

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

**RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND THE MUNDANE-SACRED:
A NEGLECTED AREA OF PHILOSOPHY**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES**

**IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN RELIGION**

THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

BY

JONAH AVRIEL COHEN

LONDON, ENGLAND

SUMMER 2004



ProQuest Number: 10731432

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10731432

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

This dissertation belongs within the field of the philosophy of religion. The thesis proposes three basic ideas. First, there is a *kind* of religious language and religious experience disregarded in philosophy: the kind of religious language that is philosophically examined is called “mundane-sacred judgment;” the mental state behind that language is called “religious appreciation.” Second, these phenomena are relevant to the philosophy of religion and therefore should not be ignored. Third, the philosophical model by which these two linguistic and experiential facts of religion are explicated is *aesthetics*.

Just as metaphysics often supplies the concepts and logical problems associated with, say, the philosophical study of mystical or prayer experience, so it will be shown that the philosophy of aesthetics provides the ideas and difficulties connected with the philosophical study of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation. To show this, the dissertation draws analogies between, on the one hand, “mundane-sacred judgment” and “aesthetic judgment”, and, on the other hand, “religious appreciation” and “aesthetic appreciation.” It also shows that, like aesthetics, the goals of the philosophical study of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation are (1) to elucidate the *meaning* of this language and (2) to characterize its associated experience.

Because the primary aim of the thesis is to suggest the existence of a neglected religious language and experience, and how they are relevant to philosophy, no single interpretation of them is proffered. Accordingly, the thesis looks at a broad

constellation of philosophical ideas – ranging from ancient philosophy, to phenomenology, to analytic philosophy – and how those differing ideas might apply to this subject. Throughout, then, the reader is encouraged and challenged to consider various philosophical interpretations of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation. In this way, the field of philosophical debate underlying these religious issues is delineated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Giving thanks is poor remuneration for the support I have been fortunate to receive while researching and writing this dissertation. I am especially grateful to Dr. Cosimo Zene, supervisor and friend, whose thoughtfulness and generosity during a trying transplant surgery will not be forgotten, to say nothing of his prudent and gentle guidance during these years of research.

I would also like to put forward a general thank you to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, to each teacher and fellow student for whom I have been blessed to meet over the last eight years, particularly (and in no order): Professor Paul Gifford, Dr. Tamra Wright, Professor John Hinnells, Professor Alexander Piatigorski, Dr. Judith Coney, Mr. Simon Weightman, Dr. Julia Leslie, Professor Christopher Shackle, Dr. Taduesz Skorupski, Dr. Bulcsu Siklos, Gurpreet Parmar, John Scott, Sara Quinn, Raha Debash Saber, and our ever-generous and longsuffering departmental secretary, Maryjayne Hillman.

A heartfelt thanks also goes to Henri Kleiman who, when not busy cheering me up with a cigar, whisky and his magnificent wit, spent many a night looking over my work and steering me away (gently) from numerous philosophical and stylistic blunders.

I should also point out my tremendous debt to Roger Scruton and the recently departed Richard Wollheim, two model custodians of England's eminent philosophical heritage, whose ingenious work in the philosophy of art inspired the philosophy of religion found in these pages. I would also like to thank the eminent classicist and historian, Victor Davis Hanson, for his kind correspondence over the past two years.

Above all, profound gratitude must be expressed to my family, in particular, my uncle, Professor Irun Cohen of the Weizmann Institute, and my grandfather Samuel T. Cohen, a learned *Torah* scholar, for *asking* to read this dissertation and offering me their deep insights; my grandfather, Samuel A. Copie for his insights on life that contributed to this paper; and, of course, my grandmothers, Sara W. Cohen and Joan V. Copie, sister Rachel and my parents, especially my mother, whose hard work made this doctoral dissertation possible, as with all the goods of my life.

Chicago (Summer, 2004)

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
INTRODUCTION	9

PART I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES OF MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION

Chapter 1.	RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT	18
	Demarcating Religious Appreciation and Experience.....	18
	Three Basic Characteristics of Mundane-Sacred Judgment	22
	Other Examples of Mundane-Sacred Judgment	25
	Four General Features of Religious Appreciation And Mundane-Sacred Judgment.....	27
	Mundane-Sacred Judgment and Aesthetic Judgment	29
Chapter 2.	DEFINING THE MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECT.....	33
Chapter 3.	PHILOSOPHICAL GOALS FOR ANALYZING RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT	41
Chapter 4.	SALIENT ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT.....	45
	The Distinct Experience of Religious Appreciation and Its Language	45
	Objectivism and Subjectivism	55
	Arguments in Favour of Subjectivism	57

	Problems with Subjectivism	59
Chapter 5.	CONCEPTS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECTS	69
	The Problem of Representation	70
	The Problem of Expression.....	74
	The Problems of Interpretation and Intention.....	78
	Further Problems with Scripture, Myth and Religious Drama	85
	The Problem of Priority	90
	The Problem of Ontology	91
Chapter 6.	GENERAL PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES	94
	The Mundane-Sacred Object as Mimesis	95
	The Mundane-Sacred as Form	96
	The Mundane-Sacred as Expression.....	97
	The Mundane-Sacred as Language.....	100
Chapter 7.	CONCLUSION.....	103

PART II

AN EXAMPLE OF A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION: MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT AS EXPRESSION, NOT DESCRIPTION, AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AS AN AESTHETIC, NOT METAPHYSICAL, EXPERIENCE

Chapter 8.	WHAT IS A “SACRED OBJECT”	106
Chapter 9.	WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CALL A MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECT AN “END IN ITSELF”	116
Chapter 10.	THE IDENTITY OF THE MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECT	126

Chapter 11.	IS THERE A RELIGIOUS PERCEPTION WHICH PROVIDES MEANING TO MUNDANE- SACRED PREDICATES?	135
Chapter 12.	ARE MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENTS DESCRIPTIVE DECLARATIVE SENTENCES?	157
Chapter 13.	HOW CAN A MUNDANE-SACRED PREDICATE HAVE A NON-DESCRIPTIVE MEANING?	167
Chapter 14.	A SUMMARY OF WHERE WE HAVE BEEN.....	180
Chapter 15.	THE RESPONSE-RESEMBLANCE THEORY OF RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION.....	182
Chapter 16.	A PROBLEM FOR THE RESPONSE-RESEMBLANCE THEORY: THE INTENTIONALITY DILEMMA.....	190
Chapter 17.	INTENTIONALITY WITHOUT BELIEF	196
Chapter 18.	REASONING IN RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION: THE RATIOCINATION OF COMPARISON.....	203
Chapter 19.	ANOTHER PROBLEM: THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS PARTICULARITY.....	206
Chapter 20.	YET ANOTHER PROBLEM: THE LANGUAGE DEPENDENT THEORY	217
Chapter 21.	BELIEF AND CONTEMPLATION	223
Chapter 22.	UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGINATION: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS	234
	The Varieties of Imagination	235
	Predicative and Adverbial/Adjectival Imagining.....	235
	Picturing.....	237
	Picturing and the Will	240
	The Rationality of Imagination.....	245
	Some Features of Picturing Images	251
	The Intensity of Picturing Images.....	253
	The Duration of Picturing Images.....	253

	The Experiential Component of Picturing Images.....	254
	Images and the Language of Sensory Experience	255
	Picturing and Imagination.....	255
	Perceptual Imagining	258
	Some Features of Aspect Seeing.....	262
	Picturing Images and Aspect Perceptiveness.....	267
	The Physical to the Mental Relation.....	268
	The Mental to the Physical Relation.....	269
	A Derridian View of Aspect Seeing	271
	The Varieties of Seeing-As.....	274
	Aspect-Perceptiveness and Thought	276
	Conclusion	280
Chapter 23.	IMAGINATIVE THOUGHT AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION.....	281
Chapter 24.	EMOTION AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION	288
Chapter 25.	THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION	295
	Religious Terms.....	296
	The Quality of Enjoyment and Passionate Interest.....	299
	The Quality of Normativity	300
	The Qualities of Uniqueness and Ultimacy	303
	The Sensuous Quality	305
	Religious-Based Terms Revisited.....	308
Chapter 26.	SOME FINAL REMARKS	313
	APPENDIX	316
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	320

INTRODUCTION

Imagine the following. A small boat sails across a pristine lake enclosed between two mountains. When it touches the shore, three hikers disembark. Although friends, each of the hikers entertains metaphysical beliefs that are incompatible with the others: one man is a theist, the second an atheist, while the third is an agnostic. Despite these doctrinal differences, they tie up their boat and begin a trek down a mossy trail shadowed by soaring trees. A waft of ponderosa pine permeates the air; a squirrel dashes across their path; a deer, on a nearby slope, nibbles on some wild grass. Everything is serene and silent and beautiful.

But then the hikers turn a bend – and a loud, powerful rush of a waterfall breaks the tranquil atmosphere, its crashing water surging over a magnificent rocky cliff. Awestruck at the stunning view, each of the men spontaneously says, “*The waterfall is absolutely divine.*” And, without hesitation, the theist, the atheist and the agnostic smile at one another, somehow agreeing in the appropriateness of that statement.

But what do they mean by their *shared* statement?

Albeit a hypothetical situation, this kind of language and “religious” response to concrete objects, like waterfalls or sunsets or rivers, is common in our daily life. Men and women from various cultures, religions, philosophies, and economic backgrounds can be observed utilizing the vocabulary of religion – words like “sacred” and “divine” and “nirvana” – in order to describe their confrontations with mundane situations. This common linguistic fact raises interesting philosophical

questions. How can men and women, all of widely differing beliefs and history, come to *agree* in the appropriateness of such statements? How can a theist, an atheist and an agnostic happen to choose and express the same type of “religious” language when describing a mundane situation like a waterfall? More generally, what do such “religious” statements mean? Is there indeed a common meaning here? Should we postulate a unique experience, a distinct mental state, which is associated with this kind of language, an experience that men of wildly dissimilar beliefs can nevertheless share and speak about? In short, what makes this commonplace language, these “mundane *and* sacred” statements, meaningful for both the secular *and* the religious man?

These are some of the basic questions of this dissertation, which is a philosophical investigation into those seemingly paradoxical statements that, interestingly, we find both the religious *and* the secular frequently employing in their day-to-day speech. Accordingly, this dissertation concerns religious responses to *this* world, something philosophers of religion are apt to pass over. For reasons provided later, I shall be calling this language “mundane-sacred judgment”, and the mental state associated with it “religious appreciation”.

However, before delving into an explanation of those ideas, here is another example of mundane-sacred judgment, but in this case from the Bible. In *Lamentations*, we read: “The roads of Zion are in mourning for lack of festival pilgrims.”¹

How odd. A road can hardly be mourning; so what are we describing when we assert that it is – or looks to be as if it is – mourning? What is the nature of the experience that makes it appropriate to describe this inanimate object in terms of a

¹ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, ed., *Tanach: The Twenty-Four Books of the Bible*, The Stone Edition (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996), 1717, 1:4.

human emotional state, when the inanimate object does not match the description of our experience? If the above hypothetical example about the theist, the atheist and the agnostic reminded us that non-religious people sometimes employ religious vocabulary to describe certain mundane objects of their world, then this example from the Bible shows that religious people often enlist ordinary, mundane terms – such as “mourning” – to describe certain sacred objects of their universe. That symmetrical relationship – of non-religious people wielding religious words and religious people wielding non-religious words in order to express their meaningful experiences of sensory objects – is fascinating and rich in philosophical implications.

As we explore these implications, we shall be ineluctably pulled into a discussion about the vague yet routine concepts of “religious experience” and “religious language”. This philosophical discussion, however, will have a somewhat different emphasis from that which is typically found in the philosophical literature. Ordinarily, philosophers of religion highlight the most otherworldly kinds of religious experience and statement, such as the language that tells us about mystical or miracle experiences; often, too, philosophers will concentrate on those areas of religious language that speak about the nature of God or the ultimate foundation of existence, entities like Nirvana, Brahman, Jesus, Matter, and so on. However, in this dissertation, we shall set aside all of those interesting metaphysical ideas, and instead focus on those religious experiences and statements that speak about *this* world, our world, the solid world as revealed by our five-senses. We shall examine statements like “The waterfall is absolutely divine” or “The roads to Zion are in mourning”, religious statements that describe things existing in our physical life.

Why have philosophers tended to ignore or understate the significance of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation? Is it because these topics are philosophically dull? Do they produce shallow questions? Are they easily explained by a concept like “metaphor”, and so unworthy of our ratiocination? Perhaps.

However, another explanation, which will be one of the assumptions of this dissertation, suggests that the main reason why philosophers have overlooked this language and experience is precisely because, by and large, they have over-highlighted the *transcendental* and *metaphysical* aspects of religion. Many philosophers would no doubt agree with Schopenhauer, no friend of the “masses”, who wrote, “Religion is the metaphysics of the people.”² His obvious meaning is that religion is primitive metaphysical speculation. Naturally, if philosophers are armed with such an assumption, then their main interest (as far as religion goes) will be whether religious claims about metaphysical entities like God, the Self, or Nirvana can be *justified*. Following from that interest, the philosopher will want to know if “religious experience” can serve as one of the means for validating religious beliefs about the purported existence of these entities. Consequently, religious experiences that do not directly relate to those entities will be ignored or dismissed as irrelevant to philosophy *qua* philosophy. This has been the situation among the philosophical intelligentsia of the Western world for some time. Read any historical study of the philosophy of religion and you will find that the branches of philosophy most often called into service to explain and describe religion have been *metaphysics* and *epistemology*. As a result of that emphasis, it is no wonder that “religion” comes to be

² Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E.F.J Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 325.

seen by philosophers as, at heart, little more than a kind of metaphysical speculation about the otherworldly, trans-worldly or the miraculous.³

Suppose, when studying religion, we considered only the following kinds of statement, which stress looking at the world beyond ours:

Learn how to be entirely unreceptive to sensations arising from external forms, thereby purging your bodies of receptivity to externals.

Huang Po⁴

Let a wise man, like a driver of horses, exert diligence in restraint of his senses straying among seductive sensual objects.

Manava-dharma-sastra⁵

Considering only such kinds of sentences, how could we not deduce that religion ought to be explicated by metaphysical concepts? If our attention spotlights those and only those kinds of statement, which speak about “the beyond”, it is perfectly logical that we would reach the conclusion that religion, at the end of the day, is a narration of something that goes beyond our sense organs. It *must be* about the metaphysical; it must be some kind of primitive attempt to explain what is.

Yet this conclusion follows only *if* we focus on those kinds of otherworldly, anti-sensory, religious statements. Any fair survey of the language of religion, however, demonstrates that religio-linguistic practice is much broader and richer, including far more than descriptions about otherworldly speculations, inward contemplation, reactions to alleged miracles, or mystical flights into the timeless. As important as those aspects of religion no doubt are, religious speech, nevertheless, directs attention toward human responses that are often as much about this world as about any other.

³ A notable exception is Nicholas Lash's groundbreaking theoretical work. See his *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Britain: SCM Press Ltd, 1988). Another noteworthy exception is F.B. Brown, *Religious Aesthetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), published the following year.

⁴ John Blofeld, trans., *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* (London: Rider, 1958), 119.

⁵ Arthur Coke Burnell, trans., *The Ordinances of Manu* (London: Trubner, 1884), 88.

Who would deny that religious language describes reactions of awe at the *physical* world; talks of the partaking of sacraments; speaks about the observance of certain rituals; outlines the performances of sacrifices and purifications; contemplates war and violence; evokes feelings of romance and sexuality; ponders wine and song? Clearly religion is not just about the metaphysical, about “the great beyond”. It is about this world in which we live. Religious language often means obeying commandments, beseeching and helping others, participating in dances and pilgrimages, as well as meditating on and interacting with the natural world. It refers to man’s eyes, ears, nose, hands and taste, not just his supernatural senses. It includes *this* world.

Of course, it may be wondered whether those aspects of religion have any philosophical significance. We might reasonably argue that, yes, the above are certainly features of the wider concept of religion, and any generalization about religion would be wise to take them into account; however, those aspects are to be studied by sociologists, comparative religionists, and anthropologists – and *not* by philosophers, because the only concern for the philosopher *qua* philosopher (as far as religion goes) *is* the truth-value of religion’s metaphysical claims. That, in a nutshell, is the business of the philosopher when it comes to religion. He is here to assess claims about what *is*. So, when religion makes claims about what *is*, the philosopher examines those claims, but ignores those other aspects of religion mentioned above.

In response, we might question if the philosopher’s *only* business in regard to religion is to assess its metaphysical claims. For, as happens in virtually any intellectual area, it is often only when our philosophical concerns cease to focus specifically on metaphysics and epistemology that other entities, other human experiences and other problems begin to emerge as discernable concepts before our

consciousness (which, of course, in turn provide new data upon which metaphysical and epistemological questions and theories can be applied). And that, so I shall argue, is precisely the case with regard to mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation.

Only by putting aside the metaphysical paradigm in the philosophy of religion does this religious experience and language manifest itself before our mind's eye. As we shall see, what emerges is that this experience and language has more in common with the issues found in philosophical *aesthetics* than with those perennial and insufferable problems that torment us in metaphysics and epistemology.

Accordingly, the explanatory model bequeathed to us by those philosophers known as aestheticians, rather than the models from those known as metaphysicians, serves better to illuminate these aspects of religion. Mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation relate to the sensory world that you and I inhabit, just as art, however transcendent it may feel, and however many metaphysical and epistemological ideas it may presuppose, nevertheless first plays upon our very real sensory experience. By applying the aesthetic model – its questions and concerns – to this area of religion, our subject remains within the broad field of philosophy. For philosophy, obviously, is not limited to the field of metaphysics, and so the business of the philosophy of religion includes more than religion's metaphysical ideas.⁶ This will become clearer when, in the following pages,

⁶ This, of course, is not to argue that metaphysics and epistemology do not play a seminal role in our specific topic within religion. In every intellectual field, however remote from philosophy, loom the dark silhouettes of the great epistemological and metaphysical problems, and in that regard our subject is no different from any other. However, such concerns slip into the background when exploring our topic, just as they slip into the background when we examine intellectual areas like man's language and responses to art.

we exploit the aesthetic paradigm in order to explicate the subject of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In *Part I*, I shall show that the concepts of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment emerge when we apply a method analogous to the aesthetic branch of philosophy to a certain class of religious statements. In this part of the thesis, no argument will be offered for the truth of any *one* solution to the questions that will be raised about these inchoate topics. Rather the purpose of this part will be to indicate *the potential field of philosophical discussion and debate surrounding the concepts in this area of religious studies*. It is a way of starting the philosophical conversation.

Part II, a specific study of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation, is a related and more detailed argument in favour of one interpretation. This part, it should be noted, is only meant to provide *examples* of what a more robust and meticulous philosophical argument might look like regarding *some* of the issues raised earlier in *Part I*. So, again, no dogmatic philosophy is proffered. Rather it is intended that *Part II* demonstrate that the ideas and problems introduced in *Part I* can indeed sustain a deeper and more rigorous philosophical analysis. It therefore must be emphasized that the primary aim of my dissertation is *not* to unbendingly assert any single point of view. Instead, I wish to open up the idea that there *is* something here – a neglected religious language and religious experience – worthy of philosophical attention, whatever the interpretation any given philosopher ultimately feels is the most defensible on these issues. In light of that, the reader is encouraged to contemplate alternative ideas throughout this dissertation.

PART I

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL
ISSUES OF MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT
AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION**

CHAPTER 1

RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT

Demarcating Religious Language and Experience

Precisely because of its striking resemblance to aesthetic responses, the religious experience examined herein is called “religious appreciation”. This label is deliberately named after the idea of “aesthetic appreciation”. In due course it will become evident why we would wish to draw the analogy.

The wider concept of “religious experience” is, of course, notoriously difficult to define. Any theoretical definition of it is highly contentious. In order then to sidestep this definitional quagmire, I shall simply present instances of religious experiences, rather than directly try to define them. It is hoped that by presenting various examples of religious experience, we will begin to *see* the distinctions between them, and thus in turn will soon come to see religious appreciation as a species category within the genus category of religious experience. For my purposes, such a definitional strategy will serve just as well as a means of beginning the discussion about our subject, although it may be unwelcome for theoretical perfectionists. So, as distinguished economist Thomas Sowell rightly put it, we can expect that: “If I say that the sky is blue, the average reader will understand what I mean, but clever sophisticates will point out that the sky is reddish at sunset, black at midnight and grey on an overcast day”.⁷ The same is probably true with the concepts of religious experience that are presented later in this chapter. But most ordinary

⁷ Thomas Sowell, *Barbarians Inside the Gates And Other Controversial Essay* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), LX.

language users will have a basic understanding of the ordinary meaning of these religious experiences, and for our purpose that is all we need.

At the outset, what ought to be highlighted is one of the basic theses of this dissertation: *religious appreciation is a philosophical category different from the more familiar philosophical categories of religious experience.* To obtain an initial grasp of the concept of religious appreciation, it is helpful to begin by identifying what the experience and its language are not.

For example, the experience of religious appreciation is not properly classified in the category of *mystical experience* because the man of religious appreciation does not necessarily feel, encounter or experience “union”, “knowledge”, or “pure consciousness” with an Absolute or some other divinity, as is typically the case in mysticism. And, the *language* of religious appreciation is also distinct from the types of religious statements out of which our concept of mystical experience derives. That is, the language of religious appreciation – mundane-sacred judgment – is *not* like mystical language, such as these mystical statements by Plotinus, Isaiah, and Chuang-tse:

Often when I awaken from the body to myself and step from otherness into myself, I behold a most wondrous beauty. It is then that I believe most strongly in my belonging to a higher destiny, and in my strength enact the perfect life, and have become One Thing with the Divine, and since I am founded in that, I attain that might and soar above all that is knowable.

*Plotinus*⁸

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting upon a high and lofty throne, and its legs filled the Temple. Seraphim were standing above, at his service. Each one had six wings: with two it would cover its face, with two it would cover its legs, and with two it would fly. And one would call to another and say, "Holy, holy, holy is Hashem, Master of Legions; the whole world is filled with His glory."

*Isaiah*⁹

⁸ Martin Buber, collected and introduced, *Ecstatic Confessions* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 32.

⁹ *Isaiah* 6:1 in Nosson Scherman, ed., *Tanach*, 963.

While keeping my physical frame I lost sight of my real self. Gazing at muddy water, I lost sight of the clear abyss.

*Chuang-tse*¹⁰

It is from passages such as these that we – who have never had a mystical experience – develop a *concept* of mystical experience. We read such statements and, whether we believe in their veracity or not, come to conclude that these people were experiencing *something*. That something is what comparative religion scholars and philosophers have categorized as “mystical experience”. But, as we shall see, mundane-sacred judgment is not like those kinds of statement from which the category of mystical experience derives; so it is probably inaccurate to classify it among the experiences of mysticism.

Moreover, if religious appreciation is an experience unlike those mystical experiences, it also is not accurately classified as a *conversion experience*, since the man of religious appreciation does not necessarily undergo a drastic alteration in his moral, cognitive or social universe, as is usually the case in conversion. Sometimes he has the experience only for a brief moment, only to be completely forgotten later. Accordingly, a mundane-sacred judgment is *not* a description out which we can assume the experience of religious conversion. The following, for example, is not a mundane-sacred judgment.

*Worldly interests encompassed me on every side. Even my work as a teacher – the best thing I was engaged in – seemed unimportant and useless in view of the life hereafter. When I considered the intention of my teaching, I perceived that instead of doing it for God’s sake alone I had no motive but the desire for glory and reputation. I realized that I stood on the edge of a precipice and would fall into Hell-fire unless I set about to mend my ways.... God answered my prayer and made it easy to turn my back on reputation and wealth and wife and children and friends.*¹¹

¹⁰ Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: The John Day Company, Inc., 1937), 86.

¹¹ “Al-Ghazali’s Conversion to Sufism”, quoted in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1967), 526.

From such a passage, we are justified in delineating the concept of conversion; but, again, we would not be right to derive from it the concept of religious appreciation.¹²

Similarly, religious appreciation does not seem to belong to the category of *prayer* and *meditative experiences*, since the man of religious appreciation need not necessarily feel such psychological pleasures as forgiveness, love, clarity of mind, or such psychological pains as shame, terror, or cosmic loneliness, or such physiological responses as a lowered heart-rate, skin sensations, or convulsions, as is often the case in prayer experiences. So the language of religious appreciation is *not* the language of *petitionary prayers*. It is not the language of *forgiveness prayers*. And, it is not the language of *mystical prayers* and *meditations*. Thus, mundane-sacred judgment does not describe an experience like this petitionary prayer to Imana, the Great Creator of the Rwanda-Urundi:

*O Imana of pity, Imana of my father's house (or country), if only you would help me! O Imana of the country of the Hutu and the Tutsi, if only you would help me just this once! O Imana, if only you would give me rugo and children!*¹³

Nor does mundane-sacred judgment narrate an experience like this Sumero-Akkadian forgiveness prayer:

*May the fury of my lord's heart be quieted toward me. May the god who is not known be quieted toward me. May the goddess who is not known be quieted toward me...O Lord, my transgressions are many; great are my sins.*¹⁴

And mundane-sacred judgment is not like this description of Jain mystical prayer/meditation:

With the knees high and the head low, in deep meditation, he reached Nirvana, the complete and full, the unobstructed, unimpeded, infinite and supreme, best knowledge and intuition, called Kevala...he was a Kevalin, omniscient and comprehending all objects, he knew all conditions of the world, of gods, men and demons; whence they come, where they go, whether they are born as men

¹² We are referring here to religious appreciation as defined in this dissertation. This is not to posit, however, that a religious convert does not also appreciate religion.

¹³ Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World*, 268-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 272-273.

*or animals, or become gods or hell-beings; their food, drink, doings, desires, open and secret deeds, their conversation and gossip, and the thoughts of their minds; he saw and knew all conditions in the whole world of all living beings.*¹⁵

Finally, let us also note that religious appreciation is not a *miracle experience*, since the man of religious appreciation does not necessarily encounter anything supernatural. Nor is it a *before-life* or *after-death experience* because the man of religious appreciation need not necessarily have any beliefs about or experiences of immortality, resurrection, interconnection, or reincarnation. And it is not a *theological experience*, since the man of religious appreciation is not necessarily involved in a cognitive experience in which the rationality or coherence of religion is debated. In short, the language of religious appreciation does not appear to suggest a mental state that is identifiable with any of those familiar categories of “religious experience”.

Nevertheless, as with these other classifications of religious experience, the category of religious appreciation derives, or can be inferred or interpreted, from empirical information; that is, it can be deduced, as we have said, from its own distinct species of *religious language*, the sentences which the man of religious appreciation is inclined to assert, those sentences we are calling mundane-sacred judgment. The language indicating this experience is, to be sure, less spectacular and less dramatic than the assertions which we find in the literature of mysticism, conversion, prayer, life-after-death, miracles, or theology. But, as we shall soon see, it is no less interesting and no less important to our general concept of religion.

Three Basic Characteristics of Mundane-Sacred Judgment

What are the features of this allegedly distinct religious language? Without indulging in a complicated theory, mundane-sacred judgment can be seen to possess, at least,

¹⁵ Herman Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sutras*, II., (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 201-202.

three immediate characteristics, which distinguish it from those other kinds of religious language just described.

First: *mundane-sacred judgment speaks about objects that are perceptible to any human being who possesses the ordinary five sense organs (or the requisite sense organ needed to perceive the particular kind of physical object denoted in the sentence).*

That is, these kinds of sentence refer to objects in the solid world that you and I can see, hear, feel, smell or taste. For this reason, the objects can be perceived by people who do not necessarily view them as sacred or out of the ordinary. For example, a Christian might say the following mundane-sacred judgment: “The Western *Wall* in Jerusalem is the holy Wailing Wall.” Now even an atheist or agnostic can perceive in part what this judgment talks about because his very eyes can *see* the physical wall should he visit Jerusalem. Furthermore, this has nothing to do with whether or not he thinks the object is actually wailing or holy. A mundane-sacred judgment is a judgment about perceivable entities, and anyone who can perceive with his ordinary sense organs can understand these sentences – at least in part.

A mundane-sacred judgment is about things such as: books; theatre and dance performances; buildings; walls; artworks; times of the day, week and year; seasonal changes; lands; music; planets; stones; stars; the sky; water; fire; vegetation; cultural traditions; rituals; even suicide bombings. All of these, at times, are or may be viewed as sacred objects within the various world religions; all of these objects can be viewed through our sensory faculties. Hence, in terms of their raw physicality, such sacred objects are, by definition, unlike otherworldly or transcendent sacred objects. Conceptually, they are radically different from things such as gods, or Brahman, or

Nibbana, or any other sacred object that seems to require some kind of metaphysical sixth sense for humans to apprehend, if they can apprehend them at all. Because of that, we begin to see why mundane-sacred judgment connotes a different kind of experience than those described in mystical, miracle, and prayer language. For in mundane-sacred judgment, the *sacred* object is in the *mundane* world; it is in the perceivable world; it is tangible and it is concrete.

Let us call this kind of sacred object a “mundane-sacred object”, so as to distinguish it from a “transcendent-sacred object”, like a god, Nirvana, an angel, and so forth. Also, this term “mundane-sacred object” should be understood analogously to the way the term “aesthetic object” is understood in aesthetics, which is simply a way of grouping the various objects – from sculptures to mountains – that stimulate aesthetic responses.

Second: *mundane-sacred judgment sometimes involves predicates that are gleaned from ordinary, day-to-day language.*

A mundane-sacred judgment may employ terms denoting human emotions, weight, depth, slang, taste, color, action, as well as a whole variety of comparative language taken from mundane, ordinary experience. All of these kinds of predicate can and are often utilized to portray the qualities of mundane-sacred objects. For example, when the Christian says, “The Western Wall in Jerusalem is *wailing*”, he is borrowing the commonly understood term “wailing” in order to describe the Western Wall, a mundane-sacred object. Again, this is a term that even non-believers understand and use in their own practice of speech; for example, in the sentence “My child is *wailing*”, the same term is used.

In a mundane-sacred judgment, the grammatical subject can therefore possess predicates used in the ordinary talk of both religious and non-religious people. Hence,

in this branch of religious language, the sacred object while being *in* the perceivable mundane world is also sometimes described by the terms *of* the mundane world. Because of this, let us call any predicate that describes a mundane-sacred object a “mundane-sacred predicate”.

Third: *mundane-sacred judgment is uttered by different kinds of speakers from different ideological or metaphysical traditions and orientations.*

These strange judgments are voiced by devoutly religious people; by priests; and by religious heroes such as saints, prophets, mystics, medicine men, and even gods (whether or not they in fact exist outside of the texts that mention them). They are even uttered by people who are not typically classified, either by themselves or by others, as “religious”. For example, a peripatetic surfer, with furrowed brow, once assured me that: “The waves in Hawaii are sacred and *sweet*.” Here the young man referred to an object that is perceptible: the ocean’s waves in Hawaii. And he described that object with an ordinary predicate: he called it “sweet”. And, though not religious, he also employed a religious term “sacred”. So this was a mundane-sacred judgment voiced by a person, a “beach bum”, as it were, who would not be typically described as a “religious man”. Now, as in our hypothetical example in the Introduction, it is common to find people who do not see themselves as religious, nevertheless, employing religious language to describe things and events in their world which, for some reason or another, they regard as *ultimate*. It is an interesting question why this is so, just as it is fascinating why “religious people” so often employ “mundane vocabulary” to describe sacred things.

Other Examples of Mundane-Sacred Judgment

Here are some further examples of mundane-sacred judgment. Notice that each of these judgments – unlike those religious texts quoted earlier – talks about objects we

can perceive with our senses, and that these judgments often use ordinary language to describe those objects.

Whenever, in the course of the daily hunt, the red hunter comes upon a scene that is strikingly beautiful or sublime – a black thundercloud with the rainbow's glowing arch above the mountain; a white waterfall in the heart of a green gorge; a vast prairie tinged with the blood-red of sunset – he pauses for an instant in the attitude of worship.

Ohiyesa¹⁶

Your altar is your sacred work space, a place imbued with your personal pagan power.

Witch Bree, a.k.a. Brenda Knight, in *Witch's Brew: Good Spells For Healing*¹⁷

The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a Temple of Majesty, yet no man regards it. It is a region of Light and Peace, did not men disquiet it. It is the Paradise of God.

Thomas Traherne¹⁸

The world is a playground, and death is the night.

Rumi¹⁹

Perhaps you have noticed that even in the very lightest breeze you can hear the voice of the cottonwood tree; this we understand is its prayer to the Great Spirit, for not only men, but all things and all beings pray to Him continually in differing ways.

Black Elk²⁰

Man is a holy temple of God.

John Tauler²¹

¹⁶ Charles Alexander Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian* (Boston & New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1911), 46.

¹⁷ Witch Bree, a.k.a. Brenda Knight, *Witch's Brew: Good Spells For Healing* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2001) 15.

¹⁸ Bertram Dobell, ed., *Centuries of Meditations I* (London: P.J. and A.E. Dobell, 1958), 31.

¹⁹ Reynold A. Nicholson, trans., *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi* (London: Luzac, 1934) II., 2600.

²⁰ Joseph Epes Brown, recorded and ed., *The Sacred Pipe, Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 75.

²¹ Susanna Winkworth, trans., *Life and Sermons of Dr. John Tauler* (New York, 1858), 287.

There are two things in this world which delight me: women and perfumes.
These two things rejoice my eyes, and render me more fervent in devotion.

Muhammad²²

Hail, O cross, yea be glad indeed!... Well done, O cross, that has bound down
the mobility of the world! Well done, O shape of understanding that has
shaped the shapeless!

The Martyrdom of St Andrew²³

All that is sweet, delightful, and amiable in this world, in the serenity of the
air, the fineness of seasons, the joy of light, the melody of sounds, the beauty
of colours, the fragrancy of smells, the splendour of precious stones, is nothing
else but Heaven breaking through the veil of this world, manifesting itself in
such a degree and darting forth in such variety so much of its nature.

William Law²⁴

One of these buildings *climbs up bold*, massive in projection, up-piled in the
greatness of a *forceful* but *sure* ascent, preserving its range and line to the last,
the other *soars* from the *strength* of its base, in the grace and *emotion* of a
curving mass to a rounded summit and crowning symbol.

Sri Aurobindo²⁵

Four General Features of Religious Appreciation and Mundane-Sacred Judgment

Before discussing some of the particular features of the experience of religious
appreciation, let us begin by noting some general characteristics that it shares with
other kinds of religious experience. Below are four general features of religious
experience and language that are also found in religious appreciation and mundane-
sacred judgment.

First: *mundane-sacred judgment – the language of religious appreciation – is
a linguistic practice that even non-religious people can recognize and talk about.* Just

²² Washington Irving, *Life of Mahomet* (London & New York: Everyman's Library, 1944), 231.

²³ Montague Rhodes James, trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 359-360.

²⁴ Stephen Hobhouse, ed., *Selected Mystical Writings of William Law* (London: Rockliff, 1949), 44.

