

Si on fait appel au chamane, cette ouverture signifie-t-elle qu'il y aurait des pathologies non classiques, des pathologies mentales qui sortent des cas bien répertoriés ? Il semble donc judicieux que cet apport alternatif entre dans la culture thérapeutique de tous les pays.

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Why Is a Presuppositionless and in This Sense Objective Study of Religion Impossible?

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1 Preliminary Remarks

a) I am interested in the question of how to combine in the study of religion the fact that all understanding is essentially laden with prejudice with the postulate of the objectivism of knowledge. In philosophy and the sciences the requirement that knowledge be free of presuppositions dates back to Plato (Hühn 2001). Today many philosophical currents, like phenomenology and neopositivism in the 20th century, aspire to an absolute point of departure for cognition which would guarantee the objectivity and certainty of scientific statements and theories.

b) By the term “study of religion” (religion study, religious studies, science(s) of religion, religiology) I mean empirical (humanistic) research into religion (studies of religion in the narrower sense) together with philosophy of religion and theology of religion (studies of religion in the broadest sense). I reflect on the charge, typical for all humanities, that the inevitable presence of assumptions at the point of departure means that the study of religion

cannot afford an objective study of religious phenomena in a sense similar to the objectivity in empirical (natural) sciences. This charge says also that the religionist (religion scholar), being guided by certain cultural (Eurocentric), religious (Christiancentric), or ideological interests in interpreting religious phenomena, of necessity makes a distorting reduction of, firstly, religious phenomena to irreligious and, secondly, of phenomena from one (extra-European) area to phenomena in the range of his own (European) culture.

c) The presuppositions (assumptions) present at the stages of gathering empirical data, interpreting that data and understanding and building a synthesis in the form of a generalizing theory, are, among others: 1) the common sense, religious, moral, and political beliefs held by the religious studies' specialist by virtue of custom or authority; 2) the researcher's desires, feelings, and emotional and volitional attitudes; 3) research preferences and ways of assessing phenomena; 4) theoretical presuppositions serving as an interpreting factor for empirical data which are of a purely speculative character since they do not come from experience, for example, a priori notions or other mental constructions. In what follows, however, by presuppositions I mean, above all, propositions (statements) assumed to be *prima facie* true by the scholar and which can be tested only secondarily. Contemporary philosophy of science mentions some important functions of presuppositions in science: in particular the heuristic function in posing questions and advancing hypotheses and the systematic function in explaining the stated phenomena and justifying statements.

2 The Study of Religion and the Problem of Objectivity

Ensuring the objectivity of scientific research into religious phenomena and of the results achieved was a major concern of all scholars from the early days of the study of religion in the 19th century. Since the first chairs of religion studies came into being mainly in (Protestant) theology faculties or in the place of chairs of theology, the objectivity of religious studies was understood at first mainly as liberation from the theological notions and theses of Christian theology. Success was only partial.

Although the need for an objective approach to the subject matter was often and ostentatiously proclaimed, particularly by atheist scholars, the deeply personal and ideological engagement of researchers – both declared believers and nonbelievers – is visible from the very beginning. In particular, in the

case of the truth of religion generally or of an individual religion, we can see nearly empirically how personal religious involvement – i.e., the scholar's acceptance or rejection of the existence of a transcendent dimension of the examined phenomena – had great influence on the results of the investigation.

From the beginning there was a tendency to harness the results of the study of religion to theses outside their proper scientific area. The problem in question is the well-known conflict associated with the simultaneous realization by a science of cognitive, ethical, and pragmatic values. The history of religion studies provides many examples of the ideological and instrumental involvement of scholars seeking in the study of religion a tool either for the criticism of religion, or for the defense of the truth of his or her own religion or of religion in general. For example, researchers of the religion of primitive peoples expected, in the spirit of evolutionism, that their findings "would be a mortal blow to Christianity. They thought that if they managed to explain 'primitive religion' as a kind of intellectual aberration and illusion resulting from emotional stress or the given religion's social functions, it would also be possible to challenge and reject higher forms of religion" (Evans-Pritchard 1969: 15). Some varieties of the psychology of religion (Freudianism) also turned out to be destructive for the religious attitude. The opposite also occurred, when the study of religion (W. Schmidt) pointed out the in some respects exceptional cultural and social position of a specific religion or religion in general.

