World. World is God, God is everything.
- PANENTHEISM: God is present in the world. God embraces the world and lovingly seeks to lure all things to perfection/fulfilment.
- MONOTHEISM: Belief in a single divine Being,
- POLYTHEISM: Belief in Many gods
- HENOTHEISM: Belief in many Gods but at a given time only one God takes upper hand.
- ANIMISM: The belief that a spirit (or spirits) is active in aspects of environment.

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Phenomenology of Religion

Phenomenon

- A fact or situation that is observed to exist or happen, especially one whose cause is in question;
- The observable aspects of a happening; that is experienced.

Phenomenology

- The study of the structure of the experience (consciousness); distinct from philosophy that examines the ultimate reality – nature and content of being.

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Phenomenology

Phenomenology “is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.”

Smith, D. W. (2008). Phenomenology. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

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Phenomenology

- The historical movement of phenomenology was launched since 1900's by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, *et al.*
- The methods and characterization of the discipline were widely debated.

Smith, D. W. (2008). Phenomenology. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

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Phenomenology

- Basically, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity.
- The structure of these forms of experience typically involves what Husserl called “intentionality”, that is, the directedness of experience toward things in the world, the property of consciousness that it is a consciousness of or about something.

Smith, D. W. (2008). Phenomenology. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

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Bracketing & Epoch

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Phenomenology of Religion

- From the above discussion distinguish between
 - Sociology of Religion
 - Psychology of Religion
 - Philosophy of Religion
 - Phenomenology of Religion
- The phenomenology of religion studies the experiential aspect of religion, describing religious phenomena in terms consistent with the orientation of the worshippers, proceeding from the observable phenomena to the meaning that emerges from patterns of experiences and expressions.

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Religion versus spirituality

- **Religion:** Creed, Code, Cult, Community
- **Spirituality:** "a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, and for the highest of human potential" (Emmons, 1999/2003, p. 5).

Spirituality may not include faith in God



I am Rafiki!

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Spiritual-but-not-religious

- 40% of American respondents and 20% of German respondents identify themselves this way (Csof, Hood, & Keller, 2009).

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Religiosity & Spirituality

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| High Spirituality | 1 | 2 |
| | Spiritual-but-not-religious <i>Quest</i> Sacred or Secular Search for significance | Religious Spirituality <i>Intrinsic Religion</i> Sacred & Secular Search for significance |
| Low Spirituality | 3 | 4 |
| | Neither religious nor spiritual Secular Searching OR no search for significance | 'Empty' Religion <i>Extrinsic Religion</i> Sacred No search for significance |
| | Low Religiosity | High Religiosity |

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