²⁵ "The Meaning of Indian Temple Architecture," Summer 2002, online at:
www.hindunet.org/srh_home/1996_11/msg00034.html.

as an agnostic like David Hume could identify and discuss religious language describing miracles, and the experience of miracles, even though he thought them utter balderdash, so too can a man – independent of the status of his religious faith – locate and distinguish mundane-sacred judgment within the overall speech of religious language.

Second: *the purported content of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment will alter depending on any given interpreter's philosophical assumptions, deductions, and intuitions.* It can be confidently predicted in advance that feminist theories, logical-positivist theories, constructivist theories, Buddhist theories, or what have you will bestow diverse significance and meaning upon mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation. Nevertheless, as with all such theories about the nature of religious experience, none of these competing theories need doubt, on logical grounds, that there *is* the experience of religious appreciation in our human world, and that this experience in turn finds expression in a particular form of language.

To be sure, the proponents of the sundry theories purporting to explain religion *can* agree that the occurrences of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation are linguistic and phenomenal facts, even if they profoundly disagree about their ontological causes, just as a Freudian, a Wittgensteinian, or logical positivist can *all* agree that, say, people undergo mystical experiences, even though they each, for different reasons, viscerally repudiate the veracity of one another's explanations regarding the causes and meaning of mysticism. In the same way, the many schools in the theory of religion can admit the existence of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment, all the while rejecting this or that contending theory.

Third: *A man can voice a mundane-sacred judgment without belonging to any formal religious tradition or institution. In addition, a person can enjoy the experience of religious appreciation without having undergone any of the other types of religious experience – just as a person can have, say, a prayer experience without ever having had a mystical or miracle experience.* We need to remember that, despite the potential diversity of conclusions from the various explanatory approaches in the philosophy of religion, it can be agreed by each of them that a person need not have experienced and voiced *all* of the different types of religious experience to count as a “religious person” or to satisfy our basic criteria that a person has some initial acquaintance with religion. A person need undergo only one kind of religious experience, and that only for a brief moment, in order to be classified as “religious” or, at least, to be familiar with the religious. So, too, this is the case with mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation.

Fourth: *A man can identify the language of religious appreciation without ever having experienced what it communicates, just as a man can identify a description of a miracle without ever having seen the miracle or even believing in it.*

Mundane-Sacred Judgment and Aesthetic Judgment

What is noteworthy about mundane-sacred judgments is their similarity to aesthetic judgments. The analogies are hard to dispute. Just as aesthetic judgment has a distinctive set of predicates, which are used primarily in aesthetic appraisal, so too does mundane-sacred judgment enjoy its own unique vocabulary. In aesthetic judgment there are such predicates as “beautiful”, “elegant”, “graceful”, or “ugly”, and these terms indicate to us that aesthetic language makes up a part of our wider use of language. Indeed that is how we come to believe that aesthetics comprises a distinct discourse in our use of words. But, in a similar way, mundane-sacred

judgment has its own distinctive predicates – words like “holy”, “sacred”, “Dhamma”, and so on. These terms likewise indicate we are speaking specifically of religious things, thereby suggesting there is a branch or discourse within our wider use of speech that can be reasonably called “religious language”. Indeed, so similar are the two kinds of judgment that mundane-sacred judgments often employ aesthetic predicates to describe mundane-sacred objects. The words of a holy man might be called “beautiful”; an enlightened monk’s quiet walk through the grove, “graceful”; or the logic of the Kalaam argument for the existence of God, “elegant”. Such usage of language would seem to promote the idea that, if there is such a thing as aesthetic experience, something like it must surely be present in religion as well.

This idea of a relation between aesthetics and religion is further fortified by other linguistic similarities, for just as in aesthetic judgment we have descriptions referring to the *formal achievement* of artworks, so too do we find these kinds of predicate applied to mundane-sacred objects. For instance, both aesthetic and mundane-sacred judgment at times describe their objects as “advanced”, “well done”, “disciplined”, “balanced”, “rough”, and so on. These kinds of “technical accomplishment” predicates are thus *shared* in aesthetic and religious discourse. They are employed in both aesthetic and religious descriptions of experience. And so where an aesthete might describe a particular dance pose as “disciplined”, so might a religious man express a particular yogic exercise as “disciplined”, both men thus exploiting the same ordinary language to depict and explain their own particular phenomena.

But that is not the only similarity. There are at least four other interesting resemblances. One is that, just as aesthetic judgment often utilizes predicates normally reserved to describe human emotions, mundane-sacred judgment sometimes

describes its own objects under concepts typically associated with human mental life. When under the sway of an aesthetic experience, we might describe a piece of music as “sad”, or as “melancholy”, or as “joyful”, or as “intelligent”. Similarly, when we are experiencing religious appreciation, we might use these same kinds of predicates to depict the mundane-sacred object. For instance, the cast of the Buddha’s footprint has been described as “joy”. Or, we saw the example of the *road* to Zion described as “mourning”. Such examples tell us that, just as in aesthetics, nearly any mental predicate can be applied to a mundane-sacred object, no matter how inanimate that object is.

Another similarity is that both aesthetic and mundane-sacred judgments often describe their objects in terms of *the feelings they evoke*. The Buddhist story about Prince Gotama’s compassion for the insects slaughtered beneath the farmer’s plow might be called “moving”, just as one might call a play by Ibsen “moving”. The biblical depiction of the flight of the Hebrews from their Egyptian slave-masters might be called “exciting”, just as we might describe a powerful work of Beethoven as “exciting”. The Christian Sabbath might be described as “tranquil”, similar to the way we describe a painting of an autumn evening as “tranquil”. All these terms, used both in mundane-sacred judgment and aesthetic judgment, appear to project our human responses and concepts onto worldly objects we encounter.

Still another similarity is that both mundane-sacred judgment and aesthetic descriptions often refer to the *expressive* features of objects. A work of art can be said to express emotion, thought, character, or attitude; so also can a mundane-sacred judgment suggest that, for example, a certain passage in a scripture or a piece of sacred music expresses a concept like “the impermanence of life” or the “oneness of things”. This is similar to the way artworks are often claimed to express certain kind

of truths, or to represent the world, or to give us an insight into characters and genres and otherwise ineffable things.

Lastly, both aesthetic and mundane sacred judgments often use predicates describing *comparisons*, *analogies* or *metaphors*. In a mundane-sacred judgment we might describe a particular sermon as *heavy*, or the waves in Hawaii as *sweet*, or the look in the eye of a holy man as *warm*. This kind of language-use is not unlike the way terms are applied in certain kinds of aesthetic judgment, as when metaphor or analogy is used to describe, say, a fashion style as heavy, or an architectural structure as light, or a shade of color as warm.

In short, when speaking about mundane-sacred judgment, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that it shares a variety of predicates with aesthetic language. We might ask ourselves why this is so. Most likely, this similarity in language offers us a clue about the nature of the experience of religious appreciation. That is, seeing these resemblances may well be our first step toward elucidating our subject, suggesting as it does the possibility that the religious experience associated with mundane-sacred judgment is analogous to our aesthetic responses to life, a religious experience connecting man to objects of *this* world, in all its concreteness, in all its earthiness, in all its presentness, not unlike the way artworks stimulate aesthetic experiences – by playing upon our senses.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING THE MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECT

The earthiness of the experience of religious appreciation coheres with what we have previously said: that among the prominent features of a mundane-sacred object are its *sensory qualities* - its ability to be touched, seen, heard, tasted, smelled. These properties distinguish it from transcendent-sacred objects, which, unlike a mundane-sacred object, are not typically open to the sense organs of the thoroughly unreligious man. We also hinted that the word “mundane-sacred object” is a kind of umbrella term incorporating a staggeringly wide variety of phenomena – from written texts to music to mountains. Naturally this raises the question about how we define a mundane-sacred object. On what basis do we distinguish it from, say, an artwork? And what unites all these different phenomena under one term?

There are, at least, four potential ways of addressing these questions. They are: *essentialist definitions*, *sceptical definitions*, *institutional definitions*, and *experiential definitions* of the mundane-sacred object.

An *essentialist definition* would undertake the Herculean task of discovering and asserting that there is a feature, or group of features, that all and only mundane-sacred objects possess. For instance, theologians of the Paul Tillich variety might wish to contend that the essence of the mundane-sacred object is its *symbolic function*. To substantiate this claim, they might cite a mundane-sacred judgment such as Hermes’ remark about the Sun: “The Sun...is an image of the Maker who is above

the heavens.”²⁶ Or they might cite this mundane-sacred judgment by St. Basil, “The respect that is paid to the image passes over to its archetype.”²⁷ These seem to suggest that a mundane-sacred object is primarily symbolic. When we perceive an object, be it a text or a tree, as a mundane-sacred object, what we are doing is seeing it as a symbol for a transcendent of some kind. In this regard, the mundane-sacred object is a way of injecting something of the sacred-beyond into our mundane here-and-now. Against this, artists of the Leo Tolstoy variety might instead see the essence of the mundane-sacred object in the way they see the essence of art, as a way of communicating *feeling*.²⁸ Meanwhile, philosophers of the R.B. Braithwaite variety might rather argue that its essence resides in the mundane-sacred object’s ability to convey *moral attitudes*.²⁹ And others would offer still other essentialist definitions.

Now there are obvious difficulties with this definitional approach to the mundane-sacred object. Essentialist definitions, as in so many intellectual fields, are often vulnerable to a broad variety of counter-examples. And the same is true, to be sure, with respect to essentialist definitions of mundane-sacred objects. For example, it is undeniable that some mundane-sacred objects are *symbols*, as those who follow Tillich might say – yet many mundane-sacred objects cannot be said to serve that purpose. Consider the Buddha’s tooth in Sri Lanka. It is sacred in itself, not because it represents or symbolizes *something else*. Moreover, many objects of the world express *feelings* but they are still *not* mundane-sacred objects. Witness certain artworks, journalism, or propaganda, all of which express feelings but are not necessarily regarded as sacred objects. Further, there are mundane-sacred objects that

²⁶ Whitall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), 318.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 321.

²⁸ See Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, trans. Almyer Maude (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985).

²⁹ See Richard Bevan Braithwaite, *An Empiricist’s View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955).

do not seem to convey any moral attitude whatsoever – for instance, the beaches of Hawaii, which surfers worldwide see as sacred. How could a statement about the ocean’s waves be construed as a moral assertion? In short, none of the above essentialist definitions – of the Tillich, Tolstoy or Braithwaite variety – seems to capture the “essence” of the mundane-sacred object. It remains questionable whether any others can as well.

A typical response to the failure of essentialist definitions, in any area of intellectual discourse, is *scepticism*. Here it is argued that, if no necessary and sufficient features can be found for a word, then it follows there simply is nothing common to define all items brought under the heading of that word. The logic behind this thinking seems to be: if it cannot be found, it therefore is not. We have not found an essence to the mundane-sacred object, so there is none.

That deduction of course is fallacious. Many have remarked that this kind of reasoning is tantamount to saying that the American Indians did not exist until Columbus discovered them, and vice versa, which is nonsense. Nevertheless, those who are attracted to such sceptical ratiocination might plausibly appeal to Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblances” in order to give their scepticism a more positive explanatory twist, as well as to confer upon it the authority of a great thinker. Thus, proffering a Wittgensteinian *sceptical definition*, one might argue that there is not one feature, or set of features, that all mundane-sacred objects share. Rather, there is a nexus of loose resemblances between the objects, a wide collection of features that the various mundane-sacred objects draw upon in diverse ways, like the variety of DNA available within a family line, which gives each member of the family a certain similarity but not a rigid identity. Likewise, one might understand the concept of a mundane-sacred object as a deliberately *vague* but *usable* term, a kind of

broad fishnet that captures a wide range of different physical things, mountains, trees, paintings, men.

Closely connected with the Wittgensteinian sceptical definition is the *institutional definition*. This approach would not define a mundane-sacred object in terms of anything intrinsic to its nature. Instead it would delineate the mundane-sacred object in terms of the external situations in which it is found: that is, its social and historical context. According to this definition, something is a mundane-sacred object if and only if it has that status bestowed upon it by members of the religious world. And the “religious world” could be defined deliberately vague, so as to include recognized religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church to not so recognized entities like a new-age hippy group in Two Guns, Arizona. Anyone, in other words, involved in anything “spiritual” could be classified as members of the “religious world”. And by being members of this religious world, they have the legitimacy to bestow upon *any* object the title of “mundane-sacred object”. In accordance with the institutional view, the identification of something as a mundane-sacred object would confer upon it a certain status but it would not serve to identify its essence. Thus, “mundane-sacred object” is a kind of honorific term, and does not denote anything that can be recognized from the mere basis of a sensory or conceptual examination of its nature. As for the *reason* why this term is bestowed will depend on the circumstances – the social, cultural and historical features surrounding that object. Accordingly, all that the institutional definition tells us is that a mundane-sacred object *happens*, and that certain people recommend these kinds of object for religious appreciation. But, significantly, it does not tell us *why* they happen, or *why* people recommend them to be appreciated as sacred.

As for those – particularly philosophers – interested in *why* there are mundane-sacred objects, the *experiential definition* may prove the best strategy for grasping the concept. For the philosopher, the major failing of the institutional theory is that it confuses a sociological definition for a philosophical one. Unlike the sociologist or anthropologist, what the philosopher wants to know is the *reason* that explains why so many human beings have a marked propensity to call certain physical things “sacred”. Certainly, says the philosopher, people confer the status of the sacred on material things, but why do they do so? What is it that prompts people to bestow such ultimacy on some things, but then not on others, within the field of their ordinary sensory contact?

An *experiential definition* of a mundane-sacred object will most likely appeal to the Kantian notion of the ends/means distinction (just as in aesthetics). This in effect was what Eliade drew upon when he famously insisted:

A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied *as* something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomena 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.³⁰

If we were to reduce the sacred – or, in our case, the mundane-sacred – to, say, class, racial or gender exploitation, or to a mere totem for social organization, then we would be forced to understand the object as a *means* to something else – that is, to the goals of exploitation or socialization. Yet, if there is one nearly universally recognized feature attributed to sacred objects, it is that they are, from the religious perspective, perceived as *ends in themselves*. The value of a mundane-sacred object resides precisely in the fact that it is *not* instrumental, as if the sacred were no different from pornography, heroin or slot machines. Such objects are deemed “sacred” because they

³⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Meridian Books, 1963), xiii.

have an inherent dignity, no matter what effects they may have on us, even when the effects are great. As Wittgenstein pointed out, in his celebrated criticism of Frazer, the ritual of rain dances occur when rain is due in any case. Clearly the object of performing such rituals goes beyond merely wanting rain because, if those who practiced rain dances genuinely believed that performing such rituals were a viable means for bringing rain, then they would perform them *whenever* the people needed that effect, in the dry seasons as well.³¹ But plainly that is not what is done.

The point of the ritual therefore lies in itself, not in what it can do. In the words of one of Wittgenstein's disciples, a ritual such as:

The greeting of the sun at the coming of day can be seen as a celebration of its coming. It is not that people who, say, raise their arms at the dawning of day think that unless they raise their hands, the dawn will not break, but, rather, knowing that the dawning of the day is at hand, they want to express a greeting to it in this way.³²

That absence of instrumentalism – that desire to “celebrate” – is a clue to the way these kinds of object are *experienced*, as well as to *why* they are valued. It is their uniqueness, their end-in-itself quality that gives mundane-sacred objects the valued status they enjoy. Such objects prompt or express reactions like *celebration*, not weather alteration. In this way, they become demarcated from other kinds of physical things.

Some, however, may contend that aesthetic and moral objects are also valued and experienced as *ends*. So what distinguishes a mundane-sacred object from, say, an esteemed work of secular art? They are both said to be unique; they are both said to be ends in themselves. So why not call these rituals “art” instead of “religion”?

³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, trans. A.C. Miles (Doncaster: Brynmill Press, 1979), 12.

³² D.Z. Phillips, *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 35.

There are, at least, two potential philosophical answers to this objection. One is to bite the bullet and accept that artworks and mundane-sacred objects are indeed no different at all. This would require that the “beautiful” and the “sacred” be recognized as synonymous concepts. A person who has, say, an aesthetic experience is really also having a religious experience, whether or not that person is aware of it.

Another way to meet this challenge is to argue that there is what might be called a “hierarchy of ends”. This could mean, for example, that, *à la* Kierkegaard, mundane-sacred objects stand at the top of the hierarchy of ultimately valued entities: religious objects are *the* end, while aesthetic and moral objects reside beneath, as *an* end. In other words, those valued objects beneath religious objects, under certain circumstances, might be subject to what Kierkegaard called a teleological suspension of value, if religion should so dictate. Other philosophers, of course, may rearrange the placement of the entities in the hierarchy: for example, arguing *à la* Plato that the Good is at the top, while artworks are far below, and so on.

Be that as it may, an experiential definition will appeal to the notion that a mundane-sacred object is defined as some kind of end in itself, and it is this critical fact that confers its status as an object deserving special consideration. It is this criterion, in other words, that gives the object the religious status that it has.

Against this, it may be replied that so long as a mundane-sacred object has value it can always be re-defined as a *means* to whatever value it actualizes. So, for example, to say that the Koran is holy is only to say that it is a *means* to holiness; or to say the Ten Commandments are moral is only to say that they are a *means* to virtue; or to say that a rain dance expresses celebration is only to say it is a *means* to festivity; and so on.

But this kind of semantic objection can be easily met by pointing out that, when we say that a mundane-sacred object is “not simply a means”, we are not intending to convey the notion that its value cannot be realized in *any other way*. Rather, we mean that the value of the mundane-sacred object cannot be realized *in the same way* by any other thing. Furthermore, this idea coheres with the commonplace observation that religious people vehemently reject the notion that their mundane-sacred object can be *substituted* by something else without loss. When the Taliban blew apart the ancient Buddhist statues in Afghanistan, no rebuilding of *another* Buddhist statue, no matter how faithful it may be fashioned to look like the original, will ever stand in “just as well” for what was lost. This was because the original statue enjoyed an inbuilt stateliness, a uniqueness, which cannot be replaced. It was, in short, an end in itself - a mundane-sacred object.

CHAPTER 3

PHILOSOPHICAL GOALS FOR ANALYZING RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND MUNDANE SACRED JUDGMENT

Given the similarities between aesthetics and religious appreciation in both their language and their treatment of objects as ends, it is clear that the kind of philosophical aims normally associated with the concepts of religious experience and religious language are not fundamental to an analysis of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment. In this experience and language, we are not interested in an analysis which aims to prove or disprove God's existence (or the existence of some other such unearthly entity). We also are not interested in finding an argument that establishes the truth, relativity, or falsity of religion as such. Thus, we are not concerned with the typical aims in the philosophy of religion. Rather, as in aesthetics, questions of epistemology and ontology, although important, recede into the distance as we explore two other basic goals.

First, we want philosophers to give us an account of the unique *form of the experience* that is common to the religious appreciation of a mundane-sacred object. As a consequence of this request, the primary question of a philosophical study of religious appreciation is not *what causes* this experience, but *what is it like to have it*. We want to know how we can describe this religious response to the world. What is the concept here? What are its phenomenological features?

Because of these kinds of question, the philosophy of religious appreciation is, as we said, like philosophical aesthetics. Just as philosophers of art seek to explain

what it is to have an aesthetic experience – usually independently of whatever causes it – so too we want philosophers to explain how it feels to undergo religious appreciation. How does it appear to consciousness? Can it be described to someone who has never enjoyed it?

As we shall see, religious appreciation often appears to have a pleasantly stimulating and contemplative character about it. It seems to involve a sense of release from the practical or instrumental demands of life. And it appears to prompt people to describe their experiences in a distinctive vocabulary. Given all that, religious appreciation is a religious experience rather different from the more commonly discussed types, like those mentioned in Chapter 1. Religious appreciation is, what might be called, the *aesthetic dimension* of religious experience, focusing the religious mind on the physical dimensions of life. It imbues a man's ordinary perception of the concrete world with a sense of the sacred and sublime, just as aesthetic experiences fill our mundane life with beauty, adventure and imagination. A wall, a mountain, a book – any of these kinds of physical thing, when viewed as a mundane-sacred object, can have the power to exert a profound influence over a man's feelings and reactions to his sensory world. He becomes suffused, as it were, with a unique, even beautiful, kind of relation to the objects of physical existence.

The second goal of the philosophy of religious appreciation is a philosophical determination of whether there is an essence or unity to mundane-sacred objects, as our brief discussion about the definition of these objects hinted. Even though the various mundane-sacred objects around the world – the sculptures, music, paintings, mountains, and so on – are all, at one level, very different, human beings, nevertheless, seem to apply very similar language to them. This common application of words occurs too often to be a fluke, and it is too uncontrolled to be a plot. There is

a linguistic *pattern* here. Accordingly, such diction *does not seem to be arbitrary*. Religious people often choose their words carefully when describing their holy objects. Such curious linguistic facts raise a number of questions, among which are the following:

- How can a mundane-sacred judgment – which says, for example, that a physical object is sacred – both express a fact about that object as well as express a feeling of the man who voices it?
- What makes a physical object of the world “sacred” in the first place?
- Why do religious people worry and debate over the appropriate description of mundane-sacred objects, when evidently there is no way to adjudicate such disputes?
- How can a mundane-sacred object put a man in touch with the mind of its creator?
- How can a mundane-sacred object, which is non-sentient, express human feeling?
- Why do people attach value and significance to mundane-sacred objects that they refuse to attach to, say, athletic objects or gastronomy?

These kinds of question advise us that the goal of this branch of the philosophy of religion is partly to provide an explanation regarding the nature of religious appreciation, the nature of mundane-sacred judgment, and the unity of mundane-sacred objects – and *not* to prove God’s existence or provide a justification or refutation of religion. There is, then, more to the philosophy of religion than those endeavours.

Now, because there has been little or no discussion of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment within philosophy, it is difficult to know where to begin when approaching this subject. Where does one start?

Perhaps, the answer is this.

One ought to borrow the model provided by philosophical aesthetics, an accumulated wisdom about a feature of the human condition spanning more than two thousand years. By looking at what philosophers have said about art, aesthetic experience, aesthetic objects, and aesthetic language, we shall fairly well anticipate the problems, debates, and theories that a philosophical discussion will dig up concerning religious appreciation, the mundane-sacred object, and mundane-sacred judgment. Following that model, the potential field of philosophical debate will divide into three sections, which mirrors the typical aims of aesthetics. Put concisely, those aims are:

- (I) to explain the salient issues surrounding the nature of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment;
- (II) to identify the concepts and questions that are fundamental to a philosophical understanding of mundane-sacred objects; and
- (III) to examine some general theories that might further explain the essence of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment.

By pursuing those three goals, we will be well on our way to delineating the general philosophical field of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment. To that end, we now turn.

CHAPTER 4

SALIENT ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AND MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT

The Distinct Experience of Religious Appreciation and Its Language

Let us begin by considering the first philosophical goal in the philosophy of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment, which is to elucidate the prominent aspects of this experience and language. As we saw, there are eye-catching analogies between aesthetic judgment and mundane-sacred judgment. Accordingly, the kind of analysis we find in philosophical aesthetics proves, so it would seem, the most fruitful means by which to understand this rather earthy religious experience. In this chapter, we shall start by borrowing ideas from David Hume's and Immanuel Kant's great works in aesthetics, applying their ideas to our own subject – and then developing our discussion from there.³³

A Humean-Kantian paradigm for religious appreciation entails two fundamental claims: first, this explanatory model suggests that mundane-sacred judgments presuppose a special mental faculty, what we have been calling “religious appreciation”; and second, the model suggests that the qualities that a mundane-sacred judgment attributes to a mundane-sacred object are, ultimately, *subjective*. That is to say, any mundane-sacred judgment – for example *The cast of the Buddha's footprint is joy* – includes two basic features: first, the man who sincerely voices the statement is exercising the mental faculty of religious appreciation, that is, he is activating a particular mental inclination which allows him to appreciate, using our example, the

³³ See any publication of David Hume's “Of the Standard of Taste” (1756) and Immanuel Kant's “The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment”, part I of *The Critique of Judgment* (1790).

joy in the footprint; second, his attribution of the quality of “joy” to the cast is not the result of seeing that quality as an *objective* property of that object. In accordance with this model, the quality is as subjective an attribution as the beauty Don Quixote ascribes to the shabby Dulcinea.

Now why do we say that mundane-sacred judgment involves “religious appreciation”? For what reason should we postulate a distinct “experience” alongside this language?

One reason is that a mundane-sacred judgment appears to result from a *felt response* to an object of the sensory world; it stems from a personal encounter with and appreciation of a particular thing. We noted that this physical thing can be a road, a mountain, a scripture, a tree, or anything else of the terrestrial world which is, for whatever reason, deemed sacred and worthy of reverence, and which in turn sparks a certain kind of verbal comment. Importantly, this felt response may be authentic or it may be inauthentic. That is, a mundane-sacred judgment may be voiced sincerely, in the way that Don Quixote’s declaration of love for Dulcinea is genuine; or it may be asserted insincerely, like Don Juan’s sham avowals of devotion for his female prey. Now this capacity for authentic versus inauthentic assertions helps bolster the claim that there is a kind of personal experience that is present when a mundane-sacred judgment is sincerely uttered about an object. Otherwise, without the possibility of an *authentic* appreciation for a particular thing, how do we explain the possibility to speak with forked-tongues about mundane-sacred objects? How would we be able to assent to a judgment without actually believing or feeling what it expresses? Obviously, because we can do this – and because we can and do have radically different mental states associated with such religious statements – it suggests the existence of particular psychological experiences potentially associated with certain

mundane-sacred judgments. It is for this reason that we are inclined to believe that the sincere mental state, as against the insincere one, is the “experience” to be described within the wider category of “religious experience”. It is a special kind of religious relation to the world.

A second reason to say mundane-sacred judgment involves religious appreciation is related to the fact that there does not appear to be any universal criteria by which people voice this kind of language. If there were such global rules for the assertion of a mundane-sacred judgment, then there would be general propositions from which we could infer a mundane-sacred judgment. On the mere basis of the sensory and non-religious properties of a mundane-sacred object, the most thoroughgoing atheist would be able to deduce logically that *the road to Zion* has the quality of *mourning* from the premise that the road is leading to Zion. He could simply look at the road’s sensory qualities and thence come to the understanding that it is mourning.

But that is nonsense. Clearly, no such rules are universally accepted. Accordingly, we say that religious taste or appreciation is present in this religious language because no general propositions *on their own* can be adduced to *justify* a mundane-sacred judgment, or to validate a particular reaction to that object. Rather some kind of personal *experience* is needed to explain these sentences. Hence we need to posit some mental state – and not something in the external world – to make sense of this language. That mental state we are calling religious appreciation.

Of course, the absence of general rules does not mean there are simply *no* respectable generalizations we can offer. Psychology, sociology, history, and anthropology – all of these, to be sure, recommend cogent *causal* explanations as to why a man voices a mundane-sacred judgment about some physical object.

Undoubtedly, there are also legitimate generalizations to be made about the historical causes and reactions to mundane-sacred objects. But these kinds of historical and social explanations are proffered from a different experiential plane than a religious man's *spontaneous* mundane-sacred judgment about a particular thing of which he is in *direct* contact. The religious man's language stems from an immediate experience, welling up inside him from his unswerving confrontation with an object he regards as an end in itself. And that is a very different kind of relation than any historian's or sociologist's statements and responses about that object. The absence of rules, then, only means that we cannot give necessary reasons why any given man, from any psychological or sociological background, *must* utter a particular mundane-sacred judgment about a particular mundane-sacred object.

Having said that, though, this does not imply that there are *no* justifications for these religious assertions. Certainly it remains plausible that mundane-sacred judgments are justified on a basis other than *universal* criteria: for example, a mundane-sacred judgment might be justified on the existentialist ground that it enlivens one's *personal* experience of things, making the world more interesting, adventuresome and poetic.

Let us return to one of our basic questions. What is the nature of religious appreciation? What is its essence? How does it differ from other religious experiences? Has it been spoken of before, or are we just *inventing* a religious experience, pulling a rabbit out of a magic hat, as it were? Surely any answer to these questions will be controversial. Even so, that should not deter us from giving it an initial shot. Indeed it is only from the presentation of rough theories that better theories are born.

So, in order to press forward, let us assume – for now – that religious appreciation involves something akin to what philosophers have regarded as the basic nature of aesthetic experience. That is, religious appreciation entails a direct confrontation with a sensory object that is valued as an end itself. From this, we can also deduce that the experience of religious appreciation is a *non-practical* or *non-utilitarian* state of mind, since the mundane-sacred object is not a means toward some other end. Moreover, we noted that this religious experience involves a *felt response*. We also said that this felt response can be experienced by people that are ordinarily classified as religious as well as by people that are typically judged to be secular. It is, as it were, an equal opportunity experience. Furthermore, religious appreciation consists of a certain kind of *excitement, craving, awe* or *pleasure* in a physical object; it arouses our emotions, and somehow this is intimately connected to our sensory experience.

Hence, at its minimum, *religious appreciation is a sincere, non-cognitive, non-practical, emotion raising, not necessarily sectarian, sensory response to a terrestrial object regarded as an end itself.*

That is a rough definition.

Now, having roughly defined religious appreciation, the other pressing question we need to face is whether something like this experience has been spoken of before within philosophy. We already gave two arguments as to why we ought to surmise the presence of an “experience” associated with mundane-sacred judgment. Now we need to ask whether this experience is a category made up out of nowhere. Is the concept just pure speculation without any prior philosophical discussion?

In answer to this, three brief descriptions – from three notable philosophers – about a kind of experience that can be fairly interpreted as the experience of religious



appreciation, even if for no other reason than their discussions do not seem to fit into any of the other more recognized categories of religious experience, are presented below.

The eminent philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein appears to have been susceptible to the experience of religious appreciation. Wittgenstein once “said that he sometimes had a certain experience which could best be described by saying that ‘when I have it, *I wonder at the existence of the world*. I am then inclined to use such phrases as ‘How extraordinary that anything should exist!’ or ‘How extraordinary that the world should exist!’”³⁴ Wittgenstein also remarked elsewhere:

If the believer in God looks around & asks “Where does everything I see come from?” “Where does all that come from?”, what he hankers after is *not* a (causal) explanation; and the point of his question is that it is the expression of this hankering. He is expressing, then, a stance towards all explanations.³⁵

“A *stance* towards all explanations”, - in this passage, Wittgenstein does not spell out the nature of this “stance”. He simply calls it a “hankering” (*Verlangen*). But is it too much of a stretch to call it instead, “religious appreciation”? Does Wittgenstein’s “wonderment at the existence of the world” not sound like the experience we have been describing? If not, in which other category should it be classified? When Wittgenstein said “I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view”,³⁶ it seems plausible that what he was getting at was something like the experience that we are describing. That religious appreciation is an experience capable of being enjoyed by people who are not “religious men” recommends this interpretation. In short, Wittgenstein seemed not only to have

³⁴ Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 59.

³⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 97e.

³⁶ Quoted in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

mentioned an experience very much like religious appreciation; he also seems to have experienced it.

Something of this sentiment was also reflected in the words of the Australian philosopher, J.J.C. Smart, who said, "... my mind often seems to reel under the immense significance this question [about the origin of existence] has for me. That anything exists at all does seem to be a matter of the deepest awe."³⁷ Like Wittgenstein, the experience to which Smart is pointing seems to involve many of the basic elements we said comprise the concept of religious appreciation; for, like Wittgenstein, Smart's experience appears to be a non-practical, felt response of awe before an object of the world – the universe – that was deemed an end in itself or the ultimate question, something that caused his discursive mind to spin out. To speak of *awe* and *wonderment* at the universe, as Smart and Wittgenstein do, or to speak of breathtaking amazement at particular objects within the universe, is a common religious experience. But do we have a philosophical concept for it? Many of us are prone to this kind of felt reaction to the material world. Moreover, this attitude, expressed by both the religious and the secular, seems to be a kind of mental state in itself, or at least capable of being demarcated from other kinds of religious mental state. That perhaps is another reason to believe that religious appreciation is not only a phenomenal fact of human life, but also a useful concept to explicate that fact of human life.

The dialogical philosopher Martin Buber provides a third example of this experience. Buber also acutely recognized the way religion attributed value to concrete, sensory experience. Throughout his career, Buber recommended to his

³⁷ J.J.C. Smart, "The Existence of God", *Church Quarterly Review* 156 (1955): 194, quoted in William Lane Craig, "Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to *Creatio ex Nihilo*", in R. Douglas Geivett, et. al., eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 185.

readers – whether they were theists, like his friend Franz Rosenzweig, or atheists, like his admirer Albert Camus – the need to look for fulfilment in the here-and-now, among the ordinary things of life. As an example, consider the passage below, which, like Wittgenstein’s and Smart’s statements, can plausibly be interpreted as suggesting the salient role religious appreciation (although not Buber’s term) plays in the wider experience of religion.

Most of us achieve only at rare moments a clear realization of the fact that they have never tasted the fulfilment of existence.... We nevertheless feel the deficiency at every moment, and in some measure strive to find – somewhere – what we are seeking. Somewhere, in some province of the world or of the mind, except where we stand, where we have been set – but it is there and nowhere else that the treasure can be found. The environment which I feel to be the natural one, the situation which has been assigned to me as my fate, the things that claim me day after day – these contain my essential task and such fulfilment of existence as is open to me. It is said of a certain Talmudic master that the paths of heaven were as bright to him as the streets of his native town. Hasidism inverts the order: It is a greater thing if the streets of a man’s native town are as bright to him as the paths of heaven. For it is here, where we stand, that we should try to make shine the light of the hidden divine life.

If we had power over the ends of the earth, it would not give us that fulfilment of existence which a quiet devoted relationship to nearby life can give us. If we knew the secrets of the upper worlds, they would not allow us so much actual participation in true existence as we can achieve by performing, with holy intent, a task belonging to our daily duties. Our treasure is hidden beneath the hearth of our own home.³⁸

Here Buber talks about the “fulfilment of existence” and the “treasure” which is given to us by “a quiet devoted relationship to nearby life”. These are, to be sure, vague terms, as indeed is the passage as a whole. However, what Buber describes – this religious encounter with “nearby life” – could very well be understood by those ideas we are associating with religious appreciation. What Buber is saying sounds like a direct, non-cognitive, non-utilitarian, fulfilling confrontation with objects of the

³⁸ Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 164-165.

sensory world, which are in turn deemed as ends in themselves,³⁹ indeed so much so that it is as if they possessed the “hidden divine life”, as if they “fulfilled existence”. This way of experiencing mundane things is certainly not mysticism, or prayer, or conversion, or any of the ordinarily discussed religious experiences. So what religious experience is it? Let us at least consider that it is a possible example of religious appreciation, as perhaps were the examples gleaned from Wittgenstein and Smart.

It is philosophically fruitful to *stop* at this experience of wonderment, awe, and fulfilment of existence, pausing to contemplate its widespread appearance in human responses, especially in religion. It raises a number of philosophical questions.

- Why do people have this experience?
- What must be true about the world that human beings should react in such a way?
- How should the experience be described?
- With what might the experience be compared?