It is obvious that the theological, philosophical, and generally ideological presuppositions of the scholar of religion can exert and indeed many times have exerted influence on the way religious phenomena are seen and examined. This influence was positive when it led to a better (clearer) perception of phenomena which atheist scholars of religion could not see. It was negative when it led to a distorted view of religion. Atheist scholars of religion are sometimes accused of a lack of sensitivity to the specificity of religious phenomena and, therefore, of being unable to recognize them accurately, regardless of the sophistication of their research methods, particularly when confronted with the religious experience of people who regard the transcendent moment of religion as real. Agnostic scholars of religion, in turn, accuse theistic specialists of having ready replies about religious phenomena before they have asked the proper questions and carried out the required research.

The charge of essentially prejudging the issues and being ideological partial and, therefore, unob-

jective and unscientific has been levelled mainly by atheist scholars against scholars privately in favor of a religious attitude. This accusation was valid in the case of some scholars who – even if now and then permeated with the best intentions to defend the cultural or absolute values of religion – interpreted phenomena one-sidedly in favor of theism. What is psychologically interesting is the fact that the agnostic (secular) scholars of religion were themselves deeply convinced of the freedom of their own views from nonscientific assumptions, as if the atheist attitude somehow automatically, so to speak, guaranteed objectivity and being scientific.

3 The Ideal of Objectivity

From an epistemological point of view a proposition (statement) is considered objective if its truth does not depend on the subject or culture that pronounces it. It is important (Kuhn 1985; Rorty 1995) to distinguish two notions of objectivity: a) an “objective” one – as the acceptance of a proposition which represents things as they indeed are; thus objectivity here means realism. Determining what really exists is the goal of metaphysics (if it is regarded as a credible type of knowledge) and of empirical sciences (as all kind of positivists see it). The real existence of an object, phenomenon, or state of affairs is established as a result of a kind of sensory contact with reality, which presents the phenomena to the mind as they indeed are; b) as intersubjectivity – the acceptance of certain statement as a result of the agreement of rational discussants, who approve them as true, when no rational reason to further doubt them exists.

Religion studies initially owed its ideal of objectivity as presupposition-free cognition (the “from the outside” approach) to the 19th-century positivist and scientific concept of science, which was shaped on the model of the natural sciences. According to this conception, the Enlightenment’s notion of science and the Christian religion are seen as two competing forces, each in its own way promising human beings a kind of “salvation.” It was also accepted that only the academic (scientific) approach, and more precisely that of the natural sciences, ensured a neutral and hence – it was thought – supracultural point of view, unavailable to theology and philosophy, for example.

According to the projected ideal of knowledge it was demanded, above all, that the studies of religion intentionally refrain from any theological and philosophical statements. Its methodological autonomy was understood in the sense that it should not pre-

suppose any propositions from religion (theology) or philosophy. Those who regarded the theological approach as purely religious and hence unscientific espoused the otherwise methodologically sound principle of not taking one religion (here: Christianity) as a measure of all other religions. Only a stance “from the outside,” free from all cognitive presuppositions, can allow a proper, i.e., objective, cognition of religious phenomena.

In the 20th century, the demand that research into religion be free from presuppositions was made according to the motto of “scientific objectivism” (Rescher 1997), this time conditioning it to the methods and techniques of social science research, mainly psychology and sociology. Logical empiricists, as well as phenomenologists like Husserl (2012), were nearly unanimous in saying that the cognitive subject – at least in the initial stages of investigation, seen as the basis of scientific knowledge – should be neutral (“pure”), i.e., free from all cognitive and noncognitive prejudices and open to the purely passive perception of the phenomena examined. For the sake of methodological objectivity, especially in its standard version (Walczak 2006), they accepted that objective (reliable) knowledge could only come from an impartial (here: religiously disengaged) researcher with no presuppositions. This is because the aim of the scholar is not a construction of the world but the discovery of “reality in itself,” and this occurs when the scholar takes cognizance passively, neutralizing in this way all noncognitive and nonrational factors (which were assumed to distort reality), mainly in the form of beliefs, pejoratively labelled superstitions (prejudice) in the Enlightenment tradition and more positively called *Vorurteil* in philosophical hermeneutics.