Perhaps because this experience so often appears before consciousness as a non-cognitive state, philosophers quickly jump past it, assuming it to be nothing more than the emotional *motive* behind the more serious discursive business of proving or disproving the existence of God. However, this experience is something in its own right, deserving its own philosophical analysis, and that is a primary reason why the concept of religious appreciation is valuable – and the subject of a doctoral dissertation.

Of course, the citation of a passage does not conclusively demonstrate that its author experienced the mental phenomena which we are calling religious appreciation, or that he would even wish to describe it as such. Any description of

³⁹ See Buber’s *I and Thou*, an extended essay on these psychological attributes of the “I-Thou relationship”.

another's experience will be open to interpretation. Nevertheless, even if only *one* man concurs that religious appreciation is a phenomenal fact in his life, if only one man agrees with the suggestion of this thesis, that he has experienced a mental state like that which we have described as religious appreciation, then we do indeed appear to have, in this world, a religious experience that *exists* (at least, in phenomenological appearance), and so is worthy of our philosophical contemplation. Moreover, it cannot be denied that the examples cited from Wittgenstein, Smart and Buber are open to an interpretation that is, at the very least, sympathetic to the idea of religious appreciation. Even that weaker claim still helps make the case that there is such an experience as religious appreciation within the wider concept of religious experience.

Religious appreciation is no rabbit pulled out of the philosopher's box of tricks. It may very well be an experience that has been around some time, but just has not been named and philosophically studied. We should also state that what we have cited as the basic features of religious appreciation does not mean that we cannot add more features to it. A Buddhist, for example, might add that the experience ought to be identified as a state distinct from the metaphysical liberation from the flawed idea of selfhood. Other religions, with a differing background of metaphysical assumptions, will obviously incorporate other features to the experience, describing it in different ways. Philosophers, too, will no doubt insert their own ideas into their interpretation of the experience, just as they have with respect to their various descriptions of, say, aesthetic experience or mystical experience. One can imagine, for example, a Heideggerian suggesting that the experience of religious appreciation has the ultimate effect of "disclosing being", or whatever.

In any case, whatever else may be added or subtracted, we now at least have a rudimentary theory of the nature of religious appreciation, and we also have some reason to believe that others may have described it and experienced it.

Objectivism and Subjectivism

Return now to mundane sacred predicates and ask the question whether mundane-sacred predicates refer to properties that are *objective* or *subjective*. That is, let us ask whether the qualities we attribute to mundane-sacred objects are properties inhering in those objects separate from our minds. If we entrust ourselves to the doctrine of objectivism, then we are committed to the view that mundane-sacred predicates signify external properties which dwell in objects independently of our consciousness. In contradistinction, if we entrust ourselves to *subjectivism* then we believe that an object can be described under a mundane-sacred predicate because it produces *in us* a certain kind of response. For the subjectivist, the cast of the Buddha's footprint does not really have the property of joy; the road to Zion does not really mourn; Gregorian chant is not really sad. Rather, such material objects prompt us to have an experience which in turn inspires us to voice mundane-sacred judgments. What divides the objectivist from the subjectivist is a metaphysical orientation, a radically different view of the ultimate nature of things.

The objectivist will argue that religious appreciation consists of obtaining knowledge about a mundane-sacred object's qualities through the application of perception. Depending on the metaphysical theory, the perception of the object's qualities may be said to be a result of our sensory organs coming into contact with the object, with our sensory faculties somehow apprehending the "mourning" of a road, the "sweetness" of the ocean, the "joy" in a footprint. Or, under a different metaphysical theory, the perception of these qualities may be said to be the product of

a “sixth sense”, a supernatural perceptual capacity that an elect few enjoy, such as Buddhas, Arhats, Mystics and Prophets. This objectivist theory, although unlikely to be widely adopted in contemporary secular academia, need not seem terribly implausible or grossly superstitious. Conceivably, an epistemology based on rationalism, rather than empiricism, might be able to construct a reasonable idealist argument in its favour. Since if, as some versions of rationalism hold, all mental ideas are cognitions, and if an idea such as “joy” is a cognition of a real property shared by all joyful objects, then it stands to reason that, if a mundane-sacred object is a potential species of joyful objects, then we are perceiving the species of joy in that object, as our mundane-sacred judgment literally asserts.

A subjectivist, of course, will think all this is sheer sophistry. According to subjectivism, in religious appreciation the subject is the only thing affected; the object itself is not in a state of mourning or joy or any other psychological state. Moreover the subject’s response – the effect that the object produces in him – is not the result of *perceiving* the object’s properties. A subjectivist may concede that the response of religious appreciation is a result of encountering the object, which includes any features the object has. But to the subjectivist these features are merely part of the *cause* of the psychological response of the subject, not the “religious” properties that the mundane-sacred predicates signify. Those religious qualities attributed to an object by a mundane-sacred judgment exist purely in the mind that contemplates them. Ironically, subjectivist interpretations of religious appreciation may be more consistent with an empiricist epistemology because empiricism – crudely put – conceives the human mind as a kind of reactive container of ideas that are gleaned, developed and combined from our sensory contact with the perceptual features of the world, and, in this view, the religious qualities of a mundane-sacred object are “semi-

sensory”, combining the ideas which our sense organs pick up from the world with our innate emotional and imaginative powers that are projected outward.

Arguments in Favour of Subjectivism

Several arguments can be adduced in support of a subjectivist theory of religious appreciation. One argument provides that, as Hume emphasized with regard to miracles and aesthetic taste,⁴⁰ there is substantial variation between what different individuals and cultures religiously appreciate. The range and disparities in judgment about mundane-sacred objects and the apparent absence of any agreed rules as to what counts as a correct judgment together fortify the idea that mundane-sacred predicates do not denote features inherent in objects. These judgments simply reflect personal, subjective or cultural points of view.

An objectivist, however, would quickly counter that *differences of opinion* are present in all types of discourse, even scientific discourse, so this standard cannot justify singling out *only* mundane-sacred judgment as subjective. Furthermore, an objectivist also might argue that the qualities of mundane-sacred objects are *mysterious*, and therefore they are available only to a chosen few who meet the special conditions necessary for discerning the object’s esoteric qualities. An observer of a mundane-sacred object might, for example, have to be *free from sin* or *negative karma* in order to apprehend its religious features.

But a subjectivist could well respond that those conditions may be necessary for other kinds of religious experience, such as mysticism or prophesy, but mundane-sacred judgments are uttered by millions of people, even by those who are not religious practitioners; such statements are even asserted by those who are

⁴⁰ David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”, in *Of the Standard of Taste, and Other Essays*, ed. John W. Lenz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

presumably fraught with sin and negative karma. So, whatever the nature of this experience, it is certainly not an *elitist* religious experience, as is mysticism or prophesy. Accordingly, in this case, we cannot postulate some type of religious aristocracy, as it were.

Another argument substantiating subjectivism is that religious appreciation often includes sensations of pleasure. And pleasure, being a felt response, is not a cognitive state of mind; it is not a proposition about the way things are. A feeling, as Kant pointed out, assigns nothing at all to the make up of an object; it is a *reaction* to an object.⁴¹ So if a felt response is a necessary condition for a sincere mundane-sacred judgment, how does the objectivist explain that objective properties necessarily produce these responses? The objectivist seems to want to say that mundane-sacred judgments merely result from a cool observation of the properties of a mundane-sacred object. But religious appreciation is not always, if ever, such a dispassionate inspection of an object. It is full of *felt* response, which means it has emotion and thus may not be cognitive at all.

A related argument, which one suspects neo-Wittgensteinian and dialogical philosophers might put forward, is that objectivism confuses the point of religious appreciation. Objectivism argues that a mundane-sacred judgment aims to mirror reality; a “correct” judgment will therefore reflect the way things are about an object. But the point of religious appreciation has nothing to do with whether a mundane-sacred judgment connects us with an impersonalised world; that is, as it really is. After all, in religious appreciation what we want – and indeed what we express – are the rewarding I-Thou relationships that we enjoy with sacred objects, like the kind of

⁴¹ “Every reference of representations”, thought Kant, “is capable of being objective, even that of sensations (in which case it signifies the real in an empirical representation). The one exception to this is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. This denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the Subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation”. *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 42.

gratifying relations we have with our fellow man or with God. Under these circumstances, notions of “objective reality” versus “subjective appearance” are simply irrelevant conceptual distinctions, since the *subjective relation* is why we cherish this experience in the first place.

Problems with Subjectivism

Having said all that, there is a potentially unappealing consequence to an unqualified subjectivist interpretation of religious appreciation. It would seem that a mundane-sacred judgment offers us no more than a testimony of one’s own mental state. It is, at best, narcissism, at worst, solipsism. Consequently, you might describe some scripture as “holy”, while I might describe it as “evil”, but there would be no means to differentiate between who is correct. Each of us would be living in our own little private world, speaking our own little private language. Thus religious appreciation would be something that we could not rationally debate. And so, all the disagreements that we *do* find between various mundane-sacred judgments would need to be explained as sheer human folly, as yet another futile exercise in disagreement.

Subjectivism then would, it seems, help vindicate the much-maligned logical-positivist view of religion. If subjectivism is true, mundane-sacred predicates are employed not in order to make statements of fact, but to express certain feelings and induce certain human responses. As a result, there is no sense in ascribing logical soundness to mundane-sacred judgments, or to bother arguing about them because this kind of language is, in the end, logically equivalent to exclamations like “wow” and “yuck”, words that merely express personal likes and dislikes. If I say *the wall is holy*, then this mundane-sacred judgment logically means nothing more than an exclamation such as: “The wall – yippee!”

Yet, as in aesthetics and ethics, the logical-positivist theory of mundane-sacred judgment conflicts with common sense. A phrase like “The wall is holy” does not seem to translate logically into “I like the wall”. The former undoubtedly means *more* than *my* feelings. What is more, religious people by and large certainly do not *use* their mundane-sacred judgments to point merely to themselves, to their own mind-set, to their own emotional joyrides. Whether we agree with them or not, religious people frequently regard their mundane-sacred judgments as accurate assertions, which others may *dispute*. Accordingly, they proffer reasons other than their likes and dislikes when they justify their inclination to call, say, a wall “holy” or an ocean “sacred”.

The plain fact is most of us *do* believe that a judgment about the sacred nature of a wall or an ocean is incompatible with another judgment that would call them “evil”. As the bare grammatical structure of these sentences implies, we wish to say something about the mundane-sacred object itself and, hence, not something about ourselves. When a man advances a mundane-sacred judgment he will presume that others will, or perhaps ought to, agree with him. Should they not, he may feel that this merely indicates an absence of religious appreciation or religious taste on their part, a kind of blindness to the holiness of things. Or he may think that through further discussion he will be able to *persuade* them to see the object as he does, or perhaps be persuaded by them to change *his* mind, language and reactions.

Because our *use* of language suggests that a mundane-sacred predicate is more than a subjective grunt, more than an avowal of personal likes or dislikes, the philosophical question then becomes: how, if we are to remain committed to the ordinary practice of language, do we maintain the subjective character of religious

appreciation without falling into raw subjective scepticism of the logical-positivist variety?

To answer this, there are a number of proposals.

One of those proposals we might call the *Humean Theory* because it is borrowed from David Hume's ideas on aesthetic standards.⁴² Here we would argue that the standard for accepting some mundane-sacred judgments – like “The Western Wall wails” – while rejecting others – like “The Western Wall smiles” – results not from something inherent in the mundane-sacred object itself, but from something in the sensibility of the human being who makes that statement. Under this view, nature or God or *something* has placed certain relations between the form of mundane-sacred objects and human reactions. Some particular objects are calculated or arranged in such a way so as to spark our religious appreciation, while others are designed to remain neutral, or even to displease or frighten us.⁴³ Furthermore, some people have greater sensibilities with respect to these objects than do others; those with wide and broad sensitivity react energetically, enjoying deep religious appreciation of things, while those of dull and tired sensibilities remain lethargic and bored even in the face of the most glorious mundane-sacred object. For this reason, a “correct” mundane-sacred judgment is one that comes from a delicate sensibility working within ideal conditions. This also means that a correct mundane-sacred judgment will not identify properties inhering in objects, nor will they merely declare a man's subjective experience. Rather a mundane-sacred judgment conveys that some given object

⁴² See, again, “Of the Standard of Taste”.

⁴³ One thinks of Edgar Allan Poe's terrified protagonist in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, when he writes of his reactions to the ghoulish appearance of the house: “I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depths. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression...” *The Fall of the House of Usher, and Other Tales* (New York: Signet Classic, 1998), 110.

possesses a certain quality that uniquely counts it among those objects of the world that are calculated – by God or nature – to evoke a certain kind of response in *some* of us.

Thus, on the Humean theory of religious appreciation, we have before us a kind of spiritual elitism. A mundane-sacred judgment is correct when it is uttered by the most sensitive among us, when it is said by those most attuned to the qualities of mundane-sacred objects. The rest of us, meanwhile, ought to conform to the judgments of our betters should we desire our mundane-sacred judgments to be “correct”.

All this no doubt raises the questions about who *is* the most sensitive, what qualities does he have, and how can we agree on this. Even if we concede that there are psychological differences between our own minds and others, and even if we grant that there are sociological differences and social hierarchies between members of our society – even if we concede all that, why *should* we defer to the judgment of others? What establishes their authority? Why should we regard someone else’s judgment as having a more compelling claim to correctness than our own? The Humean theory may offer us causal, sociological or psychological reasons as to why we do often defer to the mundane-sacred judgments of others; but this theory fails to explain why we *ought* to do so.

This theoretical affliction we might call, “the normative problem of mundane-sacred judgment”. In confronting this problem, we might begin by looking to Kantian philosophy for an answer.⁴⁴ If we follow Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment by applying it to mundane-sacred judgment, we come up with a potential strategy for dealing with the normative quandary. To see this, we need to take seriously, as Kant

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*.

most certainly would have, the idea that implicit in mundane-sacred judgment is *the demand for agreement*. When one voices a mundane-sacred judgment there is a transcendental supposition that all other people, without exception, *ought to* concur with one's appraisal of the mundane-sacred object.

Suppose when making a mundane-sacred judgment that we divorce everything that might relate to our contingent, individually varying constitutions, so as to base our judgment entirely on conditions that are *universal*. This would ground our mundane-sacred judgment on things about the mundane-sacred object that are necessarily accessible and common to the consciousness of all persons. Now what are those things that all of us, from whatever culture or time, have in common when confronting a mundane-sacred object? Those commonalities according to a Kantian would be, one, *the bare perceptible form of the mundane-sacred object*; and, two, *the mundane-sacred object's relationship to our basic and universally shared capacities of perception and understanding*.

Before we dispute this, and it is indeed a contentious claim, at least let us follow the Kantian theory, whose philosophical originator was nobody's fool.

To ascertain the correct mundane-sacred judgment, then, the first step is to focus on the above two basic features of the object and our minds, stripping away all that is not universal in both. This makes way for the second step, which is the freeing of our awareness of the object from our desires and practical concerns, as well as freeing us from our conceptual – and often grossly prejudiced – scheme for understanding the objects of the world. By focusing on the common perceptual properties of the object under our common perceptual understanding, we attain in the third step a “universal” or “disinterested” standpoint out of which we can apprehend the mundane-sacred object. From here, we could say that we now see the mundane-

sacred object as a “Thou”, to borrow Buber’s term. The object, as it were, steps up to us in its singularity, liberated from our own petty and narcissistic wants and uses and concepts. When these strict stipulations are satisfied, when we become free from our own contingency, the judgment we make of the mundane-sacred object is valid for *everyone*. And thus we have what might be termed a “pure mundane-sacred judgment” of religious appreciation. This is what we can call a “correct” judgment, thus rendering impotent the normative problem that has been upsetting us.

Such an argument, of course, rests on the dubious Enlightenment supposition that we all share a “common sense”, and that our abilities for the felt response of religious appreciation are the *same*. In that regard, it is interesting to note that where the Humean theory for overcoming the normative problem of mundane-sacred judgment is aristocratic and elitist, the Kantian theory is radically egalitarian. The question then becomes: is this Kantian egalitarianism supported empirically?

Clearly, a sceptic of the Bertrand Russell type, even if he aims for the Kantian “universal standpoint”, will most likely never respond to a Russian Orthodox icon in the way that, say, Dostoevsky would have. Moreover, this account of mundane-sacred judgment necessitates that everything except the *form* of a mundane-sacred object be stripped away, whereas in nearly all religious objects *content* is essential for our felt response and judgment. So the Kantian theory seems to leave us with a rather impoverished view of the nature of religious appreciation, focusing our attention on features that may not be what makes this experience emotion raising and valuable in the first place.

Whatever their particular flaws, the Kantian and Humean theories at least offer us the basic strategy for dealing with mundane-sacred judgment. However we ultimately flesh it out, its bare bones will resemble something like what has been set

forth in aesthetics: first, we compromise with the subjectivist, agreeing that mundane-sacred judgments are in some way *dependent* on mental states of liking and disliking; but, second, we deny that mundane-sacred judgments are *logically reducible* to judgments of liking and disliking; so that, third, we maintain that mundane-sacred judgments also *transcend* judgments of pure personal liking and disliking. From here, to be sure, the Humean and Kantian theories will send us into two different theoretical directions. If we follow the Humean path, we will – somehow – arrive at a philosophical position that grounds religious appreciation on the *contingent* and *natural* features of our minds. If we follow the Kantian path, we will – somehow – arrive at the philosophical position that grounds religious appreciation on the *necessary* and *universal* dimensions of the human mind. The chief advantage of the Humean theory is that it avoids a radical subjectivism, but the trade off is that it generates the normative problem. While the chief advantage of the Kantian theory is that it successfully meets the normative problem, it does so at the unwelcome cost of excluding many of the important psychological and cultural ingredients that make our subjective responses to mundane-sacred objects less than universal.

Against the backdrop of the Humean-Kantian framework, are a number of other theories that could be inspired by Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*.⁴⁵ Some of these other ways of conceiving the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment and the degree to which it is subjective are briefly presented below.

⁴⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, compiled from notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997).

One theory could be borrowed from Scruton's "affective theory",⁴⁶ which owes much to Kant and Wittgenstein. Notable about this theory is its denial of mundane-sacred judgments as *descriptions*, an idea we shall be exploring in fuller detail in later pages. Under this view, although mundane-sacred judgments share the grammatical form of ordinary declarative sentences, they do not make statements of fact. The mundane-sacred predicate attributes no property whatsoever to the mundane-sacred object. So, *pace* their grammatical form, the deeper logical structure of these sentences is closer to the practice of gestures and exclamations. Hence, such sentences convey or *express* a certain kind of personal experience, rather than an *assertion* about the nature of a thing. Nor are these sentences *instrumental*. In the words of Beattie: "Instrumental activity is directed to bringing about some desired state of affairs; it is oriented towards an end. Expressive activity is a way of saying or expressing something; usually some idea or state of mind."⁴⁷ In light of the application of that idea to mundane-sacred judgment, it is incorrect to speak about the "religious qualities" of a mundane-sacred object. Instead it is more profitable to describe the experiences and responses of religious appreciation, which are expressed by mundane-sacred judgments. Our philosophical goal, then, is to elucidate what this experience is like, how mundane-sacred objects affect us – and not to investigate the alleged properties of these objects or how we must agree on a correct judgment about them. To justify these statements is to elucidate their "acceptance conditions" as opposed to their "truth-conditions".

The "affective theory" contrasts with Ruby Meager's theory of aesthetic judgment, another theory we can try to apply to mundane-sacred judgments.⁴⁸ Unlike

⁴⁶ See Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1998).

⁴⁷ J.H.M. Beattie, *Other Cultures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 71.

⁴⁸ See Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 10 (1970), 303-22.

the affective theory, if we borrow Meager's proposals, we will contend that a mundane-sacred judgment does indeed have the logical role of a description about the qualities of an object. However, the function of these sentences is to assign powers to certain objects. In other words, it is a way of stating that an object has the ability to spark certain kinds of experiences in a person. Thus religious appreciation will be defined as an interest in an object that promotes particular types of responses. The mundane-sacred object itself, meanwhile, does not have any special "religious qualities" such as sacredness or holiness, nor does it have expressive features like sadness, mourning or joy. Instead these are only our subjective responses. Even so, the object does have the ability to promote these kinds of predication.

For those who are unhappy with the Meager theory, thinking it perhaps *too* subjective, we might try to develop another theory, which suggests that the qualities attributed to mundane-sacred objects have roughly the same degree of subjectivity as *colours*. This indeed would salvage us from an extreme subjectivism; for, just as perception of colours seems to subsist somewhere between the Self and the Other, so too perhaps does a quality like sacredness or an expressive feature like sadness reside neither wholly in me nor wholly in the mundane-sacred object. This idea would probably be the least subjective analogy we could draw, if it can be drawn at all. After all, there is certainly a severe disparity between the passions in our disagreements over the colour of a thing versus the broadness and harshness in our disagreements over whether something is sacred. If we are going to say that the qualities attributed to a mundane-sacred object are like colours, then we need to explain why debates over colour are fewer and less contentious than debates over the application of mundane-sacred predicates. Perhaps, as an answer to this problem, a proposal that only those people who have the special kind of perception required for

the apprehension of these qualities will be satisfying. But that proposal returns us to the troubles found in the elitist point of view.

Another proposal could be to deny that these qualities are like colours that necessitate a special perception. Instead the qualities are like *aspects*, like our experiences of Gestalt ambiguous figures. Like aspects, these appearances found in the mundane-sacred object, and denoted by mundane-sacred predicates, seem to exist neither wholly in the subject nor wholly in the object. Under this view, then, we escape unqualified subjectivism by denying any talk of the “qualities” of mundane-sacred objects in favour of talk about their “aspects”. This would make better sense than seeing an analogy with colours, because, in order to perceive an aspect, you do need some cognitive background, supplied by prior conceptual and, possibly, cultural frameworks. Such features are perhaps more congruent with what is involved when people assert mundane-sacred judgments, hinging as they do on a wider network of linguistic and cultural assumptions. A man who has never heard of or seen a duck would most likely never recognize the duck-aspect in a Gestalt figure. Similarly, a man who has never heard of the Buddha would most likely never begin to see the “joy” in a sculpted cast of the Buddha’s footprint. And so on.

To conclude, all of these theories – be they derived from Kant, Hume or Wittgenstein – have their merits and demerits. Still, it would be philosophically worthwhile to see how contemporary philosophers would develop these proposals – and others of their own.

CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECTS

Return now to the issues surrounding the qualities and nature of mundane-sacred objects. Of the many conceptual problems afflicting the philosophy of art, there are several that easily transfer to a philosophical discussion of the concept of a mundane-sacred object. For example, there are the perennial questions surrounding the aesthetic notions of *representation*, *expression*, *interpretation* and *intention*, and all these concepts have direct applicability to the objects of religious appreciation. Since mundane-sacred objects include paintings and sculptures, the concept of representation becomes crucial for our understanding of religious reactions to these phenomena. Similarly, since mundane-sacred objects include music and chant, the concept of expression also becomes fundamental, as do the concepts of interpretation and intention, since, after all, a significant category of mundane-sacred object is the literature known as “scripture”. How scripture – perhaps the most significant mundane-sacred object – is interpreted is undoubtedly a basic question of religious appreciation. As with aesthetics, there are also questions concerning the *priority* of mundane-sacred objects, as well problems surrounding their *ontological make up*.

All of these questions taken from the philosophy of art will be briefly surveyed below, before we consider some of the general theories that may answer them.

The Problem of Representation

Turn first to the potential philosophical question surrounding the concept of representation within the concept of the mundane-sacred object. Among the most prevalent mundane-sacred objects within the world religions are pictorial representations and sculptures, visual phenomena that depict sacred things and sacred people. When a pious Christian looks at a painting of Jesus, for instance, he does not merely see splashes of colours and random geometrical figures on a two-dimensional canvas. Rather he has a very particular visual experience. Out of the colours and Euclidean shapes, he *sees* Jesus nailed to the cross.

But how?

How can a painted canvas present a man with a visual object such as the suffering of Jesus? More generally, how do paintings represent things? This question, fundamental to the philosophy of art, is even more basic than the issue about the iconographic and religious meanings of such images. Prior to confronting a painting's symbolic and sacred meaning, we might wonder first about how this more basic ingredient of representation fits into religious appreciation.

There are a number of conceivable solutions, borrowed once again from the philosophy of art. Intuitively, we say that pictorial representation consists of *resemblance*. The painting of Jesus on the cross *looks like* Jesus on the cross. Its realism is dependent on the extent to which the painting actually is similar in looks to Jesus – or, if barring that, then it looks similar to how any man nailed to a cross would look.

However, such a theory, although commonsensical, hardly does justice to the religious experience. For one thing, dots of colour spread out on a two-dimensional surface have nothing like the physical proportions of an actual man hammered to a

cross. For another thing, few Christians ever sincerely claim that some painting of Jesus looks like the *real* Jesus, knowing full well that we do not know what he actually looked like. So this theory, if it is to be persuasive, needs some more development.

Another explanation, a rather radical one, is that pictorial representation has nothing whatsoever to do with *perception*. Instead, the seeing of Jesus in the picture is entirely conventional, like the understanding of a sentence in a natural language. Representation is a kind of linguistic denotation; and understanding and seeing what a picture depicts is nothing other than an issue of interpretation. For instance, to see Jesus in the painting requires a prior understanding of the “symbol system” of Christianity. Only by knowing this system do we come to understand what the painting is imparting to us. Under this view, the religious appreciation of a mundane-sacred object demands prior familiarity with the religious institution in which it is found.⁴⁹

This explanation, however, as with all philosophical explanations, is questionable. Road signs, prose narratives, and maps also denote scenes. But, unlike a painting, they do not produce the kind of *visual* experience that we seem to have when we look at a painting. By negating its visual image, the forgoing theory seems to blur this distinction, prompting us to conclude erroneously that *reading* a prose description of Jesus nailed to the Cross is the same kind of experience as actually *seeing* it on canvas. Moreover, it appears quite evident that even someone who has never heard of Jesus or the institution of Christianity can, if he has eyes, perceive a painting of Jesus (and perhaps come to see it as a sacred object). At its most basic level, religious appreciation is open to anyone with functioning sense organs. Indeed this was one of

⁴⁹ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976).

the features that we said distinguished a mundane-sacred object from a transcendent-sacred object like a God or Nirvana. So this “linguistic/convention theory” seems to be rather weak in explaining the *sensory* feature of religious appreciation.

Another potential theory of representation is that the visual experience of seeing Jesus on the Cross is a kind of *illusion*.⁵⁰ True, it is a visual experience. But it is one produced through the painting’s power to create an illusory image. Now how does it have this capacity? One answer might be that our ability to see the illusion is based on an historic process of visual “schemata” that we have inherited throughout the history of art. In other words, we see the illusion of Jesus on the Cross because the particular arrangement of geometrical shapes before our eyes has, over the years, come to represent, though not resemble, the object of Jesus. This is why we are able to identify an image of Jesus whether he is depicted like a pale Scandinavian or a darker skinned Native American.

This is an attractive idea. But, again, there are some problems with it. One is that, if the visual experience of seeing Jesus on the canvas is an illusion, would we not then *mistake* the image for a reality, as the ordinary concept of an illusion would suggest? Yet, when looking at a painting of Jesus, we do not ordinarily make that kind of mistake. There is never any question that what we are seeing is the *real* Jesus *really* nailed to the *real* Cross. So, concerning the representation of Jesus, our experience cannot be some kind of an illusion, at least not as that term is usually understood. A second problem is that, when looking at a painted canvas, we do not always lose awareness of the canvas when we *see* the picture.⁵¹ Indeed, the artistry of its brush strokes can itself, at times, become an object of reverence and religious admiration, as

⁵⁰ Ernst. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London: Phaidon, 1977).

⁵¹ See Richard Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); *The Mind and its Depths* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

is the case with masterful Islamic calligraphy or the images found in Japanese Zen paintings. We must deduce from this that religious appreciation may involve a simultaneous awareness of both the material out of which the mundane-sacred object is made and its representational content.

One of today's greatest philosophers of art, the recently departed Richard Wollheim, has suggested that pictorial representation comes about through the activation of a special mental capacity that is tied to man's organic ability to *imagine*. When asked *how do we see a portrait in a painting*, the simple answer is that we do so because innate imaginative perception gives us the power to see Jesus *in* the painting. Wollheim entitles this special kind of imaginative perception – “seeing-in”. To make the case for this idea, he first noted that one of the features of pictorial representation is that it depicts objects that are either not present (as in the case of Jesus) or non-existent (as in the case of, say, a surreal Salvador Dali painting). But these alternatives – between what is not present and what is non-existent – are something we also experience when hallucinating, dreaming, and daydreaming. So can it be, asked Wollheim, that our power to perceive pictorial representation derives from the same mental capacity that allows us to see dreams, daydreams, and hallucinations? Evidently, the human mind possesses a peculiar capacity to produce visual experiences *out of itself*. Given that, it seems plausible that, when we see the picture of Jesus on the canvas, what we are doing is *imaginatively seeing* Jesus *in* the external world of a mundane-sacred object. It is a kind of projection of our imaginative minds onto a canvas whose dots of colour possess just the right properties and arrangements that allow the image to manifest before our eyes. Thus, the visual experience of seeing a man nailed to a cross is mingled with the perception of an exterior, physical object made out of dotted colours and shapes. Under this view,

religious appreciation suffuses the material world with our innate, organic imaginative abilities.

As interesting as all these ideas are, let us leave them for other philosophers to consider, and now turn to another potential question in the analysis of religious appreciation, the problem of *expression*.

The Problem of Expression

As we noted, throughout the world's religions we find inanimate mundane-sacred objects – like musical works, paintings, plays, sculptures, scriptures, mountains, trees, and so on – described by words such as *sad, joyful, happy, blissful, calm*, and so forth. The employment of such terms to describe physical, inanimate things is intellectually curious. Why do religious (as well as secular) people describe these inanimate objects by terms we normally use to describe human emotional and psychological states? Apparently, there are *expressive features* inherent in mundane-sacred objects. But, in what way are they *integral* to the physical object? And, how are these features related to our experience of religious appreciation? The philosophical problem here is that religious people, provided, of course, they are not under a metaphysical belief in some kind of pantheism or animism, apply emotional terms to mundane-sacred objects without contending that these objects actually have emotions. To say, for example, that “*the road to Zion mourns*” makes no literal sense: a road cannot have an emotion or any other psychological state for that matter. Nevertheless, it is said to be “mourning”.

How is it possible for such an object to express that kind of emotion? Why do religious people show a repeated tendency, across culture, space and time, to describe their inanimate sacred objects in such emotional ways? What kind of experience makes it appropriate to use such language?

There are at least three answers.

One answer, which we shall largely ignore in this dissertation, is that the objects themselves do in fact feel emotions and other human mental states. This would cohere with certain pantheistic beliefs.

Another reply might be that mundane-sacred objects possess these features because such objects act as instruments for expressing the emotions of their *author*, be that author a god, an angel, a demon, a man, a spirit, or whatever. Here the mind of the author, the object's creator, explains why people might be tempted to describe, for instance, a road as mourning or a sculpture as joy. The sculpture is called joy because its creator was striving to express his own joy, his own mental experience. The road is said to be mourning because its developer is or would be in mourning should he see what is happening to his creation.

However, this theory still does not settle the issue because it fails to answer the question as to how this alleged author, however powerful this author might be, is able to use raw matter, or paints, or rocks, or patterns of sound, or anything that has no mind, to express mind. This theory requires an immensely elaborate metaphysical explanation, one that many may be disinclined to concede, and quite reasonably.

A final theory suggests that these sacred objects have the power to stimulate emotions *in the religious observer*. Somehow the objects emotionally move us as we face them. For instance, we call a mundane-sacred object "sad" because it arouses a melancholy feeling in us. So when I say, "the road to Zion mourns", what I mean is that something about that road makes *me* mourn. Under this theory, it is *my* mind, it is *I* the onlooker, which explains the psychological use of these terms. Hence, unlike the two previous theories, it is not the mind of the road or the mind of its author that bestows sense on our choice of expressive language. It is the self.

But this cannot be right either; for it does not follow that because I describe some sacred music as “sad”, I therefore feel sad myself. I can listen to a sacred chant and call it “melancholy” – and yet not feel the slightest bit melancholy. The plain fact is that a man does not necessarily experience the emotion expressed by the mundane-sacred object, at least not in the same way as he does in daily life.

It seems, then, that the emotional or psychological term cannot be attributed to either the *author* of the mundane-sacred object or to its *spectator*, or to the *object* itself. Does this mean that it floats somehow between the three? If so, how?

To avoid this conundrum, we may wish to deny that mundane-sacred objects express emotion at all, but nevertheless argue that they continue to produce emotional effects on their spectators.⁵² That is, perhaps, what is happening in this use of language is that such objects *cause* emotions in some people, but to be susceptible to this causal power is an entirely personal or cultural association that has nothing to do with the actual physical properties of the object. Accordingly, when religious people describe their inanimate mundane-sacred objects with emotional terms, they are under a kind of subjective or communal illusion. And, as a result of this illusion, the appropriate object of appreciation might be the illusory *form* of these sacred objects, and not the particular emotion that we think it expresses. It is doubtful, though, that this theory will satisfy those who experience religious appreciation, since expressive descriptions might be felt to be *essential* for the religious value and meaning of the experience.

Another suggestion, then, is that the expressive qualities of mundane-sacred objects should be understood in light of our ordinary practice of language.⁵³ According to this view, then, the application of these terms would be *metaphorical*.

⁵² Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986).

⁵³ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*.

Now this, the idea of metaphor, is an intuitive explanation that most of us are probably inclined to advance. However, the experience of religious appreciation seems to involve more than a metaphorical explanation allows. When listening, for example, to a Gregorian chant or to the sound of a melancholy Yom Kippur service, our descriptions of “sadness” are not merely metaphorical. After all, our experience of these objects can be highly emotionally stimulating, which makes our use of emotional language under these circumstances always more than an abstract association of unlike things. Moreover, the appeal to the concept of metaphor hardly mollifies our philosophical worries, since the concept is itself an intransigent philosophical problem.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, when appealing to metaphor as a way out of this expressivist problem, we are simply trading one conundrum for another.

Perhaps another theory is that we describe our mundane-sacred objects using emotional and psychological terms because we see *analogies* between these objects and human behaviour. We recognize emotional features in both phenomena and, consequently, describe them with similar language. For example, when we say a Yom Kippur chant is “sad” what we mean is that the music resembles the emotionally expressive qualities of humans when they are sad – their bodily movements, their speech patterns, their facial expressions, and so on. In other words, there is a phenomenologically similar experience between, on the one hand, seeing and hearing sadness in your neighbour’s bodily movements or sound of voice, and, on the other hand, hearing the sadness of a Yom Kippur chant.

Nonetheless, like so many arguments from analogy, this theory has problems in establishing precise resemblances. What, for example, are the features that music, bodily behaviour and voice inflections all share? Which qualities, moreover, does a

⁵⁴ What is metaphor? What is its nature?

man in mourning have in common with a road in mourning? Or, if there are analogies between human behaviour and inanimate sacred objects, why am I inclined to call the slow beat of a Yom Kippur chant “sad” rather than “cautious”? It would seem we would need to first experience the mundane-sacred object as expressive *before* we can imaginatively see it like the human form.