In order to ensure objectivity in the study of religious phenomena, 20th-century philosophers of sciences of religion proposed the pursuit of an attitude of “methodological atheism” (Rudolph 1984) or of “methodological agnosticism” (Berger 1997) in respect to the transcendent, supernatural dimension of religion: here the mind admits that it is not able to resolve the truth or the falseness of religious statements (Grabner-Haider 1993: 204). Smart (1973: 57), who also recommends that religious phenomena be studied from the position of methodological agnosticism – the suspension by the researcher of his or her own judgment (opinion) about the existence or nonexistence of God as a condition of objective research – later notes, however, that in the investigation of religion the presence of the idea of God in human experience and beliefs must be somehow taken into account (Smart 1984: 374).

4 The Contemporary Situation

The thus outlined extreme concept of objectivity along the Aristotelian-Lockean lines of the *tabula rasa*, i.e., of the mind filled up with purely experiential data, cannot be put into practice, as it turned out, even in the natural sciences. The opposing view states that an involved mind learns better than one free from all assumptions because, among other things, it has a greater sensitivity to the phenomena being examined. The process of experience is never completely free from any theoretical elements because it is they that decide the course of observation and the way the collected empirical data is interpreted in the construction of a scientific theory. Critics of the neutralized concept of objectivity call it the “spectator theory of knowledge” (Dewey 1938; Dewey and Bentley 1949), the “copy theory of language” (Quine 1970), the “myth of the given” (Sellars 1963), and the “view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986). They (e.g., Rorty 1995) accuse its adherents of incorrectly viewing the mind as a mirror reflecting faithfully the world as it “really” is. Kuhn (1985: 448 ff.) emphasizes (in the vein of Peirce 1940) the decisive function of a competent scientific community (“community of inquirers”) in evaluating, testing, and justifying scientific theories.

As philosophical hermeneutics states, the “principle of the empty head,” if carried to its radical extreme – here, meaning not using the understanding of one’s own culture in order to understand other religions (cultures) – would in practice mean that people from one culture (religion) would not be able to understand people from another culture (religion). In Gadamer’s view (1960), every understanding is relative to the horizon of some culture, usually that of the subject, and constitutes a natural point of reference for understanding the world. A total neutralization of this preliminary understanding, which is associated with evaluation, is not only impossible but harmful, since it makes any understanding and agreement impossible. This is because the truth of any statement is always stated on the basis of some pre-understanding (Bronk 1988).

Methodological (and social) constructivism – the epistemological position that assumes cognition is simultaneously construction of the described reality – also treats “scientific facts” as theoretical constructs that are the result of what, on the one hand, the subject and, on the other hand, the examined phenomenon bring to the cognition of the “objective” world. From the constructivist perspective “scientific facts” are the product of a scientific theory and as scientific theories change, so too do the “facts.” Therefore, what is called a “scientific fact”

is a “reality” already interpreted at the stage of scientific observation and description, since these activities are from the beginning determined by the conceptual apparatus applied. From this perspective culture – and along with it religion – appears as a world of intentional constructs (beings) created – i.e., called into existence – by man, though their continued existence is no longer connected “with individual subjects” (Karpiński 2006: 41).

Cultural (scientific) facts can be simple or complex. Religion as a cultural fact belongs to complex facts that extend over time and space, i.e., embrace different ages and geographically dispersed areas. Although it is possible to attribute to science the task of establishing the facts, science does not do so once and for all, as continued cognitive processes can lead to the rejection of an earlier accepted scientific theory and thus to the rejection of the facts it stated and explained. Therefore, Einstein could claim that (objective) truth in science means whatever stands the test of time.

Expressions of the objective, scientific attitude as it is represented today in the philosophy of science, include the following: the combined requirements of rationality – the demand that a reason (cause) be given for every statement – and of methodological objectivity – the demand that statements be intersubjectively meaningful and verifiable by every rational subject (scholar). Therefore, anti-foundational contemporary philosophy replaces the notion of a “source of proof” with the notion of a consensus in respect to what we recognize as evidence. Seen this way, objectivity is not faithfulness to something that is not human; it is intersubjectivity (Rorty 1995: 21).

5 The Case of Marxist Studies of Religion

An interesting case of a strange understanding of objectivity in the study of religion (and a kind of “methodological schizophrenia”) is the Polish (and more widely the so-called Soviet bloc’s) approach to religion by Marxist scholars, who, on the one hand, launched a program of studying religion without presuppositions and at the same time admitted that they were basing their research into religious phenomena on the philosophical assumptions of Marxist ontology, epistemology, and axiology. According to their approach, religion studies should be a secular science, independent of theology and apologetic tendencies. However, at the same time it should be an empirical and historical science which does not exclude evaluations and value judgments and whose theoretical structure is determined by the catego-

ries of dialectical and historical materialism (Keller 1988). It is clearly ideological when, e.g., Karpiński and Nowaczyk (1988: 42) state that the theoretical foundations of Marxist studies of religion – found in works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other outstanding theoreticians of dialectical and historical materialism – give a precise and correct interpretation of religion, formulate the principal methodological directives for the study of religion, and determine the conditions of the theoretical-methodological structure of a theory of religion.

And so after the Second World War for almost fifty years religion studies in Poland were used as a tool to shape people's worldview and "socialist awareness." They were used in an ideological fight and as political power in the clash "of opposing worldviews: one idealistic in its Catholic form and the other materialist, associated with a socialist system of values and based on Marxist philosophy" (Keller 1988: 7). As the result of a simply irrational dislike of religion scholars, who were believers, Marxist scholars of religion distinguished between secular and confessional study of religion, a distinction unusual outside countries of the former Soviet bloc. So it was with exaggerated optimism, therefore, that the "Polish Religious Studies Society" – which had after all in the socialist reality to fulfil a *de facto* atheisizing function – described itself as the first scientific society of this type in Poland, gathering scientists "interested in an objective, non-confessional study of religion in all its historical and systematic aspects" (Tyloch 1990: 7).

6 Eurocentrism and Christian-Centrism in Religion Studies

The charge of Eurocentrism sometimes comes up in the context of discussions on the objectivity of the classical study of religion in the past. The description and explanation of non-European religious phenomena in terms of categories developed on the ground of European culture and the Christian religion is seen as an expression of Eurocentrism. It concerns the well-known principle of *interpretatio Graeca* or *interpretatio Romana* – that is, of characterizing and interpreting new religious phenomena (here of the ancient world) and of foreign *numina* with the names of familiar gods (here: Greek or Roman) (Lanczkowski 1978: 2). What is criticized is the fact that the conceptual apparatus used by European specialists in the study of religion does not have a truly universal character as it is tied up with European and Christian understandings of religion and culture (Oosten 1985: 235).

Indeed, studies of religion originating in Christian theology and philosophy somehow naturally took over the Christian understanding of religion. Many notions used by scholars of religion were coined directly on the basis of Christianity, especially of Protestantism. Others have their beginning in Enlightenment understandings of religion (Sharpe 1987: 85). When the religious ideas and beliefs of non-European religions were studied, they were somehow automatically interpreted in European and Christian categories. The never-ending discussions of the presence of the term and the concept of religion in non-European cultures are an example of the problems caused by applying European notions. This is essentially the question of whether religion, as it is generally understood in European studies of religion, is really such a cultural universal as is mostly held ("maybe there are cultures which do not know or have religion?")