Yet another theory of expression is that the human mind has a tendency to extend itself across the world.⁵⁵ Some objects of the world – somehow – are fixed by nature to receive these emotional terms. There is a natural correspondence between human emotions and physical objects. Our minds are pre-established to think that some inanimate objects “fit with” psychological language. In this way, religious people can describe their mundane-sacred objects in emotional terms because these objects are among those items of the universe that are amenable to our emotional states.

Perhaps.

The Problems of Interpretation and Intention

Now, even if one of the above theories can answer the problems surrounding the representational and expressive features of mundane-sacred objects, there is the wider question of their *meaning*, which we have yet to consider. What is the significance of any given mundane-sacred object? What is it trying to convey? And, how can we appropriately *interpret* its meaning?

Take any of the world’s *scriptures*. Any one of them has been subject over the centuries to innumerable interpretations, both within and without the religious traditions in which they are found. It is not always clear how we might successfully adjudicate between these various and often-contradictory interpretations. Are the

⁵⁵ On one interpretation this seems to be, in part, David Hume’s point of view in “Of the Standard of Taste”.

Gospels truly written by Mathew, Mark, John and Luke, the actual disciples of Jesus, or were they composed at a later date by unknown authors? Is the Pali Canon the true and only word of the Buddhist teaching, or do the later Mahayana scriptures also enjoy legitimacy? Is the *Song of Songs* a collection of poetry about man's loving relationship to God, or is it merely ancient erotic literature?

Such divergent interpretations of mundane-sacred objects naturally raise two basic questions: Does biographical information about the author of a mundane-sacred object provide sufficient evidence for or against a particular interpretation? And, is it philosophically legitimate to speak about *the* correct interpretation?

Modern philosophy offers us two competing positions for the first question: anti-intentionalism and intentionalism.⁵⁶ Anti-intentionalism contends that it is a fallacy to suppose that information about the author of a work – or, indeed, any external information such as the culture in which it is produced – can provide us with the mundane-sacred object's meaning.⁵⁷ Under the anti-intentionalist persuasion, the only information that is relevant to its meaning is found in the mundane-sacred object itself. Meaning dwells objectively *in* the sacred object. Careful attention to the words of a scripture, assiduous meditation on the sounds of holy music, or vigilant observance of an icon – all this kind of devoted behaviour - is the strategy which will provide us with what we need to determine the mundane-sacred object's meaning and value. According to anti-intentionalism, then, we cannot legitimately infer a fact about a mundane-sacred object from a psychological fact about its creator. The two are independent; for what is most important is that there is an inherent dignity to the

⁵⁶ The discussion of intentionalism versus anti-intentionalism of the mundane-sacred is modelled after Sabastian Gardner's excellent introductory essay "Aesthetics", in *Philosophy 1: A Guide Through the Subject*, ed., A.C. Grayling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 607-609.

⁵⁷ See W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's classic essay, "The Intentional Fallacy", in David Newton-De Molina, ed., *On Literary Intention* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976).

mundane-sacred object. And, therefore, its meaning transcends any information we might glean about its author.

Intentionalism, by contrast, contends that the meaning of any mundane-sacred object must take into account what the author of the work intended. Ultimately, the meaning is what its creator *meant*. So, where anti-intentionalism holds that the mundane-sacred object enjoys autonomy, a kind of sacredness in itself, intentionalism would have us believe that the meaning of a sacred object is dependent on its point of origin. If somehow it turns out that Mathew, Mark, John and Luke were written in fact by, shall we say, Marcus Aurelius then this fact will have an overwhelming bearing on the meaning of Christian scripture, decisively altering how we should understand it because, for the intentionalist, textual meaning *is* authorial meaning. And, so whatever Emperor Marcus Aurelius might have meant when writing the Gospels is what we ourselves should understand today as its correct sense.

An anti-intentionalist, on the other hand, argues that an object, if it is to be interpreted as sacred, ought to be judged in terms of the experience one has when interacting with it, no matter who wrote it. To call some book a “scripture” rests primarily on *our* relationship with *that* text, that singular thing before us which elicits the kind of experience that prompts us to call it a *scripture*. And, its status as a scripture, therefore, stands or falls depending on its capacity to produce particular kinds of religious experience in people. Today, for instance, no one regards Homer’s *Iliad* as a scripture. It is considered a “classic”. And this is because the text no longer generates the kind of experiences that would need to be present for it to earn that special religious status known as scripture. Hence, whatever Homer may have meant, or wanted his epic to mean, is completely irrelevant today in interpreting its

significance. We need to look to the living situation surrounding the text in the here and now, if we are to grasp its religious implications.

The intentionalist may counter that, when a work *is* regarded as scripture, then the author's meaning is indeed relevant. When such conditions are present – when we actually do hold a certain text as a scripture – then consideration and awareness of the intentions of its author are fundamental. The intentions carry pertinent information about how we are to understand the sacred words. To say that Jesus' intentions underlying the *Sermon on the Mount* are inconsequential to that mundane-sacred object's meaning is potentially to misunderstand the *will of God*, a mistake that could very well have profound consequences. Indeed, according to some versions of Christianity, we could suffer eternal damnation if we misconstrue the author's intentions. We also cannot forget that, when mundane-sacred objects like scriptures are interpreted, we very often describe them by way of concepts like *sincerity*, *eloquence* and *wisdom*, concepts that seem to imply attributes of an author, which are now manifested in the scripture. Given these facts, it is simply not the case for the intentionalist that we can ignore the creator of an object and, in so doing, elucidate its meaning by simply attending to its inherent texture. It is not so subjective. We will have to look beyond our own experience in order to glean the text's import; we will have to look to its biographical, historical and cultural surroundings.

In plainer language, if you agree with intentionalism, then you will believe that the meaning of mundane-sacred objects includes an investigation into the disciplines of biography, psychology, history and anthropology, and any other factors, conscious or otherwise, which add to the production of sacred objects. But, if you agree with anti-intentionalism, then none of these offer important information for their

significance. You will feel that your direct experience with the object is all you require for uncovering its value and importance.

Turn now to the second question, which is whether we can say there *is* a correct interpretation of a mundane-sacred object. Again, we seem to be faced with a two-fold response to this question. One response is that there is for every mundane-sacred object – for every scripture, for every holy song, for every mantra, for every sacred tree – one and only one correct interpretation. And this is true quite independent of whether or not we can identify that unique meaning. For convenience, call this the Monist Theory of Interpretation.⁵⁸

The other view, of course, is that there are several justifiable interpretations, maybe even an infinite number of valid points of view. Each one of them, no matter how contradictory or inconsistent with any other, can enjoy legitimacy, and thus prompt compelling religious experiences. Under this view, the mundane-sacred object is a kind of vehicle for stimulating an explosion of views, ideas, emotions and creativity. Let us call this the Pluralist Theory of Interpretation.⁵⁹

The monist idea of a “correct interpretation” presupposes that mundane-sacred objects possess objective and determinate meanings. That assumption, though, is far from obvious. After all, from where does this determinacy derive? Even if we make the supposition that every individual word in some given scripture has a determinate meaning – and this is dubious because of the prevalence of metaphor in religious discourse – then we still would be left with the question of its *overall* meaning. What do the words all together signify? When we approach the text as a *whole* – for instance, by comparing the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, John and Luke – surely there

⁵⁸ Again, from Sebastian Gardner’s essay, “Aesthetics”.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

will be a variety of potential meanings which go beyond, as it were, the dictionary meanings of the individual words comprising the individual Gospels. Indeed, the whole scripture may be deemed greater than the sum of its parts, and thus when we confront a mundane-sacred object as a *totality*, we face the possibility of several valid interpretations. That fact, according to the pluralist, proves that we cannot speak of *the* correct interpretation.

A monist might reply to this with two arguments. First, he could contend it is a fallacy to conclude that, because there are competing interpretations, it therefore follows that there simply is *no* correct interpretation. At best, the pluralist argument justifies a kind of interpretative agnosticism. We simply *do not know* if there is a single right point of view. Consequently, the pluralist is deducing more than the evidence warrants. Second, assuming intentionalism is true, then the meaning of a scripture – or any other mundane-sacred object – will be determined by the intentions of its author. Accordingly, the correct interpretation can be said to be the one that mirrors those intentions.

Of course, the pluralist may wish to dispute the assumption that authorial intention supplies the determinate meaning, as we discussed earlier. He may also counter-argue that part of the concept of scripture – or any other mundane-sacred object for that matter – is that it is a text whose purpose is to elicit religious responses in its readers. An individual scripture is valued *as* scripture because it communicates something to us *as* individuals. It has *personal* meaning. And, since persons differ widely from one another, we ought not to expect one singular importance to be given to any mundane-sacred object. Each man, each one of us, will construe the text as his own unique nature sees fit. There is simply no reason to say that there is *an* accurate interpretation, which we should all embrace. Such a postulation closes a man off

from the wonderful possibilities inherent in the religious appreciation of mundane-sacred objects.

Perhaps some, when reading the above statement, will think of Jacques Derrida and his celebrated philosophy of deconstructionism, a form of *anti-intentionalist pluralism*.⁶⁰ Something of this theory, of course, is also found in the literary and post-colonial theories of Edward Said.⁶¹ According to such postmodern thinkers, there is no absolute determinate meaning in *any* context. We have nothing that could act as an objective criterion that would help us decipher appropriate or “true” interpretations from inappropriate and false ones. Ultimately, this is because meaning is *created* rather than *discovered* through such traditionally philosophical methods as analysis and logic. According to this view, not only the mundane-sacred object but also life itself is comprised of a plethora of “narratives”. What is more, the narrative that happens to be received as true is merely opinion backed by the maximum power structure, as Nietzsche and Foucault point out.⁶² In reality, a mundane-sacred object will exist for the sake of interpretation, not the other way around. And thus, contrary to Enlightenment assumptions, when we interpret something like a mundane-sacred object, we are not *uncovering* its hidden meaning. Like gods, we are *making* it.

Nowadays, many will find the anti-intentionalist pluralist position liberating, a way of freeing man from the shackles of orthodoxy, convention, and conservatism, a way of deepening our tolerance for one another’s different points of view, a way of

⁶⁰ Terms, again, taken from Sebastian Gardner’s “Aesthetics”.

⁶¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁶² Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Will to Power as Art”, in *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, et. al. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice - Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard, et. al., ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, trans. Colin Gordon, et. al., ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); *Politics Philosophy Culture - Interviews and Other Writings*, trans. Alan Sheridan, et. al., ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988).

welcoming in the marginalized, the occupied, and the oppressed. On the other hand, others, particularly if they are of a monist inclination, might find the pluralist view preposterous, perhaps even dangerous, as it seems to strip us of objective criteria, leaving us, as it were, with an “anything goes” attitude. The monist will contend that, as a consequence of anti-intentionalist pluralism, Saint Francis’ interpretation of and reaction to the *Song of Songs* would be no more valid than if, say, a paedophile were to read it as a work about child seduction that justifies child rape. Taken to its logical conclusion, says the monist, anti-intentionalist pluralism ceases to be a mere academic theory and becomes abjectly obnoxious and depraved.

Further Problems with Scripture, Myth and Religious Drama

Let us leave the ongoing Monist/Pluralist debate, and turn to another potential dispute in the analysis of mundane-sacred objects. This one concerns how we are to understand *non-literal statements* in scriptures, myths and religious dramas. Historical criticism of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, for example, has famously called into question their authorship and dates of composition. Many modern Christians and Jews no longer believe these works were written as they have traditionally been conceived, as directly produced by God or God’s disciples and prophets. Interestingly, though, this fact has not managed to alter the scriptural status of these books. Many devout Jews and Christians, nevertheless, deeply embrace these texts as scripture, rather than as classics like Homer’s *Iliad*. Why?

How is it that these religious people can continue to see these historically inaccurate works as scripture? If you discover that your own beloved scripture is not the direct work of the deity you believe in, but instead was written at some later point by some unknown authors, would you not then be inclined to reject it as a scripture, perhaps downgrading it to the status of a classic, or maybe even worse? Yet, if you

did not demote it, if you, nonetheless, continued to see it as a scripture, a number of questions are raised. Such as:

- Why do scriptures use language in such a way as to make deliberately fictional or mythological statements?⁶³
- Do these assertions make authentic statements about a world that happens to be mythological? Or, do they only appear to make such statements?
- Are there mythological worlds, and, if so, how do they relate to our own?
- What does it mean to make statements about those worlds? To what does this language refer?
- Why are some people able to regard mythological statements as *scripture*, as sacred truth, while others cannot?
- How can events and characters in scriptures emotionally move religious people, when they believe that these events and characters are not real, that they never actually happened as the stories depict?

In short, how do some devout Jews and Christians continue to have religious experiences with texts they regard as fictional? A basic contention in phenomenology and cognitive psychology is that, in order to have emotional responses, we must first have *beliefs* out of which those responses can arise. To feel *envious*, a man must first believe someone else possesses something desirable that he does not have; to feel *anger*, he must first believe he has been affronted; to feel *fear*, he must first believe something is threatening him. Without these beliefs, a man's emotional responses would not occur. Emotions grow out of what one believes about the nature of things. But, here is the rub. If I am reading the *Torah*, or if I am watching a play re-enacting the events of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, I know that what is before me is not a set of true

⁶³ Wittgenstein had an interesting answer to this with regard to the Gospels. He remarked: "Queer as it sounds: the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, & yet belief would lose nothing through this: but *not* because it has to do with 'universal truths of reason'! rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by a human being believingly (i.e., lovingly): *that* is the certainty of this "taking-for-true", nothing else. The believer's relation to these messages is *neither* a relation to historical truth (probability) *nor yet* that to a doctrine consisting of 'truths of reason.' There is such a thing. – (We have quite different attitudes even to different species of what we call fiction)!" *Culture and Value*, 37e-38e.

historical statements. How then do I continue to feel emotion, to experience religious appreciation, when confronting these fictional mundane-sacred objects? Should not my knowledge, my lack of belief in its actuality, prevent my emotional and religious reactions? For many it does not. Why?

Because many of us *do* respond emotionally to mythological statements, even though we know that the events are not true or have not actually happened, it appears to follow that the experience of religious appreciation that manifests when confronting mythological stories includes the same kind of mental state of belief that is found when we encounter objects of the actual world. It is perhaps, as Coleridge famously put it when describing the psychological state of the average theatre patron, a “willing suspension of disbelief”. Or, if what Coleridge suggests is not the case, then it seems to follow that, in experiencing the religious appreciation of these mythological objects, we are not genuinely feeling emotion.

But neither of these alternatives – Coleridge’s suggestion or the idea that we are not sincerely feeling emotion – seems acceptable. The first is negated by the fact that religious appreciation is not a pathological disorder; the second, by the fact that common sense and introspection verify that we are indeed experiencing emotions and reactions. So the question remains: how can I have the experience of religious appreciation, exhibiting emotional responses, about things and events that I believe have never actually happened? This is a question for philosophers of religious appreciation to pursue.

A related issue concerns the role of *tragedy* in certain mundane-sacred objects, such as scripture, mythology, religious artworks, and religious drama. The concept of tragedy is, of course, an important category in the philosophy of literature and art, but it is also very much present in various religious traditions. Events of a terrible and

unpleasant nature are repeatedly represented and invoked by the world's religions. Think of the savage nailing of Jesus to the Cross, the tales of the brutal Sikh wars, the many revered testaments relating the butchery of martyrs, the torturing of innocent Job. Never mind how we can be moved by these gruesome stories. Let us ask instead why mundane-sacred objects should be representing them at all! What draws us to these harrowing narratives, these frightening depictions about things we would ordinarily want to avoid and ignore in real life? Why do so many religious traditions have what might be called "tragic" mundane-sacred objects? How is it that so many religious groups use mundane-sacred objects to draw our attention to the macabre?

A Platonist, and perhaps even some Buddhists, might answer that the emphasis on religious tragedy is actually a kind of mental sickness. Religious traditions, which emphasize tragic mundane-sacred objects, do us a disservice. For they nurture those irrational parts of our soul that rejoices in fierce and feverish emotions, which is a most unphilosophical way to lead the good life. For a Platonist, such mundane-sacred objects distract us from dispassionate contemplation of the Good; for some Buddhists, from the Calm.⁶⁴

In contrast, an Aristotelian might argue that religious tragedy indeed inspires visceral horror and pity, *but this has a healthy cathartic effect on us*. It frees us from our deep-seated, turbulent, and violent emotions. It provides a kind of therapeutic venting of our own real worries. And, it stays the hand of our impieties and murderous impulses. Without these stories, mankind would be even more brutal, inasmuch as we would be compelled to emit these primitive cravings into reality – rather than into story, into myth and into intellectual contemplation.

⁶⁴ "Corpse meditation" in some Buddhist traditions, however, might accurately be interpreted as tragic mundane-sacred objects.

Readers of Nietzsche's masterpiece, *The Birth of Tragedy*,⁶⁵ might contend otherwise, arguing that we are attracted to mundane-sacred objects depicting revulsion and violence because such objects unite the terrifying aspect of our world with the divine and sublime which underlies it. To paraphrase Nietzsche, religious tragedy is the taming of the horrible; it "reminds us of another existence and a higher pleasure".⁶⁶ When we voluntarily read about the martyrdom of a saint, the butchery of a god, the slaughter of the innocent, the enslavement of our ancestors, what we are doing is recalling that despite the awfulness and absurdity of our world, despite our individual mortality and vulnerability, and despite the losses and betrayals of our loved ones, despite all this, there is nevertheless a life-saving force permeating existence, penetrating our worst experiences, promising a more elevated way of being.

Naturally, this view contrasts sharply with Nietzsche's predecessor Schopenhauer, whose followers might argue that religious tragedy is, in fact, the only true thing to be found in religion.⁶⁷ Tragic mundane-sacred objects expose the sheer nothingness of life, its futility, its vanity, its wretchedness. The value of religious tragedy therefore lies in its painful honesty, which prepares us for our own inevitable annihilation. Thus, the lesson of any tragic mundane-sacred object is that we should resign from life and detach from this world. Somehow we know that we should cease our clinging, stop our pointless striving after the transient objects of our world; and, it is this unconscious understanding about the pointlessness of things that explains our

⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1966).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Arthur Schopenhauer, "Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Suffering of the World", in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 302. Therein he says, "Nothing is more certain than that, speaking generally, it is the great *sin of the world*; and here I refer not to the physical empirical connection, but to the metaphysical. According to this view, it is only the story of the Fall of Man that reconciles me to the Old Testament. In fact, in my eyes, it is the only metaphysical truth that appears in the book...".

voluntary choice to read about and contemplate religious tragedies – according to those of a Schopenhauerian disposition.

A more sunny interpretation might be that tragic mundane-sacred objects serve to remind us of the suffering of others, of the struggles of our forebears. They are instruments which teach us to rejoice in the goods and blessings we have been given today, in the present moment. And, so it is that we return to depictions of religious tragedy year after year, day after day, as they underline the brightness in our own life in the here and now. Just as a candle burns brightest when surrounded by a starless night, so a tragic mundane-sacred object serves as a kind of darkness highlighting those fragile beauties of life that are too often take for granted.

At any rate, these are some of the approaches – dependent no doubt on whether one has a pessimistic, optimistic or ironical disposition – for understanding tragic mundane-sacred objects. The emphasis on tragedy within religion is prominent, and its role in religious appreciation is something worth pursuing.

The Problem of Priority

Given that the experience of religious appreciation manifests in the presence of man-made objects (such as a piece of music) as well as in the presence of works of nature (such as a mountain, the river Ganges, or the ocean's waves), a question arises as to which should enjoy precedence in our analysis of religious appreciation. Does a man's reaction toward mundane-sacred objects of nature – like his awe that "anything should exist at all" – have conceptual priority over man-made sacred objects such as music? Is the former a more raw and immediate experience, or is it the other way around? Perhaps, using a Kantian interpretation of religious appreciation, we could argue that

reactions to mundane-sacred objects, like paintings of saints or religious music, are merely special cases of religious appreciation more generally. Consequently, we should bestow greater significance on the religious appreciation of nature, wherein the experience transpires in a purer variety, perhaps instinctually. On the other hand, a Hegelian interpretation might argue that our reactions to man-made mundane-sacred objects, like music, are what provide us with the necessary concepts that allow us to respond fully to the sacredness of nature. Without music, scripture and icons, we would never be able to perceive the sacredness of a particular tree or the movement of the heavens. Priority should therefore be afforded to the music, the artworks, and the literature of religious men, since these are what immediately inform our religious appreciation of the natural world.

The Problem of Ontology

To settle the above dispute, we need to address another, more immediate problem. Namely, what kind of thing is a mundane-sacred object? Of what kind of being does a mundane-sacred object consist? To answer this, notions of identity and individuation become crucial. What criteria do we employ to distinguish mundane-sacred objects from one another, as well as from transcendent-sacred objects? How does a mundane-sacred object count as one and the same thing across different contexts and times?

Make no mistake about it. These are no small questions. Your copy of the Qur'an, for example, is not the same as my copy. Yet they are both copies of the *same* scripture. So, evidently, a mundane-sacred object such as a *scripture* cannot be identified with a specific physical thing. But, if that is so, then what is it? Of what

entity are your Qur'an and my Qur'an both copies? In short, what *is* scripture, as Cantwell-Smith rightly asked?⁶⁸ It really is a peculiar thing.

Similarly, a work of religious music cannot be identified with a *particular* succession of sounds, because, if it were so identified, the music could never be performed twice, which is absurd. Obviously if that were true, religious rituals that rely on the repetition of music year after year, day after day, would become impossible to perform. And that is manifestly not the case. Therefore religious music, like scripture, also cannot be identified with a specific physical thing, with one and only one sequence of sounds. So how does each specific sound, each rendition of Gregorian chant, become instances of the same sacred music? If we cannot identify the sacred music with any particular rendition, what then is its nature?

Does all this mean that, similar to Plato's belief, we can say *real* mundane-sacred objects are independent of their physical manifestation? Does their *real* form subsist somewhere outside our world?

Well, perhaps this is so for some mundane-sacred objects – such as scripture and holy song. But that cannot be the case as a general point. Some mundane-sacred objects, such as the alleged tooth of the Buddha Shakyamuni in Sri Lanka, or the strand of hair of a deceased holy man in Jerusalem, are very much identified – as a matter of necessity and not contingency – with particular physical objects. These kinds of mundane-sacred object, quite unlike a scripture or a holy song, are unrepeatable. Their sacredness is bound up *essentially* with a physical item of the sensory world. Indeed, because of this, the notion of *forgery* enters the discourse of religion. We can dispute, for instance, if the tooth is *really* the Buddha's tooth. We

⁶⁸ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture: a comparative approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

can wonder if someone stole the real tooth. And this is because one and only one set of teeth will belong to the Buddha Shakyamuni. Any others will be bogus.

It seems, then, that we do not have an obvious comprehensive answer as to what kind of being a mundane-sacred object consists. Some appear to be *contingent* manifestations of an almost Platonic form, while others appear to have a *necessary* physical existence. How this dual nature of the mundane-sacred object might be spelled out is a question worth pursuing.

CHAPTER 6

GENERAL PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES

The qualities and nature of mundane sacred objects presented in the last chapter raise, once again, the question of *essence*. We, for example, *specifically* considered such matters as the meaning of representation, the role of interpretation and the nature of the tragic within religion. But a *general* philosophical theory of the mundane-sacred object *qua* mundane-sacred object will aim to answer those specific questions *along with every other question we have so far considered*.

There are two basic approaches a philosopher might try to advance such a general theory. One way is to think systematically through each of the fundamental concepts involved in mundane-sacred objects: to think analytically about ideas like representation, expression, interpretation, and so on. Then, after vigorously contemplating each of these concepts, the theoretician might attempt to amalgamate his analyses into a whole, thus providing a general theory of the mundane-sacred. This approach, of course, would cohere with what is today called the Anglo-American analytic tradition of philosophy. But another way to proceed is to aim immediately and more speculatively for one broad concept, which would have the explanatory power to elucidate the essence of all and any mundane-sacred object. This second method would cohere perhaps with the more ambitious approach typically found in contemporary Continental philosophy.

Whatever the approach, however, we can expect to see at least four kinds of general theory emerge, which correspond to the general theories in philosophical

aesthetics. We shall briefly describe these four general theories in this chapter, so as to further suggest where the philosophy of religious appreciation might develop.

The Mundane-Sacred Object as Mimesis

One of those general theories, borrowed from Plato's and Aristotle's ideas about art⁶⁹ and more recently from Gadamer,⁷⁰ holds that at the very essence of the mundane-sacred is the concept of representation or imitation. In accordance with this theory, the object that is imitated by a mundane-sacred object may be identified with nature, God, atman or some other transcendent, depending on one's metaphysical orientation. Sacred music, for example, might be explained as imitating the sacred harmony of the cosmos and the soul, while scripture may be said to imitate the will of God or Enlightenment. Here, the value of the mundane-sacred relies on connecting man, through representation, with something above and beyond his world.

This representational theory, however, could be open to the charge that it mistakenly renders mundane-sacred objects as mere *means* to some other goal, as simply vehicles for delivering us to something else. Whereas the truth is that some, if not all, mundane-sacred objects seem to enjoy a value in themselves. We cannot replace them with some other thing that would do "just as well". To do so would destroy its very status as sacred. If we could replace our mundane-sacred objects with other things, then our sacred objects would *structurally* be no better than the way some humans use pornography; these sacred objects would be one means among many for satisfying our

⁶⁹ See Books 2, 3, and 10 of Plato's *Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1995); and Aristotle, *Poetics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2316-2340.

⁷⁰ Hans Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

arousal and responses, just mere instruments to some other, more emotional end. But sacred objects are *not like that*. They are valued no matter what they bring, even if they do not bring us much.

The Mundane-Sacred as Form

If the instrumentality inherent in the representational theory does not satisfy us, then perhaps we could construct a theory along the formalist lines of Hanslick's and Bell's work in aesthetics.⁷¹ Borrowing their ideas, we could argue that only the *form* of the mundane-sacred object – that is, the complex and unique arrangement of its constituent parts – enjoys religious worth. So, whereas the representational theory looked to *external* factors in order to confer value on the mundane-sacred, the formalist theory will see the object's significance residing in the mundane-sacred's *internal* structure, à la Eliade's ideas perhaps.⁷² Mundane-sacred objects are “autonomous”. They have an inherent dignity, an intrinsic sacredness, and, therefore, they answer only to themselves. Anything external to the mundane-sacred is irrelevant to its appreciation.

What are these structural forms that have such sacred integrity? The formalist might confidently reply: no general answer can be given because the formal and non-formal features will be demarcated differently for each specific mundane-sacred object we confront. The formal properties of a scripture will differ from the formal properties of, say, the Buddha's tooth; the formal properties of the Buddha's tooth will differ from the formal properties of Gregorian chant; the formal properties of Gregorian chant will differ from Mel Gibson's movie about the crucifixion of Christ; and so on. But, what is important to recognize is that each of these mundane-sacred

⁷¹ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*; Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914).

⁷² See *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, xiii.

objects *have* formal properties, conferring on them autonomy and sacredness. Yet, it is not necessary that they have the *same* formal properties.

A potential drawback to this theory is that, if we cannot identify a general notion of formal properties, then the formalist position may become too indefinite to serve as an explanatory theory of the mundane-sacred. When the theory does attempt to spell out the kind of form that is central to the mundane-sacred, it will need to employ notions like “sacred”, “ends”, and “uniqueness”. However, if we cannot define what we mean by these notions – and it *is* difficult – then we might end up applying them to anything and everything. Thus, we may very well end up having to conclude that the sacred form is indefinable, thereby plummeting this theory into vacuousness. We might also criticize this theory by pointing out that some mundane-sacred objects are valued for their *content* and not just their form; for example, scriptures, while valued as ends in themselves, also often serve as means for making sense of our lives when we are not involved directly in religious activities; they seem to give us moral codes and heroes to emulate. So a formalist theory may have the unwelcome consequence of excluding an important ingredient of religious appreciation of the mundane-sacred.⁷³

The Mundane-Sacred as Expression

The expression theory offers another means for addressing the mundane-sacred. This theory accounts for the *content* of the mundane-sacred. The notion of “expression”, as we saw, is connected with the idea of emotion or feeling. The idea of a central role of emotion in religion has exerted an influence on thinkers as diverse as Tolstoy, Freud and the logical-positivists. Yet, we saw earlier that the idea of “feelings” is not

⁷³ On pages 31-34, where we summarized the experiential definition of the mundane-sacred object, we have indicated, however, how this objection could be answered.

sufficient to define the mundane-sacred object. Any expression theory, therefore, will need to fill out this definition, so as to provide us with a more refined, robust and convincing explanation regarding the essential function of feeling and passion within the concept of the mundane-sacred.

To this end, we might make use of Collingwood's famous expression theory of art.⁷⁴ When applied to our subject, the theory would likely divide the topic of the mundane-sacred into two parts. First, it would consider the mundane-sacred object from the viewpoint of its creator – be that creator a man, a god, an angel, a devil, nature itself, or whatever. Second, it would consider the mundane-sacred object from the perspective of the spectator, of you and of me.

The first part, then, will interpret the mundane-sacred object as a unique manifestation of self-expression. The motive behind this desire for self-expression will consist, on the one hand, of an *affective* component: the creator of the mundane-sacred object seeks reprieve from the strain of emotion or energy. On the other hand, the motive will also contain a *cognitive* component: the creator of the mundane-sacred object seeks self-understanding. The process of creating a mundane-sacred object, therefore, will begin with the creator's indistinct and formless emotional and cognitive state – like a feeling of love or loneliness perhaps, or even just the raw organic impulse to create, as when for atheists the unconscious universe, exploding out of itself in the Big Bang, somehow came to create all *conscious beings*. So, when the pressure of this feeling or energy impinging on the creator becomes overwhelming, it will search out or explode into the most appropriate physical articulation of this feeling or energy. In this way, it ends up transforming a mental state, or an initial state of physical energy, into something distinct, definite, concrete

⁷⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

and intelligible – into scriptures, mountains and men. Such created objects will not so much *describe* the initial mental state or basic physical energy as much as *express* it. The mental/energetic state will be incorporated, as it were, into the mundane-sacred object itself, possibly like the way a smile can embody a strand of mental life like happiness. Now, because the mundane-sacred object has not been created for any further goal than its very expression, it will be an end in itself, a unique and valuable being that can be contrasted with the notion of instrumental entities. This, in turn, will explain why a mundane-sacred object, from the perspective of the spectator, is appreciated as an end and not a means.

The second part of this theory will involve not the creator of the mundane-sacred object but its spectator, you and me. We, the audience of the mundane-sacred object, when we are under the sway of religious appreciation, and, if we are not simply overcome by feelings of awe, may try to retrace the steps previously pursued by the creator of the sacred object, and by doing so hopefully recover something of the initial emotional or energetic state underlying the origin of the mundane-sacred object. If, for instance, we are monotheists, then we shall perceive the entire universe as a mundane-sacred object, as a physical expression of the divine will, and so, when we contemplate the world around us, we will, in fact, be hoping to appreciate the feelings and love of the creator God as expressed in the here and now, as expressed in the mundane-sacred object.

This – rather metaphysical – idea might explain why religious appreciation so often seems to involve the quality of enjoyment, that religious ecstasy Hasidic Jews call *hitlahavut*, “the inflaming”, because, if we use the above theory, we could say that when under the experience of religious appreciation, the habitual and mundane appear new and fresh. Buber tells the story of a zaddik, an Hasidic saint, who “stood

at the window in the early morning light and trembling cried, ‘A few hours ago it was night and now it is day – God brings up the day!’ And he was full of fear and trembling. [This zaddik] also said, ‘Every creature should be ashamed before the Creator: were he perfect, as he was destined to be, then he would be astonished and awakened and inflamed because of the renewal of the creature at each time and in each moment.’”⁷⁵ That statement of ardour for the physical world is about as perfect an example of the experience of religious appreciation as we are likely to find, and it may best be explained by the expression theory, as it seems to postulate a physical world expressing the mind of its creator.

Of course, it is important to note that, in the expression theory, we do not have to be monotheists (much less Hasidic Jews) in order to experience religious appreciation of the physical universe. If, for a contrast, we are naturalists – like an atheist surfer who sees sacredness in the oceans’ waves, or like Bertrand Russell’s “free man’s worship” of nature – then our religious appreciation can just as well be interpreted as nature’s consciousness appreciating itself, a somewhat Hegelian view perhaps, wherein the mind of nature as expressed through man “recognizes itself” as creative nature. Thus, under both metaphysical views, whether it be monotheism or atheism, an expression theory can contend that we, the audience of the mundane-sacred object, participate in a relation with the object that is symmetrical with the creator’s relation to its own mind, consciousness, or initial state of energy.

The Mundane-Sacred as Language

If the expression theory strikes us as too metaphysical, then there is at least one more comprehensive theory of the mundane-sacred we can explore, a kind of *semiotic/linguistic theory* of the mundane-sacred, we might say. This type of

⁷⁵ Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, 107-108.

explanation might be more welcomed by philosophers who emphasize the structures of language to explain phenomena. The semiotic/linguistic theory will analyze mundane-sacred objects solely in terms of their logical and linguistic categories, such as their signification, reference, denotation, “traces”, or syntactic and semantic rules. It, therefore, will ignore psychology or metaphysics as an explanation. Like natural language, the mundane-sacred object will be literally a *symbol system*, and so we shall explicate it in the way we explain other languages.⁷⁶

It is important to note that, when the semiotic/linguistic theory calls the mundane-sacred a “language”, it is not speaking metaphorically, nor is it speaking of an *analogy* between language and the mundane-sacred. It is genuinely defining it as a language, as sharing the basic properties that comprise our day-to-day talk. Such linguistic properties moreover are *autonomous*, which means the mundane-sacred needs to be comprehended and explained independently from our psychological, subjective or experiential concepts. Conceptual primacy thus resides in how these objects fit within a community of language speakers. The chief significance of any given mundane-sacred object, accordingly, will depend on its logico-linguistic role, and not on any of our personal experiences.

However, we may feel that this semiotic/linguistic theory amounts to an unacceptable kind of linguistic determinism of the mundane-sacred, as if our experiences of it are irrelevant to an analysis of religious appreciation. Those who are sympathetic to the Humean-Kantian model, cited earlier, will most likely find that this kind of theory robs us of our treasured *subjective* experiences, the very experiences we feel are most fundamental to an understanding of religious appreciation. Indeed, to reduce the experience to its bare logico-linguistic categories may have the advantage

⁷⁶ Whether this strategy is derived from logical positivist views of language, Donald Davidson’s theories, or Derrida’s, or some other philosophy that strongly emphasizes the role of language.

of precision, but at the cost of an impoverished approach to experiencing this experience, for it leaves out its most significant component – the subjective. Indeed, that was what made this topic philosophically interesting in the first place.