The aim of ensuring a knowledge, that is at least "relatively" objective (Wach 1962: 39) in the humanities, philosophy, and theology, will always be more difficult than in the natural sciences and will be attained differently. Among other reasons, this is because the results of humanities research are in a closer relationship with the general intellectual, political, and cultural development of the society in which the scholar lives. Thus, greater methodological control and discipline will always be needed in those sciences, in order to compensate for the deficiency of empirical (observational) knowledge. A greater logical culture is also necessary in situations when – sensitive to predominant paradigms (today: postmodernist or cognitivist) and other intellectual "fashions" – the humanities (and studies of religion) are easily influenced by different ideologies (e.g., of "political correctness") and by the multiple pressures coming from political and financial decision-makers.

7 The Definition of Religion as a Criterion

Attempts to define religion clearly show the difficulties associated with the demand that there be no presuppositions. No scholar of religion can work without presuppositions at the point of departure even if only because he/she must determine the scope (field) of research. Religious data are not collected mechanically and universal religious theories do not come into being as the result of straightforward, generalizing induction, but among others in the light of earlier hypotheses and interpreting categories. Furthermore, without a preliminary determination (understanding) of religious phenomena

the religious studies specialist will not be able to distinguish religious phenomena from nonreligious (irreligious), *para-*, *crypto-*, or *pseudo-religious* phenomena. Nor will he/she be able to distinguish phenomena that for functional reasons (for example) are regarded as religion, but in fact are not. Thus, atheist scholars evidently failed to notice religious phenomena that other researchers could see clearly. In addition, they accused the latter of seeing what they wanted to see. Alas, since the *sacrum-profanum* distinction has a cultural and conventional character, the borders between both will never be sharp. In religious experience (and observation) the scholar's own personality also takes the floor since he/she has many connections with his/her epoch, dominating ideology, own social class, and currently propagated views. This all means, therefore, that he/she will also not be able to attain complete impartiality and in this sense will be unable to purely objectively evaluate empirical material gathered (Sharpe 1987: 84).

When undertaking research, therefore, the scholar of religion must know in advance what he/she actually wants to study and where to search for data constituting an answer to his/her questions. He/she draws this early (and hence a priori) knowledge from informal contemporary knowledge, from his/her education to date, and from the environment in which he/she works (*Lebenswelt*). Every culture brings with itself a determined – evaluative – view of religion and so equips the scholar with ready-made schemes for understanding religious phenomena (Sharpe 1987: 85). This knowledge finds its expression in the assumptions about the object examined and the hypotheses that further research will confirm or deny. Though this knowledge may be paltry and indistinctive, true or false, it orients the research and even decides its results in advance. On this provisional definition of religion (religious phenomena) depends initially not only what will be researched and how, but also the meaning of all the terms used. In the course of inquiry this initial definition should become more and more precise and knowledge about the studied subject richer and richer, leading to the confirmation or rejection of the primary assumptions about the researched phenomenon.

8 Accusations of Relativism and Reductionism

Accusations are made by – among others – phenomenologists of religion that religious phenomena and religion itself are relativized in the context of the presence of prejudgments in empirical research into

religion. Critics see relativizing tendencies where the study of religion, failing to perceive the uniqueness of religious phenomena, treats religion as just one of many phenomena that together make up the cultural wealth of mankind. Also, for the reader of books on religious studies the information that his confessed and practiced religion is culturally neither the only nor the most important one can be a negative experience. Similarly it is so when scholars of religion describe and explain the student's own religion (Christianity), which for many reasons is a superior and ultimate value for him/her, as one of many cultural phenomena.

Alike accusation, of reductionism, states that the academic approach to religion reduces or even omits what is for every religion essential, namely its transcendent and supernatural dimension. Theories of religion which omit the truth aspect of religion as well as definitions that do not take into account the assumed specificity of religious phenomena or negate it directly are regarded as reductive. The existential and truth dimension of religion negates, for example, the “methodological atheism” postulated for the sake of the ideal of scientism. As can be seen, the accusation of reductionism assumes that religious phenomena are such a specific object of the inquiry that the methods of empirical sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, or history of religion) are inadequate for apprehending their ontological peculiarity (Penner 1984: 176 ff.).