These four general theories – the theory of the mundane-sacred as mimesis, as form, as expression, and as language – are inspired by those theories already found in the philosophy of art. Naturally, given the breadth and depth of the many writings within aesthetics, as well as the word limitations imposed on this dissertation, what is offered here, to be sure, is a framework of what a general explanation, along with its attendant problems, might be. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the reader will see that such theories *can* be reasonably, and perhaps interestingly, borrowed and applied to the idea of the mundane-sacred. Should a philosopher find these theories compelling or interesting, he would soon discover that they could be developed into whole books, as they are in aesthetics. It is something to consider.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This brings to a close the first part of this dissertation. So far, a wide landscape of philosophical issues and problems has been traversed. We have demarcated religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment from other kinds of religious experiences and language. We have shown that the mundane-sacred object is distinguishable from transcendent sacred-objects. We have noted a remarkable similarity between mundane-sacred judgment and aesthetic judgment, as well as striking likenesses between religious appreciation and aesthetic appreciation. In light of such similarities, we suggested the common goals of aesthetics and the study of religious appreciation, such as the need to spell out the nature and unity of mundane-sacred judgment, religious appreciation and the mundane-sacred object, just as in aesthetics the goal is not to *prove* that people experience aesthetic reactions, but to describe what such experiences and its language mean. Similarly, in this branch of the philosophy of religion we noted that we were not so concerned with metaphysics and epistemology, or with the goal of justifying religion. By ignoring this traditional approach to the philosophy of religion, we found resemblances between the problems and ideas that arise when analyzing aesthetics and those that manifest when looking at religious appreciation – such as the potential controversies over subjectivism and objectivism, priority and ontology, interpretation and theory, or the application of concepts like representation, expression, form, and language to the mundane-sacred object, the mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation.

If all or any of these ideas, problems and theories were to spark the interest of philosophers, with religious appreciation thus becoming a legitimized subject within the philosophy of religion, then each and every problem and solution we have hitherto reviewed is without doubt capable of sustaining whole doctoral dissertations on their own. Hence, what has been presented thus far is simply an overview of the seminal issues awaiting more detailed discussion.

What would a more detailed discussion look like? Sometimes we need an example to help us get on with our own thinking on a new subject.

That is why the remainder of this dissertation will be a more thorough analysis of *some* of the issues we have been discussing. What follows in the next part, then, is simply meant as an *example*. I shall present you with a sustained argument about the meaning of the mundane-sacred object, about the non-descriptive nature of mundane-sacred judgment, and the Kantian-like aesthetic nature of religious appreciation. Let the reader not conclude, therefore, that what follows is the *only* plausible interpretation of these subjects. The next couple hundred pages are not a dogmatic theory, but merely an *example* of a theory.

Indeed, the real thesis of this dissertation is the suggestion that there *is* an experience of religious appreciation in our human world, and other philosophers of religion might find it interesting to investigate that experience. How others ultimately do investigate the mundane-sacred is something this author looks forward to reading – or, at any rate, hopes to read and learn from.

PART II

AN EXAMPLE OF A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION

**MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENT AS EXPRESSION, NOT
DESCRIPTION, AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION AS AN
AESTHETIC, NOT METAPHYSICAL, EXPERIENCE**

CHAPTER 8

WHAT IS A “SACRED OBJECT”?

Before anything profitable can be said about mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation, we need some theory that will help elucidate the general concept of a “sacred object”, whether this object is something in the world, such as a river, or whether it is beyond our world, such as a god. There is an idea – particularly among post-Kantian and neo-Wittgensteinian philosophers who are sympathetic toward religion – that if we are to avoid reductionism then the concepts of religious judgment and religious experience need to be defined in terms of the “unique” or “value in itself” quality of the sacred object.⁷⁷ According to this theory, when a person religiously perceives an object, the person values the object as it is in itself, without comparisons or contrasts to other objects and without appeal to any practical concern. The person sees the sacred object as a separate phenomenon having its own features. Consequently, the experience of an object is religious only if the object is not subsumed under alternative concepts. Its sacredness hinges neither on being a result of some deeper cause nor on its matter-of-fact uses and utilitarian goals.

This idea further suggests that, since sacred objects have their own unique features, they cannot be translated into the terms of other theories and ideologies without becoming obscured, at best, or conceptually eliminated, at worst. Accordingly, if a scholar is to understand any religion, he must become an “insider”,

⁷⁷ For a phenomenological version of this argument, see Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Meridian Books, 1963) as well as William E. Paden, “Interpretive Frames”, *Interpreting the Sacred* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1992), 1-14. For a Wittgensteinian version, see D.Z. Phillips, *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), and *Faith after Foundationalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988).

someone who perceives the unique religious features of objects in the same way as the religious community or individual he is studying.⁷⁸ Moreover, the religious features also help us to demarcate the religious attitude from other kinds of attitude – like the scientific, the moral and the aesthetic attitudes, which, it is said, focus on different features of the world.⁷⁹

By postulating a demarcation between these attitudes and the differing features of their objects, we are able to establish the conceptual autonomy of the “religious”. It is in this way that we distinguish religion from other realms of human experience and, hence, make the academic study of religion *qua* religion possible.

To help illustrate the view that any contrasts, for example, between scientific and religious attitudes eventuate from differing perceptions of the features of objects, we might consider four thinkers in particular: Plato, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Buber. To begin, consider the two passages below. The first passage depicts the attitude and method found in Francis Bacon’s interpretation of science,⁸⁰ as described by Bryan Magee; the second passage portrays the attitude of the “loving man”, as described by Buber, who argues for an analogy, if not identity, between the loving attitude and the

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Norman Malcolm, “The Groundlessness of Belief”, in *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* ed. R. D. Geivett and B. Sweetman (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92-103. See also, Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Chapters I-III; Joachim Wach, *The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions (Religionswissenschaft)*; Mircea Eliade, *A New Humanism*; Rosalind Shaw, *Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies*; Raymond Firth, *An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Religion*; all of these articles and excerpts can be found in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed., Russell T. McCutcheon (London and New York: Cassell, 1999).

⁷⁹ Again, Norman Malcolm, “The Groundlessness of Belief”; see also, Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); W.B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. J.B. Carman (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960); W.L. Brenneman, Jr., S.O. Yarian, and A.M. Olson, *The Seeing Eye* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982); J. Wach, *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), chapters 2 and 3.

⁸⁰ I chose Bacon’s idea of the scientific attitude only as an illustration, not as an endorsement of Bacon’s method. Popper or Kuhn’s interpretations of science would illustrate, for my point, exactly the same contrast.

religious attitude.⁸¹ For Buber, the scientific and loving attitudes are demarcated through the idea that the second of them understands its object as *singular*, whereas the first understands its object in causal relation to *other objects*.

[The scientific attitude] begins by carrying out experiments [on objects] whose aim is to make carefully controlled and meticulously measured observations at some point on the frontier between our knowledge and our ignorance. [The scientist] systematically records his findings, perhaps publishes them, and in the course of time he and other workers in the field accumulate a lot of shared and reliable data. As this grows, general features begin to emerge, and individuals start to formulate general hypotheses – statements of a law like character which fit all the known facts and explain how they are causally related to each other. The individual scientist tries to confirm his hypothesis by finding evidence which will support it. If he succeeds in verifying it he has discovered another scientific law which will unlock more of the secrets of nature. The new seam is then worked – that is to say the new discovery is applied wherever it is thought it might yield fresh information. Thus the existing stock of scientific knowledge is added to, and the frontier of our ignorance pushed back. And the process begins again on the new frontier.⁸²

Now, notice here that the scientific attitude of *observing* objects, with its ambition to elicit shared features that establish a basis for general propositions, is in direct contrast with Buber's idea of the "loving attitude":

The loving man is one who grasps non-relatively each thing he grasps. He does not think of inserting the experienced thing into relations to other things; at the moment of experience nothing else exists, nothing save this beloved thing, filling out the world and indistinguishably coinciding with it. Where you with agile fingers draw out the qualities common to all things and distribute them in ready-made categories, the loving man's dream-powerful and primally-awake heart beholds the non-common. This, the unique, is the bestowing shape, the self of the thing, which cannot be detained within the pure circle of world comprehensibility. What you extract and combine is always only the passivity of things. But their activity, their effective reality, reveals itself only to the loving man who knows them. And thus he knows the world.⁸³

⁸¹ See Martin Buber, "With a Monist" in *Pointing the Way* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1990), 25-30.

⁸² Bryan Magee, *Popper* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 19.

⁸³ Martin Buber, "With a Monist", in *Pointing the Way*, 28f.

According to certain trends in phenomenology – such as Buber’s idea above – human attitudes are distinguished by their distinct appreciation of the objects of the world.⁸⁴ The world, ever since Plato and Kant sliced it in two, has often been claimed in phenomenology to present itself to human perspective as twofold.⁸⁵ And, our different attitudes branch out from this bifurcation between the features of the world unveiled by scientific investigation and the phenomenological features of the *Lebenswelt*, the human world of values whereby human life becomes possible, distinctive, and *humanly* explainable.⁸⁶

It is believed that, within the scientific paradigm, the human subject is abolished as far as possible, since the scientific attitude seeks an impersonal and absolute perception of the world *as it is in itself* and not necessarily as it appears to humans. However, in the scientific paradigm, hinging as it does on the ambition for raw objective knowledge divorced from human subjectivity, distinctive and, indeed, valuable features of *human* life seem to disappear. Phenomenologists complain that what vanishes in scientific explanations is the “intentional understanding” through which mankind justifies, explains, excuses, and describes the world as it appears in human perspective and action. A person, for instance, might perceive and describe all the shapes and dots of colour that comprise a painted portrait, but, nevertheless, fail to see the face *in* the portrait. Such a person might perceive all the details of colour and shape, but miss seeing the *portrait*, to say nothing of its beauty. And that possibility means something. It means it is possible that a way of responding to the painting can escape a man, since the appearance of the portrait depends on the application of an

⁸⁴ W.L. Brenneman, Jr., et. al., *The Seeing Eye*; also see W.C. Smith *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

⁸⁵ Dermot Moran, “Editor’s Introduction” in *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney (London: Routledge, 2002), 1- 26.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

intentional understanding that eludes the mere noting of structure and detail.⁸⁷ Similarly, an existentialist like Buber would argue that a scientist might observe all the functioning of a human organism as well as have a complete account of the organism's structure and behaviour, and yet not see the *person* in the organism. In short, phenomenologists and existentialists draw our attention to the idea that, under the sway of a strict scientific attitude, important explanatory concepts such as "beauty", "justice" or the "sublime" evaporate, as well as all those other intentional understandings which, though unable to be communicated wholly in objective terms, nevertheless, fill the human world with the meanings that are implied in much of our goals, deeds, explanations and emotions.

By employing the Platonist/Kantian model of a twofold world, we see that the scientific attitude conceptualizes its object by placing it in a nexus of causal relations to other objects, while something like Buber's "loving attitude" guards its object as unique and separable from any such nexus. The loving attitude posits, in effect, that, when its object (the beloved) is either comprehended through its causal relations to other objects or explained through notions of pragmatic use, the human experience and language of loving an "other" or "thou" are altered into something categorically different, a category incommensurate with our ordinary experience and explanations of loving a person. The scientific attitude, by contrast, contends that the true nature of the object is understood only through an explanation of its causal relations and utility. So, where the scientific attitude "carefully controlled" and "meticulously measured" a submissive and, in principle, knowable object, the loving attitude did not manipulate or analyze a passive thing whose features were measurable and explainable. The loving attitude engages on equal ground with an *Other*, thus confronting an *active*

⁸⁷ Roger Scruton, "Radical Therapy", in *The Politics of Culture and Other Essays* (Great Britain: Cacanet Press, 1981), 183.

object whose features are not always predictable or usable. Such contrasts in attitude turn on the notion of *uniqueness*, and this all-important concept is conferred only on objects in the *Lebenswelt*.

Now, analogously, the religious attitude, since it too is part of the *Lebenswelt*, is contrasted with the scientific attitude. This contrast occurs as a result of the uniqueness bestowed on its objects; for, unlike the scientific approach, the religious attitude appreciates the sacred object like the lover appreciates the beloved: *for itself* rather than in relation to any other factor. The religious attitude is concerned neither with cognitive comparisons nor with establishing scientific laws.

What is more, when the unique object is something as overwhelming and sublime as Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, Tao, Nibbana, the Word of God, or the like, the sacred object is sometimes claimed to be incapable of being subsumed *in any way* under conceptual categories.⁸⁸ And, we see here that because the scientific attitude does not *ever* approach an object in this way – by radically negating concepts *en bloc* – the religious attitude can be contrasted with it by means of the drastic uniqueness attributed to sacred objects. Indeed, Kierkegaard, an advocate of this view, has described the religious mindset as consisting of a blind “leap” whose aim is the absolute individuality of the sacred object. For him, what is ultimately important is the single-minded “passion” of the religious attitude, which appreciates the radical uniqueness of the sacred object.⁸⁹

Now, in light of Kierkegaard, it is important to remember that this theory of uniqueness also claims a seminal role in distinguishing the religious attitude from aesthetic and moral attitudes. The distinctions between these attitudes are, of course,

⁸⁸ Martin Buber’s *Ecstatic Confessions* (Syracuse University Press Edition, 1996) seems designed to prove this point, as do the essays in Robert K.C. Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁸⁹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1954).

at the core of Kierkegaard's writings, and his ideas have, even if tacitly, generated and influenced much of the discussion about such distinctions within 20th century phenomenological and existentialist literature.⁹⁰ However, the attitudes associated with religion, ethics and aesthetics are more difficult to distinguish than the religious from the scientific attitude. This is partly because they are all integral features of the *Lebenswelt*. Like the aesthetic attitude toward the aesthetic object,⁹¹ religious appreciation of the sacred object seems to involve the setting aside of practical interests to enjoy a particular entity. And, like the ethical attitude toward the objects of morality,⁹² the religious attitude does not judge the sacred object as a means to some end that is independent of the religious happening. The sacred object is an end itself. Furthermore, the three attitudes do not approach their objects simply as vehicles for evoking alleged aesthetic, moral or religious "feelings". No other object, in other words, can stand in "just as well" as a cause of the appropriate emotions.

If there is a distinction among these attitudes, it seems to derive from the relative place in the hierarchy of value in which the religious, the ethical and the aesthetic are positioned (by a philosopher) within the *Lebenswelt*. When the religious attitude is at the top of the hierarchy, it deems its objects *the* end, not just *an* end. The objects have a unique quality of ultimacy or transcendence that is absent from aesthetic and ethical objects. That is to say, in the "kingdom of ends" the aesthetic and ethical attitudes judge their objects as an end within their respective conceptual regions, while the religious attitude is more general because it can include the aesthetic and the ethical. It might be said, for instance, that an aesthete may

⁹⁰ What follows is not an interpretation of Kierkegaard, but a summary of a general kind of approach to the different attitudes.

⁹¹ Regarding the "aesthetic attitude", I am assuming a Kantian understanding of these notions. This seems to be, so far as I can tell, what the phenomenologists and existentialists assume when they make these distinctions.

⁹² Again, this is a Kantian conception of morality.

certainly appreciate the beauty of the Qur'an, admiring its poetry for its own sake. And this, to be sure, would be treating the Qur'an as *an* end. But it would not be religious appreciation, since it would not be treating the Qur'an as *the* end, which is to say, as *scripture*. A person can appreciate the Qur'an's beauty while denying its holiness; however, asked the advocate of this philosophy, can a person appreciate its holiness while denying its beauty? Unlikely, it would be answered because the beauty which a Muslim finds in the Qur'an will itself be deemed holy, or at least a result of its holiness. In this way, by perceiving the Qur'an as the absolute end, the Muslim's religious appreciation is demarcated from the aesthetician's appreciation. Holiness becomes primary, the aesthetic and ethical secondary.⁹³ This idea can be found, for instance, at the heart of Kierkegaard's masterpiece, *Fear and Trembling*.⁹⁴ For Kierkegaard, there is a special ultimacy, a radical uniqueness, to the religious object. And, because of this ultimacy, the religious trumps all moral and aesthetic claims, however important they are. Indeed, it is through this idea that Kierkegaard and his followers justify the "teleological suspension of the ethical".⁹⁵

But if, in contradistinction to the Kierkegaardian philosophy, the ethical becomes primary, then the distinction between the religious and the ethical is generated through a shifting in the hierarchy. This appears to be a Platonist position. In answer to the ethical conundrum –are moral precepts valuable because God said they are good, or did God say they are good because they are valuable? – Plato and

⁹³ Thus, we see, in a Christian context, the Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), in his treatise *In Praise of Scribes*, advising: "Holy Scripture is deserving of all possible adornment. However, we should beware that this artwork does not become an end in itself. Otherwise, beauty might prevail over truth..."Robert G. Calkins, *Monuments of Medieval Art* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 202.

⁹⁴ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1954).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

his philosophical descendents seem to endorse the latter option.⁹⁶ For this line of thought, then, the ethical becomes *the* end, the final standard, whereby the religious is rendered merely *an* end. In this way, by subordinating the religious to the ethical, we are provided with a different method to distinguish the two within the *Lebenswelt*.

The same applies for the aesthetic attitude, if it is placed atop the religious attitude in the kingdom of ends. This, arguably, is Kant's position. His *Critique of Judgement* shows us what a theology derived from aesthetics might look like.⁹⁷ Through aesthetic contemplation, modern man perceives the features of the world that were once the concern of religious meditation. Because natural theology has proved impotent, man can no longer demonstrate the validity of his religious existence by philosophic reasoning, and, hence, the *concept* of God is, at best, understood only by a *via negativa* that prevents the concept's valid application. Even so, the argument goes, man possesses a sentiment of the transcendental and the beautiful: through his feelings of beauty, he senses the rationale and the purpose of the things around him; and through his feeling of and longing for the sublime, he senses something awe-inspiring and ineffable beyond his world, grounding and justifying it. These feelings cannot be rendered valid through ratiocination or scientific inquiry. Man cannot *know* the transcendental – and, ironically, that is all he can know about it. Yet, through aesthetic experience, according to Kant, the sense of the world is revealed, and therein man can *feel* the transcendent, thereby discovering, through his feelings of beauty, the truth of his religious inclinations.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ See, for example, Buber's critique of Kierkegaard, which, perhaps only tenuously, seems close to the Platonist emphasis on the ethical, "On the suspension of the Ethical" in *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988), 113-120.

⁹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

⁹⁸ The various theodicies that try to answer the problem of suffering via aesthetic explanations – i.e., a world with pain is more beautiful than one without – also may be associated with this approach.

Be that as it may, wherever the different philosophers ultimately place “the religious” in this hierarchy – whether at the top, below or in the middle of the *Lebenswelt* – it is clear that, for many philosophers, it is thought to be some kind of end, having some kind of autonomy in human affairs. Thus, religion becomes worthy of study for its own sake; and thus, it is able to avoid reduction to other disciplines. It follows from this that if we are to understand the concepts of religious judgment and experience, demarcating them from other kinds of human judgments and experiences, we must first recognize the uniqueness, the value or end in itself status, attributed to its objects. After recognizing that the uniqueness of these objects in turn establishes the religious attitude, the task of modern scholars is to discover the religious features of these objects and determine how humans perceive them.

But how does all this stand in relation to the mundane-sacred object?

CHAPTER 9

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CALL A MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECT AN “END IN ITSELF”?

We must now confront what it means to call a mundane-sacred object an “end in itself”. Does the general view of sacred objects as “unique” apply to a mundane-sacred object? To an extent, the answer is yes. But, we need to clarify what we *mean* when we call a sacred object an “end in itself”; that is, we need to provide conceptual clarification, and not merely assume that it is there.

Now, as for the view, discussed in the last chapter, of the sacred object as an end, we might immediately argue that no philosophy of religious experience and religious language about the sacred can be persuasively offered because of intransigent flaws in the philosophical *methods* by which philosophers’ theorize. It is common today to find many philosophers, particularly among Derrida’s followers and neo-Wittgensteinians, who rebel against the very possibility of theorizing about religion (although that does not typically prevent them from offering us their own theories).⁹⁹ For such thinkers, to use the terms of Derrida’s school, a radical “reversal” of our “Western tradition” is required.¹⁰⁰ Theories about religious attitudes and judgments – like those of Plato, Kant, Kierkegaard or Buber – are considered by them to be too abstract, too general, and too remote from common language. In fact, they are alleged to reflect a bygone “modernist” or “Orientalist” age of thinking. Words and phrases like “religious attitude”, “the holy”, “the religious”, “religious

⁹⁹ For example, it hardly seems right to say that the neo-Wittgensteinian, D.Z. Phillips, in his many excellent philosophical works, is not himself offering us *theories* of religious epistemology, however much he protests against theory.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. and ed. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); *Margins of Philosophy*, trans and ed., Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

experience”, or “the sacred” are only technical terms, which might make sense within the defined context of a philosophical theory, but which cannot be employed, except arbitrarily, in the ordinary world, where such distinctions either do not exist or do not feature in day-to-day linguistic usage. Further, they claim that such unitary notions are so terribly abstract as to make attitudes and behaviours that have little, if anything, in common seem somehow similar. Given any single religion, they posit, why must we assume that the feelings and attitudes when reading a scripture are similar to the feelings and attitudes when we bow before a shrine or offer a sacrifice? Or why, they might ask, given several religions, must we assume that, for example, the attitudes of a monk meditating on the *Metta Sutta* in a Thai forest monastery are in any way akin to the attitudes inherent in a Santo Domingo Pueblo corn dancer in northern New Mexico – or, for that matter, an Al Qaeda suicide bomber on a “martyrdom operation” in a hijacked plane heading toward Manhattan? Prior to even studying religion, we have already grouped a baffling array of human happenings, all under the assumption that there are commonalities. But why must we say that there are commonalities? Why are we compelled to offer a unified account of these attitudes that exhibit no obvious connection?

A possible reply is quite simple or basic: if we do not make such an assumption, there will be no way of accounting for the reason human beings *do* judge such a sundry of mundane objects – like various books, rituals, seasons, spaces, buildings, art works, behaviours – so similarly. It is merely a matter of observation that humans do employ, across cultures, a specific (family-related) language of appraisal. This language is seemingly connected to a distinct phenomenon, which today many of us call “religion”. This observation warrants the assumption that there is something like a “religious attitude” toward the world. Across the globe, people

speak of certain kinds of books as “scripture” and “holy”, even though the individual texts are comprised of paper and ink like any other books; they call a poem, a “prayer”; a trance, a “meditation”; a slaughter, a “sacrifice”; a massacre, “martyrdom”. They describe some space as “profane”; some time as “sacred”; some food as “taboo”; some men as “wise”; some women as “enlightened”, and so on.¹⁰¹ Why does humanity make this kind of appraisal? Such uniform uses of language, even if they involve overlapping conditions rather than necessary and sufficient conditions, seem to elicit the supposition that, behind these words, a unique and distinguishable attitude toward the world exists.

According to this reasoning, we think in terms of particular religious attitudes within some people precisely because of the existence of the linguistic practice of religious appraisal. In other words, the religious judgments themselves suggest conceptual unity or, at least, conceptual relations. These ordinary modes of appraisal, found worldwide, demarcate “religion” as an autonomous sphere of human experience. And, so, we do not typically describe, for example, a Larry McMurtry Western as “scripture” or a Tony Blair speech as “holy”, because they belong to different kinds of discourse. The language of religious appraisal is reserved for a different sphere with different objects. Because humans ordinarily reserve religious appraisal for some objects, but not others, the idea arises that there is, transpiring here in our world, some distinct human attitude to be studied, something conceptually autonomous, even if it fails to be universal. That something is “the religious”. Thus, old-school “modernist” philosopher attempts *to demarcate what is religious in terms of an analysis of the concept of religious appraisal*, arise partly because ordinary

¹⁰¹ Based on discussions of religious attitudes and language with individuals from varying cultures and religions, it is assumed that there are approximate equivalents to many of these terms in other languages, especially in our now globalized world.

language seems to entitle us to the assumption that religion is a unified phenomenon.¹⁰²

This assumption also seems to cohere with the idea of uniqueness presented in the prior chapter. As we may recall, the idea of uniqueness suggests religion has some kind of autonomy within the *Lebenswelt*; that is, objects that are judged to be religious are considered an end in themselves for their own sake and not as a means for something else. Even when religion exhibits distinctive *functions* – for example, a Christian mother petitioning Jesus to heal her cancer-ridden child, or a Sikh drawing his *kirpan* to protect his community, or a Hindu utilizing the water from the Ganges to cleanse his body – these functions are not appraised as merely operational activities. Regardless of their outcomes, the sacred is judged to reside in the acts themselves, a point persuasively emphasized by Phillips.¹⁰³ In religious appreciation, the religious man steps out of the world of perishable objects, as it were, and faces a world of objects containing an enduring value in themselves.

The view of the religious object as an end, along with its coherence with the notion of a distinctive language of appraisal, fortifies the modernist assumption of an underlying religious attitude. Moreover, if the concept of the religious attitude can be deduced from ordinary speaking and thinking, then the intuitions of those modernist philosophers' "terribly abstract" theories that the sacred object is an end in itself will have a more familiar, more concrete basis, and the theoretical ambitions of these philosophers will not be so far fetched after all. Perhaps, too, the coherency of these two ideas is why the argument that the religious object is not a means, and so must be granted some degree of conceptual autonomy, has been so prevalent in the theory of religion.

¹⁰² At least, this is how I interpret the assumptions of "modernist" philosophy of religion, with its frequent supposition of a unified phenomenon underlying religious discourse.

¹⁰³ D.Z. Phillips, *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 35.

Admittedly, when taken to its extreme, such ratiocination in favour of the autonomy of religion may lead us to dubious conclusions. It may leave us either with a complete denunciation of emotion in religion or with a radical religious autonomy whose experiences bear no resemblance to other human phenomena. Why? Contrary to logical-positivist thought, whatever else might comprise religious interest, it cannot be solely an interest in an object as a mere means to the stimulation of emotion; for, in so far as the religious object exists only for the encouragement of emotions, it is not religious, because the religious object might equally have been supplanted by some other object promoting similar feelings. And, as Wittgensteinians would point out, clearly the sacred object is not replaced by other causes of the emotion. Therefore, emotions cannot be the reason for the religious object.

But is this argument convincing? Certainly some religious people will persuasively retort that, in viewing the religious object simply as an end, we are neglecting the importance of the emotions that religious objects, in fact, stimulate. An assertion that a scripture or a religious ritual is not a means for arousing emotions, or that the emotions they do kindle – feelings of awe and humility, for example – are irrelevant to their status as scripture and ritual is absurd. Such a position would jettison the important role emotions play in religion by denying their importance as vehicles for religious experience. The idea that emotions are irrelevant to the sacred object as an end implies that, ultimately, religious appreciation of an object is nothing other than disinterested and dispassionate contemplation whose object can only be described by certain formal properties, and that seems mistaken.

Now, if it is contended, as we say above, that emotions play a central role in the religious experience, then there must exist something that might be called the “emotions of religion”, and if mundane-sacred objects are understood as ends, then

this emotional experience is itself rendered an end; it is autonomous, having little if anything in common with what might be felt or experienced in another situation. Furthermore, it will be impossible to incorporate the experience into any of the normal (or alternative) linguistic categories of emotion, thought or experience. As a consequence, the shared language serving to describe it will become vague, unknowable and/or ambiguous. What is more, if a mundane-sacred object is merely a means for the arousal of a radically autonomous experience, then it will be a means that cannot be understood by any other object, since the mundane-sacred object is not a way of producing anything that is identifiable apart from it. This, briefly, is the idea of autonomy that Eliade utilizes to insulate religion from reductionism.¹⁰⁴ But, the troubling upshot is that it seems also to isolate the mundane-sacred object from *everything* external to it.

Given this two-pronged conundrum, something clearly has gone wrong with the idea that the mundane-sacred object is demarcated by the concepts of ends and means. Indeed, an opponent might repudiate the whole idea by arguing that the proposition that *religious interest in the mundane-sacred object has nothing to do with means* is a cultural bias because not all religious groups treat their mundane-sacred objects in that way. Early Vedic cultures sometimes used the hymns of the Rig-Veda as magical incantations. That is, they used those texts as a means to some other end. Or, witness the example of the rain-king. Frazer tells us that an Abyssinian king, the Alfai, is believed to possess the power to cause rain and “if he disappoints the people’s expectation and a great drought arises in the land, the Alfai is stoned to death, and his nearest relations are obliged to cast the first stone at him.”¹⁰⁵ This is a dramatic example of performing a religious act to achieve some independent aim. So,

¹⁰⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*; Carl Olson, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁵ James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 107.

are these not instances of mundane-sacred objects lacking the “end in itself” quality? If so, can we not also say that the purported autonomous nature of the religious attitude is only a philosophical bias in favour of one sort of religious approach to mundane-sacred objects? And, if this is so, by what right can the theory about ends be said to be *the* theory that constitutes religious appreciation of mundane-sacred objects?

This “cultural-bias argument” is not as fatal to general theories as we sometimes assume, for what is important is that we are able to identify *some* mental states as religious appreciation. Even if it were ethnographically shown that there are some mundane-sacred objects that are treated merely as a means to an end that is external to the religion – that is, if these religious phenomena are wholly instrumental activities – we still have some religious attitudes that are not. And *that* fact is all we need to demonstrate that religious appreciation is different from, and similar to, other attitudes toward objects of the world. Indeed, this fact alone shows that religious appreciation possesses an autonomous area of the human mind. As such, we are not required to produce a timeless concept of “religious appreciation” in order to identify a distinct attitude, an autonomous region of human experience. The standards employed in the cultural-bias argument are set too high. It is not crucial or relevant to our philosophical project whether other cultures make the same identification in strictly the same way as we do. At least for the purpose of analyzing mundane-sacred judgment, we need an initial theory that fosters *some* reasonable organization among mankind’s current ways of discourse – in our globalized world – about mundane-

sacred objects. Furthermore, we need to offer *in any case* some theory in order to determine the purported truth of the cultural-bias argument.¹⁰⁶

Jettisoning the distinction between ends and means, and its application to mundane-sacred objects, will not allay our philosophical confusion. Rather, we must further analyze what it *means* to be interested in something as a means or as an end in itself. So far, we have seen that the idea of conceiving a religious object as an end is often asserted without argument. But, are there reasons that, at least, clarify the concept? It seems there are. For if we combine the two intuitions about religion mentioned earlier, we see that they mutually reinforce each other. That is, if the idea that *appreciation of a mundane-sacred object is not an appreciation of it as a means to any independent end* is combined with the idea that *there is a distinct language of mundane-sacred judgment*, then we might be able to use these two ideas to elucidate one another. In other words, understanding *in what way* religious appreciation is appreciation of a mundane-sacred object “as an end” is through an analysis of the *use* of mundane-sacred judgment.

To see this, consider what it means to appraise something as a means; that is, to see it under the light of some other purpose. For instance, if we are interested in an object (say, a pair of glasses) as a *means* to some end (*to see* immediately) then particular features of the object are judged on whether or not they lead to our desired

¹⁰⁶ As for the specific case of the Rig-Veda, it is not obvious that the incantations from the Rig-Veda were deemed religious while their outcomes were not. On what grounds can such a distinction be made? Certainly not by the Vedic texts themselves, since they seem to suggest a comprehensive religious world where causes and effects are tied, a world where both the causes and the effects are deemed sacred. The same can be said of the rain-king's desired effects. Whether or not ethnographic material provides evidence of purely efficacious intent on the part of ritualists, they do not falsify the notion that the ritual itself – its intent and its effects – is not viewed as an end. The ritual surrounding the Alfai, for example, is complex: it has sacredness whether the king succeeds or fails in bringing rain, and while the ceremonial action may shift depending on either of those two outcomes, its sacredness does not. Therefore, we are talking here of a ceremony permitting two different eventualities. The above theory absorbs both outcomes.

end. When the required features are present, then the object fulfils its duties as a means toward our purpose. But if the glasses have merely an attractive colour and shape, but not the right prescription that allows for sight, then we shall turn our attention to another object, a different pair of glasses, which possesses those features that will help us achieve our predetermined goal. Our purpose will define the criteria of relevance for those features. Further, because the features that are relevant to the assessment of the glasses do not need to be identifying features, then *different* glasses may be *identical* with respect to their merits as a means toward our goal, which is seeing clearly.

However, if there is no purpose or end distinct from the object, then there will be no criteria of this kind that will enable us to say some features of the object are relevant while others are not. That is, if interest in a mundane-sacred object truly is not an interest in that object as a means to any predetermined purpose, then there is no criteria of relevance that permits saying that the sacredness of the mundane-sacred object depends on something having *this* feature and *not that* feature, or that a mundane-sacred object must have some set of features in order to be judged sacred.¹⁰⁷

In plainer language, every feature of a mundane-sacred object will be relevant to the appraisal of it as sacred, for no feature is serving as a means for something outside the object. Accordingly, *without an external purpose, there can be no rules for the assessment of mundane-sacred objects.* (This is one reason why definitions of the “mundane-sacred object” will so often prove unpersuasive.)

So, whatever in fact is the “nature” or “essence” of religious appreciation, it must involve an interest in the uniqueness of an object having no external purpose,

¹⁰⁷ To read this argument in its original, aesthetic context, see: Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, 21-23.

just as Kant, Kierkegaard, Buber and Wittgenstein, in their different ways, tried to express about sacred objects in general.

And if the forgoing argument concerning the *meaning* of the uniqueness of the mundane-sacred object is sound, then we have characterized, at least in part, mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation. We have found that, to start, it is an interest in a unique object and a response to an object viewed as an end in itself. Moreover, the attitude appears connected to a mode of appraisal (mundane-sacred judgment) in which a feature relevant to the object's assessment does not exist. How far this theory provides a sufficient description of a distinct realm of religious experience, and how far it enables us to demarcate mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation in relation to other phenomena with which they might be compared, remains to be seen in later chapters. But, at this point, a method has been found for determining *what it means* to call the mundane-sacred object "unique" or an "end in itself": it has no external purpose and no rules for its assessment.

Related to this idea, at least at first glance, is whether the uniqueness of the mundane-sacred object is a result of its identity. To that question, we now turn.

CHAPTER 10

THE IDENTITY OF THE MUNDANE-SACRED OBJECT

We mentioned in the Introduction that, along with questions surrounding the uniqueness of mundane-sacred objects, there were also questions surrounding their identity. How do we identify a mundane-sacred object? If a mundane-sacred object changes over time, do we identify it as the same or as another mundane-sacred object? Is its identity important?

At the outset, it seems clear that the concept of the uniqueness of a mundane-sacred object is distinguishable from the concept of its identity. To be sure, the uniqueness of the object is included in all religious references to it as an identifiable object. But if it is the case that the mundane-sacred object has conditions of identity that are responsible for its uniqueness, then the identity conditions could not change without the mundane-sacred object ceasing to be the same sacred object. However, this idea – whether the mundane-sacred object has such sturdy criteria that define its identity – is perhaps not so critical to the theory of religious appreciation. The more important (and manageable) issue it would seem is this: if a mundane object that at time T_1 is judged sacred undergoes some change at time T_2 , then will the object remain sacred in the eyes of the beholder? Or will the object necessarily lose its religious character? In other words, will the religious appreciation be affected by the alteration in the object? Will it lose its sacredness because of this change?

By investigating these questions, we will find that the object's uniqueness need not be the result of any stipulation concerning identity conditions. Rather, its uniqueness may well be the product, not of the object itself but of a particular state of mind – what we are calling “religious appreciation” – wherein the object is *appreciated* for its uniqueness. Hence, within the psychological state of religious appreciation, the mundane-sacred object is not fungible; it cannot be substituted by something else that serves just as well. It is seen to stand on its own. And, given that, there is no logical requirement that we must assume that all the features that a man appreciates must for that reason be *defining* features of the mundane-sacred object. Accordingly, the purported uniqueness of the mundane-sacred object will not be objectified as an attribute of the object itself; instead it will be understood and analyzed as a formal element of the psychological attitude of religious appreciation. In fact, that idea is the perspective we are exploring throughout this dissertation, the notion that the uniqueness of a mundane-sacred object is part of the make up of the psychological experience of religious appreciation, and not wholly of the external object itself.

Against this view, it can be contended that religious appreciation of mundane-sacred objects obliges a special criterion of identity. For example, as Cantwell Smith seems to suggest, we ought to identify a scripture with a physical object only in so far as humans truly appreciate it as a *type*, which does indeed have strict identity conditions.¹⁰⁸ Otherwise, our concept of a scripture and our concept of a “tendency to scripturalize” will not hold together. This contention seems mistaken.

To counter those phenomenologists who argue all sacred objects ought to be described as “types”, we need only remind ourselves of the physicality of some

¹⁰⁸ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture: a comparative approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

mundane-sacred objects. The religious character of, say, a *wall* has as much to do with it being a *physical thing* as it does with it being a conceptual *type* of which the religious man is somehow appreciating. If the *Western Wall* in Jerusalem, for example, were to be destroyed entirely, this could only result in an alteration of it as an object of religious appreciation. The appreciation of it as a “type” cannot be what, at least wholly, determines the object’s worth. Thus, it seems more fruitful to avoid applying ubiquitously the notion of types. Rather, we ought to identify mundane-sacred objects in the way they immediately present themselves to our sense organs. That is, some mundane-sacred objects – such as paintings, sculptures, buildings, rocks, and so on –are physical objects. Others, such as musical scores, logical theories, dances, or rituals, have a more complicated identity resulting from a formal notation or behaviour pattern. Still others, such as various printed editions of a scripture within a tradition, are, of course, *types*. But, the concept of types has a limited application, and, hence, the question of the identity of the mundane-sacred object and the question of its uniqueness is in each case distinct.

Now, if that suggestion is true – that the mundane-sacred object’s uniqueness and identity are conceptually distinct – we shall need to analyze mundane-sacred judgment about the mundane-sacred object, and the religious appreciation behind it, independently of its alleged contribution to the identity-conditions of the mundane-sacred object. To begin this project, we might try to develop the concept of “uniqueness” through an analysis of the kinds of reason that can be adduced in support of mundane-sacred judgments. And, to do this, we might look to moral and aesthetic reasoning and language¹⁰⁹ for analogies. As pointed out in earlier chapters,

¹⁰⁹ Here I am thinking of Kant’s and post-Kantian philosophers’ ideas of ethics and aesthetics.

there seem to be some family resemblances in the language we find in all three of these spheres.

Yet, it might be argued that mundane-sacred judgment cannot share the logical structure of ethical and aesthetic judgments because of the absence of reasons supporting mundane-sacred judgments in the sense of descriptions which would *always* eventuate in some given conclusion. In other words, there cannot be properties that bestow “sacredness” on a mundane object in the same way as certain properties might confer “value” on ethical and aesthetic objects. For in religion, the effect of any property must be determined through the experience of the religion or “form of life”, and not by any external properties. This is partly what Eliade meant when he contended that the sacred is not reducible to prior or alternative concepts, classifications or descriptions of its objects.¹¹⁰ In religion, the religious person is focused on the uniqueness of the particular case, the religious object in itself, as a singular and irreplaceable happening, while in morality and aesthetics the concern is with the properties that bestow values on acts, characters and art works. Here, then, there is a difference in reasoning, and it is this fact that confers autonomy on religious discourse.

This objection, to be sure, has its merits. It seems sustained by the well-known idea that an object can be appraised as sacred partly on account of some feature that in another object produces no such evaluation. The poetic effects of Arabic in the Qur’an, for example, are a feature that may be cited as part of the splendor of that scripture; but the poetic effects of Arabic in, say, an Egyptian sit-com engenders no similar evaluation, no matter how beautifully the language is rendered. Hence, the

¹¹⁰ Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*.

feature of “poetic effects” is in one case a feature which prompts the attribution of “sacredness”, while in another case does no such thing.

But, in reply, this characteristic of religious thinking is not enough to prevent an analogy between mundane-sacred judgment and ethical and aesthetic judgments. For in aesthetics, too, an aesthetic object can be of value *partly* because of some feature that in another object produces little aesthetic merit: the effects of *slang* in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, are part of the aesthetic genius of that work; however, a book that unintentionally uses slang can be aesthetically unpleasing; so, here too, is a case where the same feature can result in entirely different aesthetic judgments. It is the same with moral judgments: a single feature can be the deciding factor between whether an action is good or bad. An action that causes pain (say, having a diseased organ removed in a medical transplant) might be *good* when the pain leads to a better situation. But pain in other circumstances (say, having a diseased organ removed in an act of torture) is *bad* when it does not produce a better situation.

The retort to this could be that in ethics and aesthetics there are in fact features of actions and artworks that truly do decide their worth. These features, however, are not first-order features, like causing pain or literal meaning in a poem; but instead they are second-order features that are only disclosed through interpretation or *hermeneutics*. In ethics, for instance, the valued features would be stipulated or discovered by a set of ethical rules, or by stipulations that have a distinct role in a moral “language-game”. The Aristotelian virtues, for example, belong to this class of features. Temperance, it might be said, would be a feature that always affixes worth to an action. And, whether an action possesses the feature of temperance is not, either in its Kantian constitution or in its utilitarian consequences, directly observable. It is a matter of interpretation, and it can be described even without a complete account of

the action. So here would be a case of a feature *providing a reason* for a given moral appraisal.

In aesthetics, it is the same. There may very well be two orders for describing artworks, in which the occurrence of a second order property is always a reason for determining an artwork a success: on one level, an aesthetic object can be described in terms of, say, its metrical structure; but on another level, it can be described as tragic, evocative, or sincere. This second order terminology is, again, *a reason for its worth*, and it is decided by interpretation of the case at hand.

But can the same rational process be attributed to mundane-sacred judgment?

The answer is yes. For even if this ratiocination were true, it would not be enough to show that mundane-sacred judgment was not analogous to moral and aesthetic reasoning about the uniqueness of its objects. Just as with aesthetic objects and moral objects, mundane-sacred objects also appear to generate two orders of description. In religion, both religious practitioners and non-believers offer first-order descriptions of mundane-sacred objects: for example, a ritual might be described according to sociological terms; a prayer explained in psychological terms; or an ontological proposition understood under metaphysical assumptions and terminology. What is important to note is that such varying descriptions *can* be, and sometimes are, voiced by *both* a religious person and a secular person. However, as important as that fact is, there is, nevertheless, a second order of description evidently reserved for religious appreciation as such. A ritual, a poem, a proposition, a stone, a wall – all of these, from the religious point of view - may be judged as possessing the features of being sacred, holy, evil, good, noble, authentic, divine, blessed, enlightened, blissful, beautiful, sad, and so on. In other words, there is a kind of description for these objects that likewise requires a hermeneutic analysis, a broader interpretation than the

immediate characteristics perceived. And this second order vocabulary is similar in certain ways to the terminology that we find in virtue-based ethics and certain kinds of aesthetics; that is, like these other philosophical fields, this vocabulary can be cited as a *reason* for the religious appraisal. Consequently, this reasoning allows us to conclude that there could just as well be a comparable two-order description for mundane-sacred objects.

The effort, then, to distinguish ethical and aesthetic judgments from mundane-sacred judgments via the different methods by which they attribute uniqueness to their objects does not seem a profitable intellectual exercise. At any rate, it is not conclusive.

Of course, the reasons behind a mundane-sacred judgment are, in some way, different from ethical and aesthetic judgments. Even though the various judgments each involve the assessment of objects as ends and not as means, the end associated with mundane-sacred judgments often includes the objects that we find in both ethics and aesthetics. Moreover, many mundane-sacred objects – like icons and mountains and so on – seem especially different from moral objects, in that they are more immediate, involving a particular physical object that can be seen, heard, touched or tasted. In this respect, the mundane-sacred object bears closer resemblance to artworks. But, given that mundane-sacred judgments refer us to the religious, to the transcendent or to the ultimate, these judgments must be sustained by reasons of a special kind. What these reasons are, however, cannot be fully specified until we have a broader theory explaining the origin of the mundane-sacred judgment.

How do we go about discovering the factors that bring about the mundane-sacred judgment? A theory describing the psychological state of religious appreciation could be used to do this. For, if we could specify the features of religious

appreciation, it would immediately suggest suppositions about the kind of reasons that substantiate the language associated with it, as well as provide an insight into its distinct kind of evaluative speech-acts, as McClendon and Smith have interestingly investigated (in other areas of religious language) with plausible conclusions.¹¹¹

But how do we go about describing the experience of religious appreciation? It would seem that, if we jettison a phenomenological approach, our only option is to begin by an investigation of its language. By deciphering the *meaning* of mundane-sacred judgment, we shall obtain clues about the experience alongside that language.

It might be argued against this proposal, however, that religious appreciation should be characterized through the *objects* it perceives, and not in terms of the language of appraisal that give expression to the experience. According to this theory, religious appreciation is the perception of certain kinds of features of things. And so, we must begin not by investigating the language of religious appreciation but by analyzing the features of the mundane-sacred objects, as this is what is necessary to understand the psychological experience of appreciating them. In light of this, it could be argued that the objects of aesthetics are the second-order aesthetic features of a work; the objects of ethics are the second-order virtues and vices of a deed; the objects of science are the causal dependencies and practical features of an object; and, for our investigation, the objects of religious appreciation are those second-order features of mundane-sacred objects mentioned above – sacredness, holiness, blissfulness and so on.

This contention provides us with a way of describing religious appreciation. It tells us, in short, that religious appreciation is nothing other than the psychological state whereby one appreciates certain features of things. And, similarly, mundane-

¹¹¹ James Wm McClendon Jr, and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

sacred judgment is nothing other than a method of appraisal where we are told that an object possesses those religious features. This in turn suggests that we are able to identify what is and what is not “religious appreciation” in the world, since it is simply a matter of cataloguing the features that are typical objects of mundane-sacred judgments.

This idea you will notice is the popular idea of “religious perception”, a philosophical theory to which we now turn to investigate.

CHAPTER 11

IS THERE A RELIGIOUS PERCEPTION WHICH PROVIDES MEANING TO MUNDANE-SACRED PREDICATES?

The idea that certain features of objects define religious appreciation and judgment makes plausible the suggestion that there is some distinct class of “religious features” or “religious types” or “religious patterns” to which mundane-sacred predicates, the words used to communicate the experience of the mundane-sacred object, refer. However, this suggestion in turn raises the question of what it means to *perceive* such features. Phenomenologists often embrace the notion of religious perception, arguing that only an “insider” of a religious tradition can perceive and describe these features aright. Underlying this theory is a key idea in the general philosophy of phenomenology: namely, the idea that perception delineates phenomena. “By phenomena”, defines the father of phenomenology, Franz Brentano, “[I mean] that which is perceived by us, in fact, what is perceived by us in the strict sense of the word.”¹¹² Or, to paraphrase, a phenomenologist of religion might say that, “By religious phenomena, I mean that which is perceived by us, in fact, what is perceived by us”. Under such a definition of phenomena – no doubt suggestive of idealism – we might be tempted, by a kind of *epoche*, to bracket off a class of “religious features” of objects from other kinds of features. Succumbing to this temptation leads us to a core assumption in the phenomenology of religion: religious appreciation of an object is

¹¹² Franz von Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, trans. and ed., Benito Muller (London: Routledge, 1995), 137.

nothing other than the *perception* of religious features, and that a religious perception is the requirement for recognizing these features. According to this approach, the role of the scholar is to achieve a state of such radical sympathy with the group he is studying that he is able to perceive their religious world as they do – and, thenceforth, communicate that vision to outsiders. By employing this approach, the scholar is then able to *describe* the religious features of phenomena. To do so, the scholar begins with (what might be called) an exercise of *absorption* in the religious world of the “Other”. This chapter addresses how a theory of perception might relate to mundane-sacred judgment.

As an illustration of phenomenological absorption, consider this passage from Alexander Piatigorsky’s *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Myth*:

When I think about mythology I know that myth is me, my thought, speech and behaviour... At the same time, when I think about my own thought, speech and behaviour, I know, even without any prior knowledge, however superficial and elementary, of mythology as a discipline and of myth as its object, that some, at least, of my thoughts, words and acts are subject to certain patterns and forms which I *see* [italics mine] exactly, literally almost, reproduced in other people’s events, occurrences and situations. And then, by a simple extrapolation, I arrive, in my thinking, at the idea that – barring a solipsistic surmise that reality is a reflection of, or derivation from, my own thinking – these forms and patterns constitute, themselves, that which is *other* than my individuality, as well as the individuality of other people. And if so, then I know that I am that other, which, as soon as the notions of myth and mythological are *post factum*...appropriated by me, is the mythological; the mythological in the sense of being neither individual nor non-individual, so that in this case I am myth.¹¹³

Piatigorsky’s argument is a nice expression of some of the assumptions and ideas in the phenomenological approach to religion. Evidently, Piatigorsky feels justified in saying “myth *is* me” because, first, *a priori* he *sees* that the patterns of myths – or what we are calling religious features – are reflected in his own thinking and

¹¹³ Alexander Piatigorsky, *Mythological Deliberations: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Myth* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993), 1.

behaviour, from which he, secondly, infers that the patterns (or “features”) do not belong wholly to himself, they are also “other” or a separate class; and this, in turn, leads him to the belief that the divorce between his individuality and the myth is dissolved. Thus, he and the myth are, in some sense, one. That is, he can *perceive* the features as an independent class; he is no longer an “outsider” to them.

Now, ignoring the merits or demerits of this interesting argument, consider what it implies: namely, not solipsism but absorption. And the question to ask of this theory is: *what* does such absorption mean? The phenomenological answer is that it is some kind of *religious perceptual capacity*. But what is this capacity? How do we perceive such religious features? And what is its relation to the mundane-sacred judgment that expresses it?

In considering the theory of religious perception, we shall be distinguishing features from properties, the purpose of which will become apparent in later chapters. For now, let us understand the notion of a feature as anything satisfying the predicate place in formal grammar, and let us understand the notion of a property as anything belonging to an object *in fact*. That is to say, a feature is *grammatical* and may be, but does not have to be, *ontological*, while a property is always ontological, even if in the current state of our knowledge we do not know whether a certain attribute belongs to the category of features or to the category of properties. This means that there is a feature for every grammatical predicate, but not necessarily a property. A Leninist, for example, might perceive Jesus’ advocacy of poverty in the *Sermon on the Mount* as *in fact* an ideology harming the genuine interests of the proletariat, and he might perceive it as *in fact* a literary tool devised by a ruling party for the exploitation and manipulation of the working class. In that case, the Leninist would be crediting himself with the ability to perceive the *properties* of the *Sermon on the Mount*, while

at the same time asserting that the faithful are only perceiving *features* of that sermon. In this example, the features ascribed to the text are a kind of delusion fostered by an exploitative ruling class and embraced by a naive Christian working class. But, even if that is the case, we are not logically obliged to accept that all features are delusions, since properties may have features. We should also note that, if a feature is a delusion, it still can make grammatical sense; that is, one might still understand mundane-sacred judgments even if, in fact, the predicates of those judgments do not refer to properties.

Assuming this distinction, let us begin our discussion by asking another question: how does one *identify* religious features of mundane-sacred objects? This question, after all, is the first problem facing the scholar of religion, for he needs some reason for believing that he is studying a religious phenomenon rather than something else, or a religious judgment rather than, say, a political judgment. Furthermore, if it is true that observation is “theory laden”, as many philosophers from both the analytic and postmodern traditions tell us, then it is doubtful that the scholar can answer this question pre-theoretically.

Even so, we can assume for now that some features of mundane-sacred objects are empirically available to the five senses, while other features – sacredness, scripture, dharma and so on – are available only to those with the additional aid of “religious perception”. So, again, our question is: how do we first identify the religious features, especially those features requiring religious perception? Intuitively, we might answer that the scholar’s initial pre-theoretical means of identifying religious features is derived from observing the actual uses of mundane-sacred judgments. That is, through an inventory of the predicates that attribute religious features to objects, we are able to identify religious features. Thus, we might look to

grammar and nomenclature – and, in looking there, we might observe, and indeed do observe, a bewildering variety of predicates ascribed to mundane-sacred objects.

For instance, as mentioned in the Introduction, we notice that there are predicates whose principal use is, nearly only, in religious judgments: “holy”, “sacred”, “scripture”, “Dhamma”, and so on. Such words happen chiefly in judgments that are classified within the discourse of religion. “The Western Wall”, a religious Jew might say, “is *kodesh*.” That kind of language would be an example of attributing a predicate used mainly in religious discourse. Furthermore, we observe that it is not uncommon to find mundane-sacred judgments suggesting practical ability: “well-done”, “balanced”, “mature”, “spiritually advanced”, “disciplined” and so on. The judgments surrounding the many practices of “spiritual discipline” – the variety of meditations, yogic exercises, austerities, and prayers – often employ these kinds of “technical accomplishment” predicates. We also see that mundane-sacred judgments often make use of predicates that typically describe mental and emotional states of human beings, as when a non-human object – for example, the sculpture of the footprint of the Buddha – is described as “joyful” or “blissful”. In addition, we notice that objects of religion are described in terms of the feelings they evoke: for example, the scriptural *story* of prince Gotama’s compassion for the insects slaughtered beneath the farmer’s plow might be called “moving” or “compassionate”; the story of the flight of the Hebrews from their Egyptian slave-masters, “exciting”; the advanced meditative states of a Jain holy man, “enjoyable”. These terms seem to express human responses projected onto the mundane-sacred objects themselves.

We also often witness comparative or analogical language. Here mundane-sacred predicates are used “metaphorically” or “figuratively”. For some examples, just ponder the varieties of analogical language describing God’s relationship to

humans: the relationship has been compared to that between *lovers* (as in the *Song of Songs*, or in the *Gita Govinda*, or in the passionate poetry of the Muslim mystic Halal al-Din Rumi); in many Jewish, Christian and Hindu sources, the relationship has been likened to a *parent's relationship to a child*; it has been compared to the affinity between *friends*, as in, for instance, the friendship between Christ and the disciples in the Gospels, or between the Lord Buddha and his bikkhus in the Suttas; and it has been compared to the *teacher and pupil relationship*, which we find, for example, between the Gurus and their followers in the Sikh tradition. Examples of analogical predicates are abundant. Moreover, this kind of analogical language is used not just to describe human relationships to transcendent objects – like Gods, Goddesses and Nibbana – but also to terrestrial objects. The comparative descriptions are present in mundane-sacred judgments: a Guru's sermon, for example, might be described as “heavy” or “deep”.

Besides analogical language, we also find various descriptions of mundane-sacred objects in terms of what the objects symbolize (or fail to symbolize). Here the judgments seem to use terms denoting some kind of relationship to truthfulness or knowledge or Being. The sacred stories and heroic legends, the dramas and art works, the dances and songs – all of these are, within the various religions, often said to articulate or symbolize something *true* about the ultimate reality of the world.

Also, there are *ethical terms* found in mundane-sacred judgment. In various religions, types of deeds and relationships are said to express the order and disorder of things. The “Law”, the way things are or are meant to be, is often expressed in written or spoken codes, poems, and rules which refer human beings to something ultimate. Taoism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, just to name four religions, speak constantly of the Tao, the Dharma, the Torah, and the Sharia, and the boons that manifest when

the Law or Way is followed, and the ills when it is not. In these religions and in many others, we find certain actions and works described as *good, evil, wholesome, unwholesome, skilful, unskilful, vulgar, noble*, as well as most of the other words commonly employed in virtue-based ethics.

There are also mundane-sacred judgments that employ *aesthetic terms*. For example, the words of Jesus might be called “beautiful”; the Buddha’s quiet walk through the grove, “graceful”; the logic of the Kalaam argument, “elegant”.

This survey of mundane-sacred judgments, while not exhaustive, is certainly staggering. It is enough to show that promulgation of a comprehensive theory of mundane-sacred judgments would have to be as complicated as any other region of our language. Judgments utilizing terms of “practical accomplishment”, of “metaphor”, of “aesthetics”, of “ethics”, of “ontology”; judgments referring to human emotions; judgments employing symbolic language, such as in rituals, in art, in dance and in festivals; judgments describing the *inability* of language to symbolize religious phenomena – all of these judgments would need to be included in a comprehensive theory of mundane-sacred judgment. And, no doubt, there are other linguistic areas of mundane-sacred judgments which have not been identified that need to be included in such a theory. For instance, we have not mentioned the realm of religious language where certain terms – like Om and other mantras – do not refer to any object at all but are holy in themselves, the mere *sound* being religious and linguistically meaningful. Indeed, we should extend the above list of religious predicates in mundane-sacred judgments to include *any* predicate that can be used to refer to religious features, whether or not at present there are such descriptions.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Remember, new religious movements arise frequently, and they often employ novel language to describe their religious experience.

All of this, no doubt, educes diffidence for a would-be theory bent on comprehending mundane-sacred judgments and the features of mundane-sacred objects to which these judgments refer. Such a sundry of predicates seems to force upon us the deduction that *all* phenomena are possible candidates for being religious features. With that conclusion, it appears as if there is *nothing* to contrast religious features against – and, so, *nothing* to say independently of what it might mean to perceive such features.

But, although the bewildering assortment of religious language picks out an indefinite amount of phenomena of indefinite linguistic complexity, it, nevertheless, seems true that we *do* determine if someone's interest in an object is religious on the basis of the language he is willing to employ to describe that object. A distinguished scholar of Zoroastrianism once joked that British football fans appeared to possess traits which were analogous to those found in religious persons, and, therefore, the interest of the former might be considered an instance of religious experience worthy of study.¹¹⁵ Admittedly a comic suggestion, but, nevertheless, something rings true about it: there are some shared characteristics between football devotees and religious devotees. Yet most people do not conflate or confuse the two phenomena. Why?

The answer, as noted in the previous chapter, seems related to language and its uses. Aficionados of athletics typically do not use religious language to describe British football matches – just as (shall we say) Vicars typically do not “high-five” their congregations after an exciting sermon. And that indicates something to us.

Scholars do not feel puzzled over whether they are studying religion or studying sports because ordinary day-to-day language and its accompanying behaviour unconsciously allay any confusion. Language, in short, points us toward the

¹¹⁵ Stated by John R. Hinnells in a lecture at the School of Oriental and African Studies during the fall of 1997.

features of our study, even when there are overlapping uses and the conceptual borders are rough.

So, from the intuition that language identifies religious predicates, it is not an unreasonable assumption for phenomenologists, and many of their existentialist offspring, to presume religious language refers to perceivable characteristics of phenomena. After all, much of everyday language is referential of perceivable properties.

Now the phenomenological/existentialist approach to religion avers, in short, that we are able to distinguish religious activity by a person's interest in the religious features of an object. Accordingly, scholarly *knowledge* of a particular religion is nothing more than the knowledge about religious features gained through the acquisition of a religious perception. If this idea is also true for mundane-sacred judgment, then only after acquiring the appropriate perception do our concepts of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgments become intelligible. This is why the phenomenological slogan that *we must describe the religious as they describe themselves* is so often heard.

Let us be clear. A theory of religious perception (be it derived from phenomenology or some other philosophy) does not fail, if it does fail, because the notion of a "religious perception" is counterintuitive or implausible. If it fails, it does so for other reasons. In the end, solving the conundrum about how we identify religious features hinges on answering the question whether there is some unitary logic distinguishing the religious use of words. An idea that religious people *perceive* some features of mundane-sacred objects *could* serve as a means for providing this unitary logical sense to mundane-sacred predicates.

However, if, as some postmodernists assert, there simply is no unitary logic behind religious discourse, then the concept of a “religious appreciation” of a mundane-sacred object, defined solely by way of an indefinite and expanding class of features, appears to be wholly arbitrary; that is, a concept with no ultimate foundation, no grounds. It thus deserves no special place in a philosophical study of the mind. If the postmodernists and their ilk are right, the phenomenological program collapses. Moreover, distinguishing the “religious” from the “secular” becomes almost impossible.

Now Malcolm – a prominent neo-Wittgensteinian, who appears to offer several arguments for relativism – argues that there are no grounds for the application of religious terms.¹¹⁶ But, nevertheless, he somehow sees a distinction between a religious attitude toward the world and a scientific attitude (which is also groundless, in his opinion).¹¹⁷ Therefore, from his perspective, although religious features depend on non-religious features, with the consequence that, say, a wall (like the Western Wall) might be called *kodesh* or *holy* because of a set of revered stones, the features, the stones in our example, are not “grounds” for the application of these terms. Malcolm argues that any description given as a ground for an object’s being “religious” could just as well be given for some other object’s being not-religious, and any two objects could be religious for different, possibly even conflicting, grounds. So, even though religious features are often dependent on non-religious features – for example, a religious argument for the existence of God might depend on the truth of the finitude of the universe – these non-religious features still do not, in themselves, necessitate the emergence of religious features. Hence, Malcolm concludes that there are “reasons” or “causes” for religious judgments but not “grounds”. “Religion”, he

¹¹⁶ Norman Malcolm, “The Groundlessness of Belief”.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

asserts, “is a form of life; it is language embedded in action – what Wittgenstein calls a ‘language-game.’ Science is another. Neither stands in need of justification, the one no more than the other.”¹¹⁸ In other words, there is *somehow* a distinction between the “religious language-game” and the “scientific language-game” but this has nothing to do with grounds.

This argument, while reasonable, proves difficult to demonstrate. It appears to rest on the assumption that, if a reason is to be considered a ground, it must necessitate *one* particular description. Because no list of non-religious features can entail *only* a religious description, there is no sufficient condition, in terms of non-religious features, that establishes the ground for a mundane-sacred judgment.

This theory is debatable.

For, why can we not argue that different mundane-sacred judgments share the same grounds? Is it not possible that, say, a word used *to describe a mundane-sacred object* borrows the criteria for its meaning from some other context? One might say the term is groundless – but only in the religious context, and that is because the word is *borrowing* its grounds or criteria of meaning from some other, secular application, which very much has grounds.

The assertion, for example, that *the universe is finite* might be a ground for *both* the “holiness” as well as the “meaninglessness” of things, but the *reason* for using either of those terms will depend on the context and the individual who voices it. That situation does not imply *total* “groundlessness” or *total* absence of “foundation” for those judgments. It is conceivable that at least the list of features, which constitute the total “first-order” descriptions of a religious object, entails the occurrence of any “second-order” feature it possesses. We might even lack a ground

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 100.

or foundation for choosing a religious term rather than a non-religious term, but that is simply not enough to prove that there is a radical contrast between religious and non-religious descriptions in terms of such an alleged absence of grounds or foundations. For, just as it has not been demonstrated that there is a logical distinction between evaluation and description, so too it seems unlikely that a similar categorical divorce of meaning between religious and non-religious descriptions can be demonstrated.

Indeed, to shed light on the notion of a religious feature, it is helpful to compare it with moral judgments. Like the division in ethics by some philosophers between moral values and “brute facts”, the radical distinction here between religious and non-religious, first-order and second-order, features seems too absolute. Just as the naturalist in ethics argues that any list of facts does not entail a moral judgment, so too the opponent of religious features argues that the “groundless” or “foundationless” character of these features arises because no fact necessarily entails a mundane-sacred judgment.

But is this true? Perhaps it is persuasive to say that sitting cross-legged, smelling incense, closing one’s eyes and lowering one’s heart rate are not “grounds” or “foundations” *in themselves* for employing religious terms; but it does not seem persuasive to assert that the discipline of sitting lotus at appointed hours, the subtlety born of rhythmic breathing, and the control of one’s thoughts are only *contingently* related to a religious description of meditation. The latter properties seem to belong somewhere between the non-religious and religious features, between the “first-order” features and the second order religious features which depend on them, just as in ethics “institutional facts” sit between values and brute facts.¹¹⁹ If this is true, if there truly is this “third category” resting somewhere between first-order features and

¹¹⁹ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), ch. 8.

second order religious features, then we cannot accept that the groundlessness or foundationless-ness of religious descriptions is what distinguishes the logical unity of religious language, much less mundane-sacred judgment. What Malcolm offers cannot be shown; it can only be asserted, based on an intuition that is disputable. And so, if one is to maintain Malcolm's view, and similar postmodernist views, then we shall need a fuller theory for the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment that will include an independent explanation of *all* that is involved in such descriptions. The simple assertion that religious features are not conditioned by non-religious features is no more than a protest – or perhaps an attempt to insulate religion from criticism – against a plausible hypothesis.

So, the modernist and phenomenological theories that advocate religious perception of features that provide grounds or criteria for religious judgments are not so easily debunked.

Now, it could be replied that someone can acknowledge and accept a total description of a religious object – that is to say, evince total understanding of the terms used to attribute a religious character on the basis of the description – and yet still reject any religious attribution, no matter how closely he studies and understands the object. For instance, Malcolm suggested, in a different essay, that a person could believe and accept the description of a work of religion – say, Anselm's Ontological Argument – while at the same time demonstrating *a total understanding* of the terms attributing a religious quality to the work, but nevertheless rejecting its religious quality or meaning.¹²⁰ That is, the person might believe in the validity of the Ontological Argument, assent to its truth that God's existence has been proved, yet still not believe in God in any meaningful way.

¹²⁰ Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments" in *The Existence of God*, ed. John Hick (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1964), 47-70.

But, this argument is really only an *assertion*, not a proof, that there are no grounds for religious descriptions, since it depends on an *intuition* about what it means to “understand” a religious judgment that can be, and has been, questioned.¹²¹ (And, in any case, what is meant by a total description of a religious object?)

Because a person can dissent from attributing a religious term to a phenomenon, while at the same time understanding the meaning of the term, it does not follow that there simply are no grounds or foundation for a religious description. More evidence, by some other means, would need to be adduced to save this position from oracular assertion. Even without this proof, it may, nonetheless, be true that terms in religious judgments have no grounds. But, although this idea is popular, we should remember that it is, at the moment, only a hypothesis, whose plausibility depends on the explanatory power of what follows from it.

Such non-foundationalist theoreticians could in fact compound the persuasiveness of their position by, surprisingly, borrowing the theory that the religious features of a phenomenon are comprehended through a kind of special “religious perception”. That is, they could, for example, offer a theory redolent of Moore’s ethical intuitionism. Moore, remember, concluded that, since values are not deducible from brute facts, “goodness” must be analogous to phenomena like colours, which are simple properties of experience whose objective truth, like mathematical truths, is available solely to a mature or developed mind.¹²² Under this rather elitist view, Moore hypothesized a special faculty or intuition by which these simple moral properties could be perceived.

Now, *vis-à-vis* Moore, one might argue that religious features – and the meaning of the mundane-sacred predicates that refer to them – are discerned by a

¹²¹ Gerard J. Hughes, *The Nature of God* (London: Routledge, 1995), 185.

¹²² G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

special religious faculty or “religious perception” that is based not on the object’s properties but rather on *emergent* properties that a few anointed souls can perceive. So, although the man of religious appreciation uses language that is dependent on non-religious features of objects, those features do not wholly determine them. There has to be something special in a man in order to perceive them. Like a gestalt configuration, the emergent properties depend in some way on other properties; but the emergent properties are not of a logical or necessarily observable nature for all men. Indeed, somehow, when a man of religious appreciation sees the properties on which emergent religious properties rest, he comes to “see” the religious properties of the phenomena, and thus uses mundane-sacred judgments to describe what he sees. In this way, we might say the grounds for the application of that term refer directly to the “emergent properties”, and, thus, it does not refer us to the criteria which give the word its ordinary meaning.

It is also worth noting here that this special religious faculty of perception is not identified by the body, that is, by the five sense organs. Presumably, it is more like the notion of “taste” in aesthetics, or the ability to perceive “goodness” in ethical intuitionism, or the power to see an aspect in a gestalt figure.¹²³

Pursuant to this theory, scholarly descriptions of mundane-sacred judgments do not offer “grounds” or “foundations” for the judgments, but instead aim to direct the outsider toward seeing a particular and elitist perception of the world that the judgment is communicating. Religious scholarship, therefore, is an endeavour to explain the properties of some phenomena in such a way that the emergent religious properties mentioned in the mundane-sacred judgment somehow become apparent also to the curious outsider. Now, because the dependence of religious features on its

¹²³ Indeed, I shall be arguing for something like this in *later chapters*.

first-order properties is not a logical dependency, the scholar is not able to advance arguments to convince the external observer of the existence of those religious properties. All the scholar is able to do is explain the material in such-and-such a way – and, thence, hope that the outsider sees that the religious properties are there. If, however, in the explanation, the outsider still cannot perceive them, then there is simply no ratiocination that will compel him to perceive or “know” their presence. To appreciate the religious properties, then, one ultimately has to “see for oneself”. Hence, the emergent religious properties will be said to depend on others in some way, but in no particular way. The only thing that can be said about this dependence is that someone might be able, if the requisite perceptual capacity is present, to come to “see” the emergent religious properties of the object.

In a nutshell, this “anti-foundation” theory contends the following: mundane-sacred predicates refer to emergent properties that are groundless, in the sense that not everyone can understand the application of such words to mundane-sacred objects. For, if these terms had universally accepted grounds, their meaning would be available to all people, while in fact their meaning is only open to a few with the appropriate perceptual abilities.

In the next few chapters, I argue that there is a kernel of truth to this theory. But, it has serious problems. Its main problem turns on a difficulty of linguistic ambiguity. Namely, the *same* set of properties can eventuate in the perception of two *different* “emergent properties”, just as the duck-aspect and the rabbit-aspect eventuate from the same visual patterns in a Gestalt picture. This ambiguity happens both *within* religion as well as *without* in religious scholarship. Incompatible interpretations can be based entirely on the same set of first-order features of religious objects. Where Aquinas does not see a religious feature in the idea of an infinite

universe, Buddhaghosa does. Similarly, in the world of Zoroastrian academic scholarship, Mary Boyce and Julian Baldick have construed from the same first-order properties (the “evidence”) such contradictory accounts of Zoroastrianism that the layman might justifiably feel they were describing entirely *different* religions.¹²⁴ Examples of this kind compel us to recognize that, in religious appreciation as well as in scholarship, diametrically opposed interpretations of “emergent properties” *can* be derived from the same set of perceptual properties, thus leaving the notion of an “emergent property” for a select few utterly confusing.

Obviously, such ambiguity about *who* correctly sees the emergent property is particularly troubling for the theory of religious perception. It shows that much more must be said about what is entailed in perceiving some “emergent property” as religious. More plainly, the unique relationship of two conflicting religious features to the same properties must be explained. But, more importantly, the theory must explain how those incompatible religious features are observable when a person, reflecting on the same set of properties, can at one moment see one feature where he formerly saw the other feature (as in, for example, religious conversion). Of course, these questions, alone, do not impugn the theory of religious perception, whereby mundane-sacred predicates allegedly derive meaning, but they do show the complexities inherent in it.