The methodology of sciences defines two connected kinds of reductionism: the ontological and the epistemological. The first refers to levels (spheres, fields) of reality; the second to ways of explaining them. Let us first say that every scientific procedure is in some way relativistic (relativizing) and reductive because it is limited (fragmentary and aspectual), choosing its objects out of the entirety of other phenomena and analyzing them from a certain, selected point of view. It is also in the nature of empirical investigation that in trying to understand a complex phenomenon, the researcher has to appeal to its internal structure and to the properties of its components, accepting that phenomena on the lower levels, regarded as more basic, explain the properties (*epiphenomena*) of phenomena on higher levels. However, the accusation of reductionism can be justified in the case of those scholars, who – extrapolating ideologically from their results – state, for example, on the grounds of empirical sciences that the methods they apply exhaust the whole of the examined religious phenomenon and that nothing exists apart from what was established in this way. And so we have a fundamental question: can a religion scholar simply globally deny the existence of

moments of religious phenomena other than those accessible to his empirical research without venturing beyond – in a methodologically unauthorized process – the limits and possibilities of empirical science? I leave this question open for a possible discussion.

9 Tentative Conclusions

Even if the earlier comments do not remove all doubts about the presence of prejudgments and the objectivity of the study of religion, it is worth making some essential concluding remarks.

(1) It is the obligation of the student of religion to neutralize through research the possibly distorting influence of assumption on the view of religion. On the other hand, to have an absolutely objective standard of understanding (knowledge) which would and could serve as a neutral point of reference for all scholars of religion seems unrealistic.

In the humanities generally, which deal with the “spiritual” – the axiological and normative dimension of man and his products (culture) – a total philosophical and ideological neutrality is for many reasons impossible, if only because humanist facts usually have determinants incomparable to “neutral” facts in the (natural) sciences (Kamiński 1992: 297). The declared freedom from presuppositions of the phenomenology of religion has a specific character, as do such approaches (e.g., Wach 1962) that see the empathizing *Einfühlen* of the scholar with the examined phenomena as a necessary precondition of understanding religious phenomena. Additionally, the situation is complicated by the fact that in different religious disciplines we have to do with different standards of objectivity. Objectivity is different in empirical studies of religion, philosophy of religion, and theology of religion.

(2) In the past, scholars of religion who had formed their beliefs about religion under the influence of religion and theology were accused of prejudging matters and hence being unscientific. It is of course problematic to accept as legitimate the existence of either a theistic or an atheist study of religion, because this would threaten the very nature of the science as a cognitive, rational, and socially institutionalized endeavor, which seeks to arrive at an intersubjectively controlled truth about religious phenomena. In doing science – describing and explaining phenomena – every kind of religious behavior, whether from purely religious or ideological motives, is improper.

At most there are scholars who admit privately to having access to a certain kind of religion (as oth-

ers have an agnostic or atheistic attitude) and who perhaps find inspiration (a heuristic dimension) for their studies in (their own) religion. But to omit the immanent contents and the transcendent value of revealed religions in the very study belongs somehow to the very nature of empirical sciences, which do not have after all any experimental access to the supernatural.

(3) Accusing a religion scholar of practicing confessional (religious) study of religion because in private life he/she declares himself/herself to be a believer is fundamentally groundless. Personal involvement in matters of religion does not automatically rule out an objective study of religion. Similarly, being an atheist does not automatically guarantee a more objective – i.e., free from any presuppositions – approach to religious phenomena. We know already that so-called scientific objectivity is also guided by its own interests (Habermas 1973).

(4) As long as religious phenomena are studied as a factor of social life, it does not make much difference whether the scholar of religion is a theist or an atheist, because both should be guided by cognitive interests and take into account only what they see (observe). But although religion is a part of social life for both, for the believer it can have an additional dimension. When, however, believers and nonbelievers try to go beyond mere observation, each of them will probably go a different way. The atheist researcher will likely look for a biological, psychological, or sociological theory of religion to explain the – in his view – illusions associated with the religious worldview. The believer will try to understand how and why people imagine the (transcendent) reality of religion in one way rather than another (Evans-Pritchard 1969: 121).