Furthermore, there is another, more troubling difficulty with this theory. It concerns something that prompted us in the first place to note the existence of mundane-sacred judgments within the wider field of religious language. Remember, mundane-sacred judgments often describe non-human but earthly and inanimate

¹²⁴ Julian Baldick, “Mazdaism”, in F. Hardy, ed., *The Religions of Asia* (London: Routledge, 1990), 20-36; Mary Boyce, “Zoroastrianism”, in J. Hinnels, ed., *A New Handbook of Living Religions* (London: Penguin, 1998), 236-60.

objects with the ordinary terms denoting emotion. We might call them joyous, sad, blissful, mournful, and so on. But, these are inanimate things that cannot literally be said to be in a state of emotion. So, if these words are, in their religious use, denoting emerging perceptual properties that are groundless – that is, if they do not possess the ordinary criteria for their application – then we are forced to accept that the religious use and the non-religious use of such emotion-words are even more radically ambiguous than we had assumed. For, remember, the grammatical application of emotion-terms to some mundane-sacred objects cannot literally be “joyful”, since the nature of these object do not in themselves feel joy, indeed they do not feel anything at all.

What this means is that, as a consequence of saying *there are no grounds or criteria for mundane-sacred predicates*, we are applying predicates to religious and non-religious phenomena for wholly different reasons. In the non-religious use, we apply the word “joyful” to denote a property according to accepted criteria, such as the gestures, tone of voice and expressions that a particular human being exhibits; while, in its religious use, these criteria are absent, or at any rate need not be present. Accordingly, the religious use would not be applied according to our ordinary methods for applying such words; the basis for the ascription of each use would not be anywhere near the same. In the one use, the term denotes an emergent perceptual property for a few; in the other use, it denotes a property determined by ordinary criteria for everyone. But this means that one *could* in theory understand the use of the word “joyful” in the religious context but not understand that word in its non-religious use for one would be employing independent criteria for the religious ascription. This would mean the word would be fundamentally divorced conceptually from our ordinary understanding and use of that word. And, if that consequence is true, if the

meaning of “joyful” in the religious and non-religious context is so utterly independent, then it provides support to the notion that there is a far-reaching divide between the religious insider and non-religious outsider. Both would inhabit totally different languages, despite the similarities in their surface grammar.

However, such a radical divide assumes that there is not a primary human emotional state that confers sense on terms like “joyful” when they are applied to non-human mundane-sacred objects. But, remember, we have already agreed that phenomena such as stories and sculptures do not literally *feel* emotions.¹²⁵ Therefore, we must conclude that, if there is a phenomenon that feels, it is the human being, and that phenomenon must be our source for understanding such words. There must be *some relation* between that word and the human emotional state. Because any person who does not understand a word like “joyful” in its ordinary non-religious use – along with the criteria that oblige its ordinary application – would, therefore, not understand its ascription to a corn dance, a sculpture or any other non-sentient but terrestrial religious phenomena. Therefore, while we may accept that there might be nuances of additional meaning to emotion-terms when ascribed to mundane-sacred objects, we, nevertheless, should remember that there is, to borrow Austin’s phrase, some kind of “primary nuclear” sense to such words, which is open and perspicuous to *everyone* who can learn a language. It is out of this ordinary meaning that the other religious meaning acquires sense.

Let us pause to note here that, if this is the case, then the much discussed insider/outsider gap is not without its bridges, nor always very wide. Aspects of religious language, such as the ascription of emotion-words to mundane-sacred objects, suggest linguistic bridges of understanding between the religious and secular

¹²⁵ Notwithstanding, of course, cases of miracles, such as the claim that some Hindu and Christian sculptures have cried milk, blood or tears.

use of words. No doubt, there would be little reason for religious people to voice the assertion that a non-human mundane-sacred object *is* “joyful” unless they see some kind of connection between the religious phenomena and our ordinary criteria for attributing emotional states. Indeed, without that relationship, it would be very odd for a religious man to *describe* the phenomena in such a conventional way. It is not uncommon for a religious man, when asked to explain what he means when he describes a certain religious object as “joyful”, to point to commonplace experiences of that emotion. This suggests – does it not – that he believes there is some kind of parallel understanding in the world of the secular outsider.

Hypothetically, if there were a religious person who saw no such parallel with the secular use and meaning of a word like “joyful”, and if he, nevertheless, used this word solely for religious objects, while not understanding how to apply that word in its ordinary, day-to-day usage, then we would be inclined to say *he* did not understand the meaning of the word, would we not? He would be the one not comprehending its *primary nuclear sense*. And, in not comprehending this primary meaning, his choice of the ordinary word for the religious phenomena would be completely arbitrary and, assuming there cannot be a private language, perhaps meaningless.

Given this consequence of radical ambiguity and arbitrariness, it seems then that the idea of religious features as emergent properties without criteria or grounds is an unhelpful route for explaining the meaning of mundane-sacred predicates. Moreover, since the theory of religious perception seems to require such a view of the mundane-sacred object and how mundane-sacred predicates acquire their “special” meaning, we should doubt as well the explanatory power of the notion of religious perception itself. The theory of religious perception fails because it implies too deep a chasm between religious language, particularly mundane-sacred judgments, and our

ordinary language. In truth, no such radical gap exists. Since if it did, we would have no explanation for the meaning of mundane-sacred judgments that ascribe such day-to-day predicates to inanimate, non-feeling mundane-sacred objects.

It is precisely this ambiguity of language which partly fosters the belief in the sharp divorce between the “religious insider” and the “outsider”. In the following chapter, we consider how the ambiguity might be clarified. Without a clarification, the *meaning* of mundane-sacred judgments is profoundly hard to explain. And, religious appreciation ends up an entirely independent and unrelated dimension of human life, an experience whose language, logic and value are radically cut off from ordinary elucidation and evaluation. Of course, such a consequence may be a desirable consequence for some; but for the scholarly “outsider” – who, after all, is often paid (sometimes on taxpayer money) to assess and explicate religious judgments – it cannot be an acceptable outcome. And, yet, this outcome, we should not forget, is not the eventuality of *all* theories and approaches to mundane-sacred judgment. It is the consequence of the theory of religious perception, which construes the features and language of religious experience as something wholly unrelated to our ordinary, day-to-day practical awareness and linguistic practice. This I shall soon be disputing.

Nevertheless, the alternative to the theory of religious perception has its own difficulties, as we shall see. Without the criterion of perception, we may well find that the notion of religious features of the object surceases to define the nature of religious appreciation. Even worse, we may well cease being able to explicate how religious appreciation is different from other kinds of appreciation – moral, aesthetic, scientific or what have you. If a word such as “joyful” means the *same* when applied to a mundane-sacred object as it does when applied to any other phenomenon, then how

will we be able to separate what is *different* between the two cases? Will we still be able to distinguish religious appreciation from other types of experience?

Clearly, if we jettison the theory of religious perception, the concept of a religious feature raises a dilemma. If words like “joyful” are not applied to religious phenomena according to our ordinary criteria for ascribing such terms, and if they are not applied to a perceptual property, then in *what* sense is it applied at all? The words neither depict perceptions nor denote the objects which are perceived. In what way, then, are they genuine properties? In the next chapter, I consider those questions.

To conclude this chapter, however, we have found that the explanation of “religious appreciation” in terms of perceptual features of the mundane-sacred object is not tenable. We found that the theory does not adequately consider the relationship between mundane-sacred judgments and day-to-day language. What we may conclude from a richer explanation of this linguistic relationship remains to be seen. At present, our investigation has led simply to the conclusion that the perceptual theory is unsatisfactory as a means for defining what we mean by “religious appreciation”. In later chapters, we will develop the idea that, rather than looking to features of the mundane-sacred object to ground the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment, we ought to look to the experiential conditions – that is, the psychological state of the experience of religious appreciation – to glean how these strange sentences acquire sense. However, to make that argument we need to first cast doubt on the idea that mundane-sacred judgments are in fact *descriptive* declarative sentences.

CHAPTER 12

ARE MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENTS DESCRIPTIVE DECLARATIVE SENTENCES?

In jettisoning the notion of religious perception, we have – so it seems – jettisoned the highly intuitive, if not most plausible, explanation of mundane-sacred predicates. How else do we understand mundane-sacred judgments if, as the last chapter suggests, we must discard religious perception and the related idea that mundane-sacred predicates are referring to emerging properties in mundane-sacred objects? Indeed, by forswearing religious perception, we are now faced with a dilemma. Our previous discussion suffers the implication that if (a) mundane-sacred predicates denoting religious properties have the *same* meaning as they have in non-religious contexts, then we shall have a formidable problem distinguishing religious properties as a separate class; but if (b) they have a *different* meaning, then we shall have an equally severe problem in determining the reason for the naming of religious properties in the way people do; that is, their choice of words will appear strikingly arbitrary. We found that, at least, some mundane-sacred predicates have the same (or at least similar) meanings as they have in non-religious settings. So, we are left with the need to meet the problem of option (a): how do these mundane-sacred predicates contain some of their ordinary meaning while preserving their autonomous status.

How shall we meet this problem?

First, it is important to note that this problem assumes that we have criteria for the meaning of the concepts of “sameness” and “difference”, an assumption that

eminent philosophers – Quine (of the analytic tradition), Malcolm (of the Wittgensteinian tradition) and Derrida (of the postmodern tradition) – have challenged (for different reasons, of course). And this problem, the problem of ambiguity, comes before our dilemma. Thus let us start with a brief consideration of it before attempting to address our main conundrum.

Remember, it has been frequently noted that formal logical analysis of meaning, besides having problems with the notion of vagueness, often blurs the distinction between the concept of ambiguity and the concept of extended meaning. This is because the meaning of sentences when derived solely from logical analysis is only *part* of the larger story of linguistic meaning. Formal logic analyzes the concept of meaning through the purportedly more primitive concepts of syntax, formal semantics and inference types. However, in focusing on these *rational* dimensions of meaning, logical analysis fails to capture the *empirical* dimension of language. It simply leaves out the intimate relation between meaning and practice, wholly ignoring those practical aspects of language that have been noted by many of the great twentieth-century philosophers.¹²⁶

Hence, while logical analysis reveals important information about the syntactical or rational framework upon which our sentences hang, it neglects the meaning that words acquire through lived, messy, empirical practice, that is, through the social institutions of teaching, speaking and the learning of words. These latter features of language, occurring between an *I* and a *Thou* within a community, are the background in which words become meaningful. And, this, perhaps, is Wittgenstein's key contribution to Frege's and Russell's logical program, namely, his suggestion that

¹²⁶ Such as, Wittgenstein, Strawson, Austin, Heidegaard, Buber, Gadamer, and many others.

the theory of meaning requires more than just a formal explication, it also requires an awareness of the pragmatic and historical features of word use.

Now, keeping in mind the pragmatic/historical context, it is almost always a matter of degree whether a word is ambiguous. A linguistic question often concerns whether the new use of a term is *wholly independent* of the old use or whether it is simply an *extension* of it. (See, for instance, the idea behind the “infinite polysemy” thesis¹²⁷).

So, given that question, what is “ambiguity”? A conspicuous example of ambiguity would be two independent uses of a single word, such as with the word “bear”. Only the context of its use seems to clarify which meaning of bear, the noun or the verb, we are voicing. How does this ambiguity come about? Such ambiguity happens when the two sets of criteria for the application of a word are logically independent, so that a person can understand one use while not comprehending the other, for example, understanding what a “bear” (the animal) is, but not understanding what the verb “to bear” (a load, for example) is.

However, we must remember it is not always the case that several uses of a single word are logically independent in a way that would count them as ambiguous in the formal sense. Scruton, for instance, has given us an example of *extended meaning* that shows how this can happen: consider the word “duck” when it is used to describe both decoy ducks and live ducks. Just because the word “duck” can have these different uses, we are not obliged to say the word is therefore *ambiguous*. Moreover, we would not be inclined to say the class of ducks has been extended to include the creation of decoy ducks, since decoy ducks are obviously not live ducks. Rather, the word “duck” fails to count as ambiguous because the one use of duck, the

¹²⁷ See John Lyons, *Semantics*, vol. I. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; U. Weinreich “Explorations in Semantic Theory”, in *Theoretical Foundations*, ed. T.A. Sebeok (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).

decoy duck, is “parasitic on the other, and could not be understood independently”.¹²⁸ That is, the first use – applied to flesh-and-blood ducks – is the primary use, hence providing an *extended meaning* for the other.

Another example of the extended meaning of a term, which might mislead us into wrongly attributing the notion of ambiguity, is the common practice of analogy. In analogy, we observe shared features between two different phenomena, and so apply a term from one context with *some* of its criteria to a different context exhibiting *some* similar criteria. This may be what happens when an artwork like a painting is called “sad”. The painting may be rendered in such a way that it exhibits some of the criteria that we normally utilize to justify our attribution of the term “sad” to a human being, a withdrawn expression, tears, and so on.

There is yet another important linguistic phenomenon, besides analogy, that ought to be classified in the category of *extended meaning* rather than the category of *ambiguity*. It is Aristotle’s observation of *paronymy*, which Austin explicates.¹²⁹ A word is used paronymously when it is used in a *derivative sense*, and the derivative sense can only be understood if the primary nuclear sense is comprehended beforehand. Paronymy might *look* like ambiguity; but, again, it is not. Thus, we might talk of a “healthy body” and a “healthy complexion” and a “healthy personality”, but all of these uses are derived from a more immediate, primary nuclear sense of “healthy”. All these different uses contain a part of the primary sense. And, without cognizance of that primary sense, the other derived senses would be unintelligible.

Now, to be sure, the concept of *paronymy* might very well be utilized to resolve problem (a) – the problem of mundane-sacred predicates denoting religious

¹²⁸ Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, 45.

¹²⁹ J.L. Austin, “The Meaning of a Word”, in *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J.O. Urmson, et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 71.

features having the same meaning as they have in non-religious contexts - but then we have difficulty distinguishing religious features as a separate category of phenomena. Using the concept of paronymy, a theorist might alleviate our anxiety by arguing that the examples of paronymy are exactly the kind of case that explains how a term like “mourning” (or any commonly used modifier) is applied to an inanimate mundane-sacred object. When religious people apply the word “mourning” to a scripture or to a sculpture, or to any non-human terrestrial object, they are using that word paronymously. Hence, the term is neither wholly the *same* as the original meaning nor wholly *different* from it. Mundane-sacred judgments employing such terms are merely a species of paronymy; these words are an extension of the primary nuclear sense of words found in ordinary language.

From this, we might further note that religious features are observable in the way something “mourning” outside religion is observable, like the mourning we observe in a human glance. Consequently, we describe the *road* to Zion as “mourning” because the meaning is *derivative* of our ordinary criteria for the application of that word; similarly, we call a religious practice, such as a funeral, “mourning” because it is a symptom of mournfulness; and, we call a sculpture or a scripture “mourning” because, by analogy, it resembles the gestures of mourning. In other words, religious objects acquire their religious features and their accompanying descriptive language *by imitating* certain states of mind and human behaviour. In this way, we demarcate religious features while acknowledging their relation to other, more ordinary categories of empirical life and word usage.

But is this argument persuasive?

Well, on one level, the answer is yes. It seems right to say that the meaning of many mundane-sacred predicates derive from ordinary meanings. And, it seems

unfair to say that there is only one way in which words are employed in mundane-sacred judgment.

However, on another level, it seems equally right to say that this theory does *not* provide us with a comprehensive analysis of mundane-sacred judgment, for how can a road, like the “road to Zion”, or a footprint, like the Buddha’s footprint, or anything of the sort, share the formal properties of a human state of mind? How could these inanimate objects *imitate* a state of mind? And, why would we choose to describe them in that way?

More specifically, such mundane-sacred judgments certainly do not mean that Jews and Buddhists, always and in all cases, feel mourning or joy upon meditating on these respective mundane-sacred objects. That is, these objects do not necessarily *make people feel those emotions*. Nor, do these judgments necessarily mean that the mundane-sacred object *tends* to make people feel such emotions. One can reasonably imagine an entire Buddhist community attributing the term “joy” to the sculpture of the Buddha’s footprint without ever feeling joy themselves as they observe or encounter it, just as an audience can describe a play as “comical” without ever having sincerely laughed at its jokes or even thinking the play is funny. Consequently, analogies and paronymy might explain *some* dimensions of mundane-sacred judgment – and indeed they probably do – but these concepts do not capture *all* of the meanings of mundane-sacred-predicates. In short, they fail to provide a general sense of the meaning of this odd religious language.

Consider, then, another interpretation of mundane-sacred judgment, which may well help to fill out the above theory. This interpretation we might call the “normative theory”. It theorizes as follows: when people express a mundane-sacred judgment, they are not saying what others *will* feel, but what they *should* feel. To say

that *the Buddha's footprint is joy* is to say that it is appropriate to feel joy upon encountering it. When a sculpture, a scripture, a sacrifice or any other mundane-sacred object is called “joy”, then it is like calling it exhilarating or thrilling. It is a way of saying what would be natural and appropriate to feel given the presence of the mundane-sacred object. Hence, I call the Buddha’s footprint “joy” because the mundane-sacred object explains how I feel or should feel – and perhaps how you too should feel. In this sense, the mundane-sacred judgment *describes* the object *so as to justify* my experience. I am feeling exhilarated *because* of the Buddha’s footprint, therefore I say to you, “The Buddha’s footprint is joy”.

There seems to be something attractive about this idea.

Yet, it prompts a question: *what* exactly is appropriate when the non-human mundane-sacred object is called an emotion like joy? As we said earlier, it is not the case that an observing person necessarily feels joy *by* a mundane-sacred object – and, yet, he may, nevertheless, continue to describe the object in those terms. Why does he go on speaking that way if he feels no such emotion? Even more troubling, it sounds peremptory to speak of *the* response toward a mundane-sacred object. Can we really be confident that there is a common response?

But, even if those questions can be answered, there is still another drawback with the normative theory. Suppose we could, in theory, identify a response or experience involved in every appropriate linguistic assertion of a mundane-sacred object. Even given that assumption, why must we further assume that the role of the assertion is to *describe* the object and *justify* the experience? A more immediate, indeed simpler, theory would suggest that mundane-sacred judgments do not so much *justify* that a certain state of mind is made appropriate because of the object, but rather recommend that the judgments offer direct *expression* of the state of mind itself. In

calling the Buddha's footprint "joy", I am not *describing* the object so as to *justify* my experience. No, I am merely *expressing* my immediate response to that object. Here, in this religious language, the language of mundane-sacred judgment, we are not describing *beliefs*. We are expressing *responses* and *experiences*, and that is why a man who is not conventionally religious feels so at ease using this kind of language. He is not committing himself to any claim about the external world.

Let us call this the "expressive theory". Under this theory, mundane-sacred judgments do not aver, or necessarily aver, that a certain response or belief is mandatory, normal, or normative, as appears to be the case in the normative theory. But, rather, this language exhibits direct expression of the response itself. That is, it is the *direct* expression of an experience of *religious appreciation*, and, thus, the assertion expressing the experience does not tell us what people should appreciate, but rather what they do appreciate and might appreciate. In the expressive theory, mundane-sacred judgments, then, are *not always or even primarily descriptive declarative sentences*. They are not about beliefs.

According to this reasoning, the normative theory of mundane-sacred judgment fails to capture its non-descriptive dimensions. What is more, the normative theory requires an explanation of *what* justifies the response a person *should* have, and – as in ethics and aesthetics – that is no small task. Religious people often use, one suspects, the religious sense of emotion-terms like "joy" without knowing what would justify or make appropriate such a response, and, nevertheless, they feel confident in the application of those kinds of words to mundane-sacred objects. This is because, through an established practice or tradition, they agree to certain applications of words. But that does not mean they must necessarily know how to *justify* or *elucidate* the truth-conditions of their judgments, as if they are referring to

beliefs. This may be why both “insiders” and “outsiders” to religious traditions can often understand and use mundane-sacred judgments without knowing how to explain them in terms of beliefs.

Now, if the expressive theory is the correct interpretation of mundane-sacred judgment, then we cannot say that this religious language is necessarily descriptive. Rather, such non-descriptive mundane-sacred predicates may very well relate to non-cognitive states of mind, expressing such psychological phenomena as the imagination. This relation between non-cognitive states of mind and mundane-sacred judgment may well be akin to the way that descriptive language is associated with cognitive states of mind about actual states of affairs, like the way beliefs are connected to descriptive statements.

This theory, too, of course raises difficult questions. For, if mundane-sacred judgments are not, or not always, descriptions of states of affairs, even though they *look* like ordinary declaratives, then what are these peculiar judgments? What is the nature of the mental state behind them? What do these declarative sentences refer to or intend to communicate? What do they tell us about the mundane-sacred object? With what can the applications of mundane-sacred predicates be compared?

The brief answer, the theory of this dissertation, is this: mundane-sacred judgments do not *refer* us to properties about the object; rather they *express* an experience, a psychological state, derived from confrontation with that object. And, the agreement with a mundane-sacred judgment does not entail an agreement in beliefs, but rather an agreement in responses. Moreover, the features that give an object its religious character – which prompt that response – can be compared with the way we describe “aspects”; that is, the psychological state, which allows one to “perceive” the features ascribed to mundane-sacred objects, derives from, or is like,

the imaginative capabilities that allow one to engage in “aspect seeing”. (Later chapters will expound on that suggestion.)

In order to help elucidate this “expressive theory”, let us understand *expression* to mean the relation between a sentence and a mental state. Some statements will express *beliefs*, others will express different states of mind. Our theory assumes, similar to Grice’s arguments about language,¹³⁰ that, in some way, expression determines meaning (in that this relation between mind and language determines our understanding of a sentence). The idea here is that mundane-sacred judgments, because they are not descriptions, do not express a linguistic relation to *beliefs*. On the contrary, they express a relation to what we are calling “religious appreciation”, a different kind of mental state that, as will be argued later, is closely associated with features of the *imagination*. It follows from this suggestion that, if one sincerely voices or assents to a mundane-sacred judgment, then one can do so only if one has had a particular kind of experience, just as one can understand a certain description of a state of affairs only if one has had a certain belief or mental picture about that state of affairs. Mundane-sacred judgments, to be concise, are not descriptions about the mundane-sacred object. They are expressions of an experience when confronting that object.

But, if mundane-sacred predicates are not descriptive of the mundane-sacred object, how do we construe their meaning? To that question, we now turn.

¹³⁰ H.P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

CHAPTER 13

HOW CAN A MUNDANE-SACRED PREDICATE HAVE A NON-DESCRIPTIVE MEANING?

Let us go back to the question about the *meaning* of mundane-sacred judgment. In the foregoing pages, we considered commonplace questions: *what are* religious features, *what are* mundane-sacred judgments, and *what is* it about a mundane-sacred object that makes us say it possesses religious features. Now, if the hypothesis of this dissertation is correct, if the expressive theory holds, then these are misleading, perhaps even totally mistaken, questions because such questions rest on a flawed notion of mundane-sacred judgments. Namely, they confuse us by suggesting that mundane-sacred judgments are *descriptive* in nature and, thus, in need of an explanation about a man's *beliefs*. This in turn implies that we should investigate the *truth-conditions* that justify those beliefs; we should look to see how they can be verified, perhaps by some kind of special perception. Instead of all that, however, the expressive theory directs us to ask *what it means to accept or decline* a mundane-sacred judgment. That is, the expressive theory instructs us to ask about the experience or response this language seeks to communicate or elicit, if we wish to understand this peculiar kind of religious language.

Admittedly, this suggestion faces a difficulty similar to the one we found plaguing the theory of religious perception. Explaining how mundane-sacred predicates maintained their original meaning when placed in a new religious context befuddled the theory of religious perception. Similarly, the expressive theory must

answer how mundane-sacred predicates like “joy” or “mourning” preserve their same meaning when relocated from a descriptive to a non-descriptive use. How do we avoid the problem of ambiguity between religious and non-religious uses of terms?

The answer is this: if linguistic phenomena yield the possibility that individual words not only acquire extended meanings (through analogy, paronymy, or other figurative practices), but also can be used in radically new ways while maintaining their original and accepted meanings, then we shall have a means to interpret those mundane-sacred predicates non-descriptively *without falling into problems of ambiguity*. That is, if we can discover the possibility that, in some cases, there is no genuine extension of meaning, but instead a different context – an *extended use*, as it were – then we can successfully meet our intransigent problem by *not* going between the horns of the dilemma, but rather by arguing that the terms mean the *same* (or close to the same thing) in both non-religious and mundane-sacred judgments. The only difference is that they are being *used* differently.

Fortunately, we find a clue to our problem in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*.¹³¹ Wittgenstein observed that words are, indeed, sometimes used with their ordinary meanings when out of their ordinary contexts. It is important to note that this happens not from paronymy, but rather from the fact that the ordinary meaning is applicable in a different environment. In short, it has a *new* use with an *old* meaning. In such cases, the extended use is understood, but only if the meaning from which it is taken is comprehended beforehand. To illustrate, Wittgenstein offers the following example:

Given the two ideas “fat” and “lean”, would you be rather inclined to say that Wednesday was a fat and Tuesday lean, or the other way round? (I incline to choose the former.) Now have “fat” and “lean” some different meaning here

¹³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998).

from there usual one? – they have a different use. – So ought I really to have used different words? Certainly not that. – I want to use *these* words (with their familiar meanings) *here*. – Now, I say nothing about the causes of this phenomenon. They *might* be associations from my childhood. But that is a hypothesis. Whatever the explanation, - the inclination is there.

Asked “What do you really mean here by ‘fat’ and ‘lean’?”, - I could only explain the meanings in the usual way. I could *not* point to the examples of Tuesday and Wednesday.¹³²

The upshot of Wittgenstein’s example is that to understand such a peculiar use of terms is not to comprehend some derivative relation of those terms to a central and primitive case, as in paronymy, but to see *a different point* for using those familiar terms in a new context. What is more, such a peculiar use of words (similar to Wittgenstein’s example) happens often, and not just in what is called “slang”. If we consider the novel uses of words in *dreams* – when the normal referents of those words are altered by a peculiar context but the meaning nevertheless stays the same – then we see that just about any word is capable of being used in new, almost radical, ways. And, yet, it does all this while preserving its commonplace meaning.¹³³ So, in order to understand this kind of use of terms, we must comprehend the purpose or point of the description, and thus we need not learn any new meaning or paronymous meaning.

It has also been noted that Wittgenstein’s example bears similarities to certain kinds of aesthetic descriptions – descriptions, for example, of the “weight” of certain visual effects or the “warmth” of a colour scheme. Not surprisingly, because there are some striking resemblances between mundane-sacred judgments and aesthetic judgments, Wittgenstein’s example also has commonalities with certain types of

¹³² *Philosophical Investigations*, 216. This quote was brought to my attention while reading Scruton’s *Art and Imagination*, 50.

¹³³ *Art and Imagination*, 49-50.

mundane-sacred judgments. Descriptions of the “depth” of a sermon or the “heaviness” of a Yom Kippur service serve to illustrate.

Now, such mundane-sacred judgments might be explained, at least in part, through the concept of analogy, but, to say that this is all that is involved in such language seems dubious. For such judgments, if they are simple analogies, would be injudicious, to say the least. What, after all, would be the similarities between an abstraction like “heaviness” and a religious service?

Such unresolved questions allow us to maintain that, in both aesthetic and mundane-sacred judgments, there is additional room for a non-descriptive interpretation of their terms. Even if we are not always able to elucidate how people are purposefully using words non-descriptively, it does not imply that we can never indicate what we mean by such usages. A simple example suffices to remind us of this. Suppose you pointed to Jastrow’s duck-rabbit configuration and said, “That is a duck”. The ostensive word “that” in your judgment would be non-descriptive, would it not? Clearly, it does not refer to the drawing, but instead refers to what is *in* the drawing. And, if someone were to think you were referring to the drawing – the physical object – as a duck, he would entirely misconstrue your sentence. Your point in making that statement is not to attribute a property to that object, but rather to draw our attention to an aspect in the drawing. The use of the word “that” becomes meaningful in the context of your purpose, which is to try to get the other to see the aspect.

How is it that the man does not misunderstand you? Is it because he holds some grand semantic theory about the meaning of the ostensive “that”, which allows him to anticipate your meaning beforehand? Is it that he has a “special” perception?

No, it is because he understands the conditions for the acceptance of this judgment. By the conversational context, he understands the non-referential nature of the word “that”. It is the same with mundane-sacred judgments. When the man of religious appreciation points to a mundane-sacred object and says, “This is mourning”, there is nothing in his statement alone that informs us that its meaning intends to convey the attribution of *properties* to the mundane-sacred object, with this language thereby expressing a perception. Assessing such a statement by a logical or semantic theory of meaning alone will simply not allow us to determine whether or not some property is being attributed by this description to the mundane-sacred object. Such language, standing on its own, could just as well be indicating *features* of the mundane-sacred object, with this language thereby expressing an experience – and not a perception. The language on its own is meaningless without reference to its use, which is to express the experience.

Accordingly, our understanding of any given mundane-sacred judgment hinges on an ever-renewed study of the circumstances in which it is used – as well as on dialogue with those who assert them – because we will not be able to say in advance, by any kind of semantic theory, whether the mundane-sacred predication of the judgment is attributing a property or not. Its meaning needs to be determined by the presence of the experience the judgment is directly expressing.

Indeed, it is here, while trying to distinguish religious features from properties, where the idea of “aspects” genuinely helps to clarify the dilemma voiced at the beginning of this chapter. Identifying aspects have several qualities that are comparable to the way we use mundane-sacred predicates to indicate “religious features”.

Like aspects, a description of religious features does not refer us to simple properties of objects, which the “religious perception” of a select few can discern. This is the case even if in some ways the words denoting the features behave like the way we describe simple properties. Just as a person who is ignorant of duck drawings may, nevertheless, faithfully draw the properties of Jastrow’s duck-rabbit, and thus reproduce the duck aspect without “seeing” that aspect,¹³⁴ so too a man may reproduce all the *properties* of what he sees of a sculpture of the Buddha without ever “seeing” its religious *feature* of joy. It takes a certain experience to see the point of a mundane-sacred judgment, just as it takes a certain experience to see the point of describing Jastrow’s duck-rabbit drawing as a duck. Religious features, like aspects, cannot be properties.

Another comparable quality is this: the terms that describe aspects receive their meaning from their normal sense, even when the uses of those words are not their normal employment. The term “man” has the same meaning when describing a flesh-and-blood man as it does when describing an *aspect* in a picture; indeed, our criterion for the application of the word “man” to the aspect in the picture is the term’s normal sense. Similarly, our criterion for the application of a commonplace term to mundane-sacred objects is its conventional meaning, albeit *used* in a different or extended way.

Still another comparable, and related, quality is this: the use of words to describe aspects is not analogical or figurative or some other derivative linguistic practice (like paronymy). This is because, again, the meaning of these predicates comes from the normal sense of these words. The same is true for mundane-sacred

¹³⁴ *Philosophical Investigations*, 194.

predicates. In this use of language, mundane-sacred predicates are not, or need not necessarily be, figurative.

Wittgenstein provides a final comparable quality: when Wittgenstein distinguished aspects from properties, he argued that the application of a term to an aspect does not need any new criteria, since terms used to draw attention to aspects employ the criteria and meaning that inform their normal sense.¹³⁵ If the same is true in the use of mundane-sacred predicates, which draw our attention to the experience of religious features of mundane-sacred objects, then mundane-sacred judgments also do not require new criteria for their meaning. As when we describe an aspect by using the criteria employed in other contexts, we express the experience of the religious features of a mundane-sacred object by exploiting language everyone uses.

All of these comparisons with the way we describe aspects suggest that religious features are, as we assumed in the last chapter, distinct from properties, since, most importantly, they do not invoke novel criteria for their application. In this way, we do not fall into the problem of a radical autonomy to the meaning of the religious use of ordinary terms, and – very importantly – we do not negate their extended uses. Moreover, in this way we avoid the need to hypothesize “religious perception” of properties, and thereby avoid all the theoretical difficulties such a hypothesis brings along.

If we have accepted – or followed - the argument so far, then we will begin to see why a distinction is drawn between features and properties. For, if mundane-sacred judgments are not descriptive, then we must interpret such language as attributing not properties to things but features to things. That is, mundane-sacred judgments are not necessarily making an assertion about the properties of an object,

¹³⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, 193-214.

even if their language sometimes appears that way. Accordingly, we need to make room for this dimension in our interpretation of religious language, particularly mundane-sacred judgment. Distinguishing features from properties does just that.¹³⁶ It also allows us to understand what a religious feature means, since the meaning of the mundane-sacred predicate, which denotes the feature, is the same as its sense in non-religious contexts. We appeal to the same criteria for establishing a mundane-sacred predicate's meaning without asserting it as a property of the phenomenon to which it is applied. To be sure, the use of the words is different, but that is not a criticism. In fact, that is the point. The sense is the same, but the use is different. And, that is how both religious and non-religious men come to voice mundane-sacred judgments.

Interestingly, this expressive theory also assuages the "insider/outsider" controversy. When we recognize that there is a distinction between words expressing features and words denoting properties, we see that words that express features need not possess independent criteria for their application, for their criteria, and thus their meaning, are the same as in their other ordinary sense. As a result, they do not have different criteria when applied to mundane-sacred objects. Therefore, even an outsider to a religion has an opening into the language of the "other", from which dialogue and further understanding may blossom.

Such are the consequences of recognizing a distinction between features and properties, as well as of rejecting the thesis that mundane-sacred judgments are given meaning only by new criteria of meaning or by direct religious perception of special religious properties that have no foundation or grounds. In short, to see some object of the world as sacred or mourning or joy does not necessarily mean that one is seeing

¹³⁶ Of course, this is not to say that religious assertions *never* describe states of affairs. Here, we are not repudiating this traditional practice in the philosophy of religion, as many Wittgensteinians and Postmodernists do. But, care should be taken in not confusing a piece of religious language that expresses an experience with religious language that asserts a property.

some *property* in it, which only those inside the religion can comprehend. It is to have a response to an object, which others may or may not experience.

To sum up, the foregoing ideas have suggested the possibility of an analogy between the description of an object's religious character and the description of the aspect of some object. This analogy, in turn, prompted the idea that we should try to describe mundane-sacred judgments in terms of an experience that the judgments express, rather than by a belief. The phenomenology of religion, with its notion of religious perception, proceeded from the assumption that "seeing for oneself as the other sees the religious object" is the prerequisite for understanding religion *qua* religion. And, to the extent that one must share a response to agree with a mundane-sacred judgment, this is true. However, it is a dubious phenomenological claim that one must rely on oneself, on one's own perceptions, to experience religious features of mundane-sacred objects. Other than invoking the sin of "reductionism", the phenomenological approach never truly explains why a person has to rely on the fact that he has shared another's vision in order to understand the alleged religious properties. If something is a visual property, it is simply not true that a person must see the property himself in order to know that an object possesses it. A blind man can know about colours without perceiving them himself; so why is it not the same for a non-religious man or an "outsider" to know about alleged perceptual religious properties he has never seen? An understanding of mundane-sacred judgments, therefore, does not hinge on one's perception, or some radically isolated "language-game" *because of* a unique property in the object. Rather, it is because our "seeing" is not the perception of a property at all. Our seeing is an agreement in a response. And, it is not at all obvious that an outsider cannot share in this response.