(5) There are no serious reasons why it should not be possible to investigate according to general standards of objectivity – accepted by a certain community of inquirers – religious traditions other than one’s own (Wiebe 1981: 2). This is because the problem is not the making of certain assumptions at the point of departure, but rather – as was said – the neutralizing of their influence where they can interfere with an objective view of the observed religious phenomena. The key is to preserve from the very beginning an open attitude, i.e., not to establish the results in advance and so to act critically, taking into account among other things the possibility that further research may force scholars to change earlier accepted substantial or methodological assumptions and force a correction of earlier results.

(6) Since the study of religious phenomena usually goes hand in hand with a personal and deep engagement on the part of both researchers and

readers of their works – as nobody works in an axiological vacuum –, to demand a totally nonprejudiced and hence simply objective approach to religion is naive (Stolz 1988: 39). The scholar always remains more or less consciously a member of a complex manifold, called culture, in which he/she is brought up and in which his/her own research tradition is deeply rooted. It is possible, however, to agree with the opinion of Smart (1973: 158) that the study of religion *per se* must at the point of departure neither presuppose nor negate the existence of a supernatural object of religion (an Absolute, a God), i.e., it does not have to be connected with either a fideistic or atheistic (gnostic) attitude.

(7) If a heuristic and hypothetical function is assigned to those assumptions of the scholar that he/she owes to his/her culture and education, the accusation of Eurocentrism and Christian-centrism loses its force. Within his/her culture the scholar encounters religious phenomena and signs of religiosity at almost every step. In addition, he/she generally understands them thanks to the understanding of religion (and culture) which he/she moulded for himself/herself during his/her earlier, more or less intense contacts with the sphere of the sacred. Culture (Western) also provides him/her with common ideas about the origin, the nature, and the many roles (functions) of religion. This informal knowledge is mostly unsystematic, weakly justified, and sometimes contradictory or even false. Here is a space for the many and different studies of religion and their search for objective, i.e., a systematized and well justified knowledge about religious phenomena, even though this can be a very difficult task.

(8) Since something like absolute objectivity in the study of religion seems impossible – for what exactly would it mean after all? – the role of methodological discussions as a meeting point for diverse, competing views is important (Sharpe 1987: 84). The presence of prejudgments, characteristic of humanist theories, demands that theories of religion propagated on the basis of religious disciplines be examined with a critical eye. Any discussions of their cognitive value should go to the very philosophical basis. Taking into account only one aspect of religion or, even worse, negating the existence of other aspects, must as a rule lead to a narrowed or even false image of religion in general or of the religion discussed.

(9) As a practical rule it should be accepted that the duty of the scholar is to overcome the narrowing particularism of his initial point of view. How far he/she succeeds in overcoming his/her own culture and its ways of seeing religion depends on, among other things, the degree to which he/she surrenders

his/her opinions to the judgement of other scientists to give them an intersubjective sense and verifiability. He/she should realize that one of the conditions for an appropriate (increasingly objective) view of religious phenomena is the taking into account of the restrictions of one's own perspective (Oosten 1985: 232): a skilled suppression of one's own aversions (atheist scholars) or defensive mechanisms (believers).

(10) In the discussion of the ways of objectivizing assumptions in the study of religion it is worth keeping in mind the unity of human nature – accepted by many philosophers – and to see the structure of the human mind, common to all people, as a basis for a common, intersubjective view of the world (Koj 1993: 55). It is human nature that is responsible for the diversity of cultural artefacts and the plasticity of human behavior in the field of religion. It is possible to accept (as a presupposition) that the purpose of the study of religion(s) is to look for cultural and religious universals which exist because the different modifications (versions) of culture share a basis in the form of a single dynamic human nature, not understood just biologically or even culturally but metaphysically. This way the differences between cultures and religions can be explained by referring to differences in the specific historical, social, political, cultural, and economic conditions (Carrithers 1994: 15 ff.).

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