The knowledge that some religious feature is “in” the mundane-sacred object is provided by the same linguistic criteria that evinces a person understands the meaning of the respective word expressing that feature, just as in the case when one “knows” an aspect is “in” a picture. In this case, “seeing” and “knowing” that a mundane-sacred object has the feature of joy are the same phenomenon because, to accept the judgment that the mundane-sacred object is joy is not to accept a belief, but to agree in some kind of response or experience or mental state that, which unlike a belief, is wedded logically to the conditions that elicit it.

If you grant that, we can now state our theory more generally. Justifying a mundane-sacred judgment is to justify its *acceptance*.¹³⁷ More specifically, by elucidating the experience whereby a mundane-sacred judgment is accepted, we can show that it is different – or may be different – from the conditions for the acceptance of an ordinary description of a belief, and, thus, we can demarcate this branch of religious discourse. The relation between the experience of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment is really only the relation between a sentence and the experiential conditions where it is accepted, and these conditions can vary with the kinds of declaratives we are considering. For example, on the one hand, if the mental state associated with some sentence is a “belief”, then the acceptance conditions would be some kind of verification condition. A justification of the judgment would be a justification of the belief in terms of truth-conditions that would determine the acceptance of the judgment. That is, the belief that is being justified is the belief in the truth of that judgment; or, to put it differently, the truth of the judgment would be the justification for both the sentence’s use and the belief it is expressing. Thus, in the cases where sentences are descriptive of belief, their meaning is made possible by

¹³⁷ This idea, of course, is borrowed from – or at least similar to – Roger Scruton’s affective theory of aesthetic judgment.

justification. On the other hand, the acceptance conditions for mundane-sacred judgments may not be a belief at all. Instead, it may be some other mental state that better explains the point of the mundane-sacred judgment. So mundane-sacred judgments need not have the same truth conditions that descriptions of beliefs require; and, thus, to justify a mundane-sacred judgment may be to justify an experience and not a belief.

Of course, the comparisons so far given between religious descriptions and aspects do not adequately resolve the problems associated with the use of religious terms. The term “joy”, for instance, is not clearly an aspect of a sculpture (or sermon or scripture or mantra or...) in the way that a “duck” is an aspect of a drawing. Only after more thorough investigation, in later chapters, will the comparison be more adequate. For now, we can minimally say that the condition for the acceptance of mundane-sacred judgments is an “experience of appreciation”, and not a belief. Furthermore, the definition of the experience of “religious appreciation” should be for now understood in the broadest possible sense, until the ideas in later chapters give it more content.

Now, it is worth pointing out here that, if a special experience is the condition for the acceptance of a mundane-sacred judgment, then a mundane-sacred judgment can be *sincerely* voiced only by someone who experiences the religious object in the appropriate way. But what is that way? Later chapters seek to answer that.

To recapitulate this chapter, however, its key point is that mundane-sacred predicates do not have a radically different kind of meaning when used in mundane-sacred judgments, even though such terms are being used differently in religious contexts. Like Austin’s use of “healthy” and Wittgenstein’s use of the words “fat” and “lean”, the religious use of terms can often be understood as in someway derivative

from ordinary usage. A conspicuous explanation of religious words in mundane-sacred judgments is best offered by tracing back their meanings to their normal, day-to-day usage. None of this implies, however, that understanding mundane-sacred judgments is *simply* no more than understanding the ordinary usage of words. Of course, there is a difference between *using* those words in a religious context and using them outside such a context. And, of course, there is a difference between a person who understands when a description is related to a religious context and a person who sees no such relation and who thus does not “see the point” made of those words. This person, who fails “to see the point”, who is unable to share a particular kind of response, understands the religious usage as an injudicious analogy or a flawed simile and probably nothing more. Such a person might even understand that the words are used in a mundane-sacred judgment, but may not understand the purpose of using those words in that way. And, according to the theory advanced in this chapter, his failure to understand the religious description results from his lack of acquaintance with the experiences that the judgment is used to express.

The perceptive reader will have noticed that our analysis of the mundane-sacred judgment has, in a sense, ended where we began. In trying to delimit the states of mind involved in religious appreciation, we began by seeking out the “religious features” of mundane-sacred objects toward which religious appreciation is directed. But, we found that there is no way of construing these features except through identifying and analyzing the mundane-sacred predicates which we ascribe to mundane-sacred objects. However, we concluded that the mundane-sacred predicates could only be understood in terms of the state of mind that it expresses; that is, in terms of the experience of religious appreciation. In the following chapters, we,

therefore, turn back to an analysis of “religious appreciation”, the experience for the acceptance of mundane-sacred judgments.

CHAPTER 14

A SUMMARY OF WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

So far in this thesis we have been concerned with the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment, and we interpreted it under the “expressive theory”. Recall that we did not elucidate the meaning of mundane-sacred judgments in terms of the truth-conditions by virtue of which someone believes such assertions. We rejected the attempt to fill out the meaning of these strange religious “declaratives” via a schema such as *S believes P iff S and P possess features x, y, z*, and so forth. Instead a more fruitful explanation pointed to the experiential conditions whereby one accepts such language: that is, *S sincerely voices P iff S experiences x, y, z*. This denial of the applicability of concepts like “belief” or “truth-conditions” in this area of religious language was sparked by the discovery of some perplexing examples of mundane-sacred judgment: namely, those linguistic instances that borrowed expressive predicates from everyday discourse. Given the application of these kinds of predicate to mundane-sacred objects, we argued that the most coherent, if not the most intuitive, explanation of such religious language ought to postulate a mental experience other than *belief*. We hinted that this mental state of non-belief was associated with the experience that we called *religious appreciation*, and that this religious experience bore some fundamental connection to day-to-day linguistic meaning and experience.

In the next chapters, we shall elaborate on this point, hoping to disclose more fully the salient features of religious appreciation, the experience that provides the point of voicing mundane-sacred judgments. An understanding of these features, it is

hoped, will spell out the experiential conditions that supply the meaning of this kind of religious language. If these features can be ascertained, and if indeed they are distinguishable from the features of other kinds of religious understanding, then we shall have succeeded in identifying a religious experience separable from the more commonly recognized sorts. This would be an exciting philosophical discovery, for we shall have unearthed not just the meaning of a certain kind of religious judgment but also a new category of religious experience, an experience which would decidedly determine our general conception of religion.

CHAPTER 15

THE RESPONSE-RESEMBLANCE THEORY OF RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION

Now, to resume our discussion, recall a predicate such as “mourning”. Note how it is used in a mundane-sacred judgment such as *the roads to Zion mourn*. When a religious person applies this kind of emotion-predicate to a non-sentient object, we are immediately faced with a philosophical puzzle. As we discussed earlier, we want to know how this person, and those around him, would come to accept such a curious judgment. What is the experience that invites a religious man to apply such language to an object that clearly possesses no capacity to suffer the mental state of human mourning? And, why is it that those around him accept it so nonchalantly?

It has been suggested that there are, at least, two ways to use a predicate like “mourn”. One use *describes* a state of mind, a belief; the other *expresses* a state of mind, an experience. And so we noted that the state of mind of one use is not necessarily the same state of mind occurring in the other. That is, we have at least two mental states and, yet, they both exploit the same word. Now this idea of at least two distinguishable mental states using an identical term was suggested after our repudiation of various interpretations of mundane-sacred judgment. It is not, we noted, because the road necessarily *makes* a religious man mourn that he is prepared to say it is mourning, nor is it because he *believes* the road actually to be in a state of mourning, nor is it a result of the man, after analyzing the *object*, realizing that the

predicate stands for a property of it. None of these hypotheses withstood conceptual analysis.

Yet, the rejection of them only furthered our confusion, because if we jettisoned such highly intuitive suggestions, intellectual honesty obliged us to explain why religious people used the same word, or the same predicate, so differently. We had to wonder how it was possible to account for the predicate's novel application in the religious context. Clearly, a religious man did not have to learn a different meaning for the word's new use. On the contrary, his understanding of the word was obtained organically, through the natural manner by which he and those around him learned the word in their native language. Otherwise – if we did not propose ordinary language learning – such diction would be inexplicably chosen and applied, if not outright arbitrary. Its meaning in the religious context had to be suffused with the religious man's effortless understanding of the word's primary meaning in mundane circumstances. In light of this everydayness of the language, we, therefore, argued that the word's *use*, and not its basic sense, was being extended from its ordinary application.

Now this fact, we thought, offered a further clue about the nature of the man's religious experience of the mundane-sacred object; for if the primary day-to-day meaning of the predicate were still present in the new religious use, then undoubtedly the primary meaning would mark some limits to what the experience must be like. The religious experience would invariably bear some connection to the ordinary meanings of the words expressing it. Significantly, the diction would have meanings that any of us – the religious man as much as the non-religious man, the insider as much as the outsider – could understand.

That surprising fact – deadly to relativist theories of religious language – now raises the deeper question of our final chapters of the investigation into religious appreciation:

Can we find a plausible theory that will add more content to our understanding of the experience of religious appreciation than just what is expressed in the basic, everyday sense of the predicates employed in the mundane-sacred judgment?

One response to this question, the one for which most of us would be inclined to advance, is to proffer the explanatory concept of *metaphor*. It is an almost instinctual explanation of mundane-sacred judgment. To the question – “On what grounds could there be a similarity between a man’s experience of a road that is said to be mourning and his experience with another man who is said to be mourning?” – we are unvaryingly tempted to explain the predicate “mourning” by way of the concepts of analogy and association, that is, in terms of the notion of metaphor.

According to this explanatory impulse, a man who chooses to voice a mundane-sacred judgment does so, at least in part, because there are analogies and associations between the ideas that he is joining in his judgment. Idea-associations are then, according to this view of language, inextricably connected to the appreciation of mundane-sacred objects. Under the sway of a metaphorical explanation, the mundane-sacred judgment therefore involves, on the one hand, a *linguistic* association between the word “mourn” and the word “road”, and, on the other hand, a deeper expression of the association between the *concepts* behind those words. Of course, this *association* of ideas may be distinct from any *analogies* we might find between their denotations because clear-cut and significant analogies cannot always be adduced in favour of conjoining two concepts such as “road” and “mourning”. But there is an association, and that association is all that is required for the mundane-sacred judgment to have a meaningful explanation and application.

That is not all, however; the metaphorical explanation goes deeper still. Linguistic and conceptual associations are not the only associations embedded in the religious experience; religious experience of the mundane-sacred judgment also involves, at its deepest level, man's *desires*. For what is important in religious appreciation – on this metaphorical interpretation – is that there is an appetite in man, when he confronts his mundane-sacred objects, to associate those concepts. This does not mean, though, that when the religious man associates the various ideas in his mundane-sacred judgment – when he connects the cast of the Buddha's footprint to the concept of joy – he is *describing* associations; more simply, his association of the ideas is *involved* in his more immediate desire to speak in that way. The experiential component of this religious experience is, then, very much about desire, appetite, or will.

Now something of the above line of argument is probably what most, at least at first glance, think is happening in mundane-sacred judgment. But, in fact, such an explanation does not resolve the mystery of this kind of religious language. The upshot of this theory is that, when metaphor and comparison are employed as an explanation of mundane-sacred judgment, we are presented with exactly the same philosophical problems we find in those cases when terms in their non-metaphorical use are being exercised in such judgments. More precisely, we still require a broader philosophical account for the experience behind the words in order to explain the *impulse* to combine the concepts. This is true whether or not the terms are being used metaphorically. In other words, even if we accept a metaphorical explanation, the broader question as to why *those* metaphors are used remains, as well as why *those* associations of ideas arise in the will, the appetite, or the desire of the religious man.

What is the experience that tempts a man to speak in *that* metaphor rather than in some other way? What is happening inside him when he chooses to speak with *this* particular word about *that* particular object? Whence does this desire for metaphor arise? Why is this impulse so *widespread* in religious language?

The metaphorical explanation seems too shallow, too pat. We want to go deeper.

So here is another theory for our consideration, the one we shall be defending in subsequent chapters. In a nutshell, it goes something like this. If a man describes a mundane-sacred object as “mourning” (or under some other similar everyday predicate), he is *responding* to that object in a way similar to the way he responds to the mourning of another human being. He uses the same word for these different objects because he reacts to each object in a similar way. The sameness of diction in the religious and non-religious contexts is therefore reflected and justified by the similarity of the man’s experience in the two different environments. Again, this is because in both contexts he has a *similar response*. And this “response-resemblance” in the two different contexts is a necessary condition under which the mundane-sacred judgment is accepted. This necessary condition provides its meaning. Accordingly, when a religious man sees a mundane-sacred object as “mourning”, he does not see a correspondence between the objects themselves – i.e., a sameness in the mourning of a human being and the purported mourning of a mundane-sacred object. The two objects are for him very different, just as they are different for any other man. Rather, the religious man simply uses the word *mourning* to describe all mundane-sacred objects that draw forth responses in him that are analogous to *his* responses when he faces another human being in a state of mourning. It is this, the resemblance of his response, rather than any similarity in the various objects themselves, that explains

why the man chooses to use the word “mourning” in both religious and non-religious environments, and why he does not have to learn any new meanings for the term when it is applied in an unusual religious context.

For convenience, let us call the above suggestion the “response-resemblance theory”. It appears to cohere with some idealist and phenomenological interpretations of religion, particularly those that emphasize the idea of “empathy”. It also bears some resemblance to certain theories in philosophical aesthetics.¹³⁸ Indeed, to compare it with aesthetic theory, we might extrapolate by saying: just as – according to Collingwood – a portrait of my deceased cousin is *like* my dear relative because, when I look at her portrait, I *feel like* I am again in her presence, so too – according to the response-resemblance theory – when I choose to employ the word “mourning” to a mundane-sacred object I *feel like* I were in the presence of another human being in mourning. Thus, as in certain theories of aesthetic experience, in religious appreciation it becomes irrelevant whether the features of a mundane-sacred object in fact resemble the features of other objects that are described by the same term. What is important is that the word *expresses* some shared response on the part of the spectator. It tells us something about the human soul, as it were.

In view of that, we can then say, if a religious man voices that *the road to Zion mourns*, it is philosophically uninteresting that the road to which he points exhibits little or no resemblance to the sounds, gestures or emotions of an actual man in mourning. In our theory, the two objects *in themselves* do not have to be alike. All that we need to note is that the mundane-sacred object has, for whatever reason, the power to arouse feelings similar to how this man feels when facing another human

¹³⁸ Particularly, R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 52-6; Scruton, *Art and Imagination*.

being in a state of mourning.¹³⁹ Indeed, that is what marks out this language as distinct from other kinds of religious language. Thus, we have a kind of religious language referring back to the mundane, concrete world, to the world of men and their everyday emotions, language, and meetings. This language derives its sense by *not* pointing beyond and above to heavenly or mystical worlds, to those realms whose linguistic denotations few, if any, truly understand. Rather, mundane-sacred judgment returns us to the human world itself, to a religious experience very much earthly.

Now this theory, as it stands, tells us precious little about the nature of this “shared response”. What precisely is its constitution? To which category of mind should the experience be classified? The implication appears to be that it is not a belief. Yet, if that is true, then *what* is it – an emotion? Is the experience just a raw *feeling* that merely or contingently happens to express itself in both religious and non-religious situations?

A whole constellation of secular twentieth-century intellectuals, from Freudians to logical positivists, have urged us to consign *all* religious experience and language to the mental realm of “feelings” and not “beliefs”. Following their lead, we may come to the conclusion that, when we interpret mundane-sacred judgment, we confront a simple disjunctive choice: either the experience behind this religious language is connected to the mental state of *emotion* and therefore it lacks truth-conditions, or it is connected to the mental state of *belief* and therefore its language has truth-conditions.

On closer scrutiny of the paradigm, however, this taxonomy may be slightly misleading. To believe that our response-resemblance theory *necessitates* an explanation via either strictly emotional or cognitive classifications is hasty. In

¹³⁹ Here I say it has the “power to arouse”. This is admittedly vague, but rest assured it will become clearer, as the argument progresses, what this “power” is that produces the kind of language and response involved in mundane-sacred judgment.

classifying any given human experience, we, of course, not only need positive arguments that one category of mind is more fitting than another, but also we cannot simply *assume* that there are only two broad mental states appropriate to the classification of *all* religious experience. We ought to remember it still may be possible to find another paradigm. If we are persistent, we may yet identify another mental state that is not properly described either as an emotion or as a belief, but could cogently explain the experience of religious appreciation. It is *that* hope which will be our overriding objective in the following pages.

We shall find, in the course of the next several chapters, that discovering such a mental state will be fraught with menace. Difficult dilemmas and muscular counter-theories await us. Whether our theory can make it through them depends on how well it meets these upcoming challenges.

CHAPTER 16

A PROBLEM FOR THE RESPONSE-RESEMBLANCE THEORY: THE INTENTIONALITY DILEMMA

Let us return to the main question posed in the last chapter: how do we add content to our theory that, when a man sees a mundane-sacred object as “mourning” or as “joy”, or as some other emotion, he is responding to it in the way he responds when moved by another human being in mourning or in joy? Clearly, in order to understand such a response, we would need to discover the conditions that identify this experience. Only then, when the conditions of the experience are in hand, will we be in a position to comprehend how it comes about that meaning is provided for this religious language. Because of this requirement, our theory must make available a robust account of this response, an account that is independent of the purported “religious properties” of the mundane-sacred object, so as not to appeal to the concept of *belief*, but which is not wholly reduced to *emotion* either. Can this be done?

Before we can even attempt to offer such an explanation, there are many theoretical problems immediately confronting us. There is, for instance, a particularly daunting phenomenological objection. This objection bluntly asserts that our effort to provide an independent explanation of the experience is futile. We might be able, at best, to provide a vague explanation of the response but we shall never be able to offer any precise description of its nature. This is because a fuller explanation will necessarily end up in a quagmire of paradoxes, resulting from our confused assumption that a man’s response toward *any* object can be characterized

independently of his *awareness* of it. In other words, our effort *to characterize the experience of mundane-sacred objects independent of the consciousness of those objects* will have violated a basic phenomenological law about the human mind; namely, that human responses are intentional. And this intentionality *necessarily* involves some kind of belief. That means our response-resemblance theory is guilty of negating belief *when some kind of belief is a necessary condition for the existence of responses*. Our theory, according to phenomenology, thus collapses because of an elementary phenomenological mistake.

To see this, reconsider our theory. Up until now, we have suggested that there is no distinction between the *response* to a mundane-sacred object and the *recognition* of that object. That is, we have implied that a man's response to *the road to Zion* is indistinguishable from his recognition of it. This seems to further imply that there is no distinction between a man's *concept* of the sacred object and his *response* to it. But, as Brentano and his philosophical offspring would quickly point out, responses are intentional. They are directed *towards* things, they are *about* conceptualized objects. Unlike *reflexes*, which flash out in a man's behaviour with evidently no reference to his concepts about things, a man's *responses* toward objects have the quality of conceptual *aboutness*: they entail an awareness *about* the object to which the man is responding. And, it is precisely this awareness that our theory is neglecting to consider. A man's responses must originate from a particular conception of the objects of his universe, whether or not those conceptions are grounded in reality.

Because those conceptions define the intentional objects of his responses toward material things, we cannot justifiably speak about "response" without a more subtle analysis of its intentional objects; that is, without a deeper examination of the awareness that the response involves. When referring to any response, as we are with

the religious response to a mundane-sacred object, we necessarily must be referring to a particular awareness. In more concrete terms, this means that an object that, for example, *evokes* envy (a response) is also *believed* to be desirable (a recognition). The response is associated with what might be called a “believed conception”. This believed conception is, in phenomenological parlance, the intentional object of the man’s envy. The “intentional object” marks the awareness out of which his response grows. Conversely, if there were nothing *about* the material object that was first believed to be desired, then there would also be no response of envy.

For another example, imagine a young boxer who wishes to evoke the response of fear in his would-be opponents. What would the fighter have to do to achieve his end? Clearly, he would first need to do something that demonstrates, in the *awareness* of his adversaries, that he is “something harmful”. Because “something harmful” is the intentional object of the response of fear, without establishing such a conception in the awareness of his enemies, there would be no fear, and, thus, the boxer would not realize his goal to be fearsome. Generally speaking, then, when phenomenologists classify intentional states of mind in such ways, they are also discovering for us features of intentional objects, features such as harmfulness or desirableness, which material objects may be thought to possess and, which, in turn, spark characteristic human responses and language.

Now, a similar way of thinking about the mind has been introduced in contemporary cognitive psychological theories, particularly those that draw inspiration from the Hellenistic period of philosophy. *Rational-Emotive-Behaviour Therapy*, a popular form of cognitive therapy in England and the United States,

exemplifies this thought.¹⁴⁰ As in phenomenology, this theory contends that human responses are founded on beliefs or judgments.¹⁴¹ Systems of thought determine how people feel about and behave toward the world.

For example, three people working for the same firm lose their jobs at the same time. The first person is angry because she believes she should have been promoted and not sacked; the second person is depressed because she believes that without a job she is worthless; and the third person is happy to have lost her job because she always found it boring. The important lesson to learn from this story is that though the loss of the job contributes to the various emotional reactions, it does not cause them: how each individual perceives being made redundant is the key factor in determining the emotional reactions.¹⁴²

This individual judgment arises because, on a deep level, a man first intensely *believes* a proposition – such as “I *should* not have been fired” or “my parents *must* be kind to me” – that he ends up responding with turbulent emotions when the world fails to correspond to his beliefs. His responses result from dogmatic cognitive demands placed on a recalcitrant and often flawed world. Thus depression, anxiety, anger, and so on, are generated from and dependent on those demanding but fallacious convictions about the nature of things. Accordingly, from this theory of mind, a new philosophy – one more cognizant and tolerant of the inherent imperfection of the universe – would mollify emotional mayhem. Without such demanding beliefs about the world, a man’s state of mind will, more often than not, be characterized by concepts other than depression, anger, anxiety, fear or some other

¹⁴⁰ Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, (New York: Kensington Publishers, 1994). The discussion does not do full justice to Ellis’ theory. The relation between reaction and thought, over the years, has become far subtler in Rational Emotive Behaviour theory.

¹⁴¹ This contrasts sharply with Freudian and Jungian psychological theories, which often argue that beliefs and judgments are grounded in deep-seated emotions, cravings and urges. We, therefore, should not be surprised if Rational-Emotive-Behaviour theorists would analyze the psychology of religion quite differently from what usually passes for “the psychology of religion” in the seminar room.

¹⁴² Michael Neenan, “Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy”, in *Counselling and Psychotherapy*, ed. Stephen Palmer (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 279.

painful emotion. Like the phenomenological theory, this interpretation of the mind draws a distinction between our *recognition of* objects and our *responses to* them.

Given these ideas in phenomenology and cognitive psychology (and, before them, in Hellenistic philosophy), we are in a position to see the dilemma they pose for a response-resemblance theory of mundane-sacred judgment. Our theory wants to interpret the experience of religious appreciation by saying that a man regards a mundane-sacred object as “mourning” if he responds to it in a way that resembles the manner in which he responds when he is moved by human mourning. We also want to say that this happens without belief about the properties of that object. But, if the above phenomenological and cognitive psychological ideas are true, then we cannot sensibly say that the religious man’s response and language are without belief and truth-conditions about that object’s nature, as we alleged in earlier chapters of this dissertation. Belief is integral to the response.

The strength of this objection can be seen if we consider the following dilemma it creates.

Let us call a man’s response to human mourning “response-X”. Now either (1) belief is essentially definitive of response-X or (2) it is not.

(1) If the belief is definitive of response-X, then it must reappear whenever response-X reappears; the belief must even reappear when the object of response-X is not a man but, for instance, *the road to Zion* or *a statue of the Buddha* or any other non-sentient object. So, even a mundane-sacred object, such as a road or a statue, can be believed to mourn in a way similar to how a flesh-and-blood man mourns. Thus, the “mourning” that is said about the mundane-sacred object is *a matter of belief*, just as the response to another man’s mourning is a matter of belief. But, we have contended that the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment does not involve belief (i.e., truth-conditions). So our original contention about the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment must be false.

(2) If, on the other hand, the belief is *not* definitive of response-X, and so response-X can reappear without the belief, then response-X is

not necessarily *about* human mourning. "Mourning", in other words, is not the intentional object of response-X. Therefore, when response-X occurs toward mundane-sacred objects, we are unable to say that it necessarily reappears with the kind of recognition or awareness of *mourning* that stimulates a characteristic response. But, if that is the case, then we shall not know why it is an important fact about response-X that it is called "mourning", or how response-X's recurrence in the religious context is, in fact, the recognition or awareness of "mourning" in the mundane-sacred object. So when the religious man employs the predicate "mourning", we cannot explain its use by any particular kind of response, or by our response-resemblance theory. Therefore, our theory is, if not false, then merely guesswork. Only by accepting the idea of belief as essential to this response can we understand its diction.

Let us call this the *intentionality-dilemma*. It will haunt us throughout the rest of this dissertation. In short, it says: either response-X applies the word "mourning" to the mundane-sacred object because it involves *belief* about that object, in which case our theory that belief about the object is not involved in mundane-sacred judgments is false; or response-X applies the word *without belief* about the mundane-sacred object, in which case we are left unsure as to why the word is being applied to the mundane-sacred object, and what the awareness of the object entails. To avoid this latter consequence, we must accept that religious appreciation *does* include belief, and that its language *has* truth-conditions. As a result, our theory against that idea must be rejected. Our response-resemblance theory, once again, collapses.

If we wish to break the horns of this dilemma, and keep our theory that mundane-sacred judgments do not involve truth-conditions, then we need to find a different mental state; that is, an awareness or mental state *other than belief* that can be incorporated into the experience of religious appreciation, and at the same time be able to explain the ordinary use of terms in mundane-sacred judgment. That will be our philosophical quest.

CHAPTER 17

INTENTIONALITY WITHOUT BELIEF?

We might begin this quest to find a mental state that provides for the experience of religious appreciation by taking the offensive. Before defending our own position, we could pose some questions to the proponent of the dilemma. As a starter, is it obviously true that, as the stoic, the phenomenologist or the cognitive psychotherapist might say, the intentionality of a mental state arises *only* as a result of belief or judgment?

Undoubtedly, it would be an unwarranted constraint on the concept of intentionality to suggest that, of all the mental states available to a man's consciousness, only his beliefs have the power to generate intentional responses. While it may, indeed, be true that a man must *believe* himself to be a worthless human being in order to suffer *responses* such as depression, it hardly seems true that a man necessarily has to believe something about a situation to be, shall we say, *disgusted* by it. Without citing facts, without appealing to evidence, without evincing beliefs, a man might simply be disgusted by, say, the company in which he finds himself at a dinner party. Here, in this particular environment, among these particular people, he is *just* repulsed, disgusted, nauseated. In which case, it is merely a brute fact of his consciousness, having neither rhyme nor reason, that he is repelled by *these* people around him. An emotional "cloud" has descended on him, as it were.

As some existentialists contend, such responses of “disgust”, like the responses of “amusement”, “boredom” and “horror”, often arise without any belief or judgment about events. These emotions simply happen (which, of course, does not mean that they do not have *causes*). And, importantly, these kinds of “general responses” put in question the presence of belief in all conscious human behaviour and response.

To add to this, we might recall that a common criterion of clinical mental illness is the reoccurrence of responses that have as their psychological basis, not even irrational beliefs, but no beliefs at all. These are what could be called “unfounded responses”, as in those medical observations of patients who suffer the profoundest anxiety or despair, while neither the patients nor their doctors can provide the slightest reason why there is such violent emotional upheaval. Under these circumstances, clinical psychiatry is justified in hypothesizing that there is no underlying belief – a *reason* – generating the behaviour, but rather a chemical imbalance of some kind – a *cause*.

This psychological idea – of response without belief – has even crept its way into an international relation’s theory, the “security dilemma”. This theory contends that a state, even under the awareness that all other states are abiding by international norms, and even under the awareness that all other states do not seek to exercise violence and coercion with one another, still might experience a sense of insecurity in the international realm without any objective belief why it should feel so.¹⁴³ Like a deranged patient, who responds strongly for no reason or conviction, a state has the possibility of responding towards other states without grounds or belief. It can *just* feel insecure, and then act from there – with devastating consequences.

¹⁴³ Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations* (London: Palgrave, 2001) 101-102.

Now, if such counter-examples from existentialism, clinical psychology and, perhaps, political science can be trusted, then the concept of intentionality does not necessitate a reliance on the mental state of belief, since, as we have seen, responses *can* transpire without it. Therefore, the case that we wish to present still has some life. Be that as it may, at this point it is enough to know that the kind of intentional response inherent in religious appreciation may not, nor does not have to, involve belief. If that idea is, indeed, the situation behind mundane-sacred judgment, we will be able to sidestep proposition (1) of our dilemma, that “mourning” is *believed* to be part of the mundane-sacred object to which the religious man is responding; that is: belief is not necessary for such responses, as it is erroneously assumed in the dilemma.

In opposition to our suggestion, it might nevertheless be replied that, even in the extreme cases, every man will at least believe in the *existence* of the objects evoking his responses. A man who feels “disgust” at those around him – at least *believes* in their existence. A man who is clinically ill and fraught with anxiety – at least *believes* in the existence of a threat, however nebulous. A nation-state suffering insecurity in the international theatre while being unable to explain why it feels so – at least *believes* in the existence of the international realm. And so on.

Yet, even if all that is true for the above cases, such a counter-argument still does not establish that the concept of belief is fundamental to the concept of response. Who would deny that a man can be disgusted or amused or bored by something entirely *imaginary* – such as a mental or cinematic image of gratuitous violence – something of which he knows with certainty not to be real? It is evident that imaginary-objects are just as likely to evoke responses in a man as are believed-objects. Therefore, we cannot contend that a man’s intentionality is founded *only* on

belief or judgment, not even on the bare belief in the *existence* of the intentional object. A man can respond to something imaginary.

Make no mistake about it. When a man imagines an event – let us, say, he says to himself, “the trees outside my window are bending down in bitter mourning” – he certainly can *respond* to this spectacle of the imagination, and he can do this without the slightest commitment to its veracity. The more he indulges in it, the more his response toward the trees may even appear similar to how he would respond if he were facing an actual man in mourning. His imagination *could* spark states of mind – ideas and responses, metaphors and language – analogous to those which are ordinarily awakened by displays of authentic mourning; he acts just as he would in those moments of concrete life when he truly believes in and responds to the existence of a sorrowful, mourning man. (This suggestion no doubt coheres with the oft-used Stanislavski method in professional acting).

Such a possibility – response through imagination – provides us with a clue to resolving the intentionality-dilemma, which so impressively threatened our response-resemblance theory. For here, we have a mental state that is (1) not a belief and yet is also (2) a definitive awareness behind the response. It, thus, provides the kind of mental awareness needed to explain the response and language of religious appreciation. In this way, we can avoid the horns of the dilemma. But, we can do so only if we can plausibly suggest that imagination, or something like it, is the “awareness” underlying the response of religious appreciation. If we can do that, then our response-resemblance theory can be salvaged.

Our response-resemblance theory will need to contend that responses to mundane-sacred objects are not grounded on any belief that attributes properties to its object. This can only be accomplished by hypothesizing that religious appreciation

does not involve the same kind of intentional objects that we find in responses based on belief. In religious appreciation, a man's response must be founded in a way that permits his response to exist without reference to any belief about the nature of its object – just as disgust, boredom, amusement, or insecurity can exist without recourse to beliefs about their objects. That is, our theory will need to show that the response inherent in religious appreciation is founded on a thought that does not include the ascription of some property to a physical thing.

This is where imagination comes in. Imagination is the kind of thought that, like belief, can evoke responses; but, unlike belief, it does not involve the attribution of properties to physical objects. By utilizing a theory of the imagination, we are in a position to say that, in religious appreciation, a man's experience of a mundane-sacred object incorporates a distinctive kind of intentionality, wherein the response is derivative of imagination and distinct from beliefs. Thus, the language expressing this experience is not vulnerable to either verificationist or falsificationist, or perhaps even agnostic, challenges since the language is not asserting beliefs – or necessarily even feelings.

Indeed, another advantage of exploiting the concept of imagination is that the experience of religious appreciation would not necessarily involve emotions. Theorists of religion who are inclined toward empiricist epistemologies – thinkers as diverse as Freud, Marx and logical positivists – have tended to discard the idea of religious perception, the idea that religious people enjoy some special sense that allows them to uniquely perceive the “spiritual properties” of things. In rejecting that kind of religious explanation, empiricists have often concluded that the relations of a religious man to sacred objects must be explicable in terms of a state of mind, which

is ordinarily brought under the heading of the word "emotion", and, thus, not through the senses that ground belief and knowledge. Here, it is assumed that religious experiences can be readily explained in terms of feelings, as if those feelings can be easily detached from the awareness and thoughts they presuppose. Hence, this empiricist temptation suffers the phenomenological fallacy mentioned earlier. By not recognizing the distinction between recognition and response, the empiricists forget that emotions often have, at their base, particular modes of awareness.

Is there, then, a mental-state that (a) includes awareness of its object, but (b) does not always include the mental-state of emotion? Again, the concept of imagination seems to meet this question. Those mental phenomena grouped under the name "imagination" exhibit the kind of awareness needed for responses, and, yet, they often do not arouse *emotions*, even when emotional words are used to describe imaginary objects. A spectator at a play of Hamlet, for example, might describe the protagonist as "morose" without the spectator finding any noticeable feeling in himself. Any spectator of this play *can* describe the main character, stemming from Shakespeare's imagination, in terms of emotion, while not actually feeling any emotion himself. This possibility of *an absence of emotion while retaining its language* is important for our theory. For, surely, if we assume imagination is a mental feature inherent in religious appreciation, then *feelings*, like *beliefs*, are not always present in this religious experience, because they are not always present in imagination.

If we are able to utilize the idea of imagination in our explanation of religious appreciation, it may well be the case that the recognition of "mourning" involves, at times, nothing emotional at all. In which case, those theories of religion that contend that *all* religious language has, as its mental base, the status of emotion would also be

mistaken. In turn, a rejection of the singular role of “feeling” might help confirm the prevalent intuition that sacred objects do not simply stir up people’s raw feelings, so much as channel them into focused thought and contemplation.

Not only is emotion not necessary, but also we shall now see that there is even some pattern of *rational justification* in mundane-sacred judgments, an intellectual process that would be absent if the experience of religious appreciation were nothing more than feelings, urges, passions, unconscious or otherwise. In short, we shall now show that religious appreciation is not irrational.

CHAPTER 18

REASONING IN RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION: THE RATIOCINATION OF COMPARISON

The intellectual dimension of religious appreciation may be so articulated that any bare emotion-theory might seem, if not wholly misconstrued, then at least unduly simplified. Mundane-sacred objects can be exceedingly calculated and multifaceted objects, and so too can their descriptions. Just think about the many elaborately constructed temples, sacred sculptures and scriptures abounding in our world. Much intellectual exercise may be needed to understand the full meaning of these kinds of mundane-sacred objects and the language expressing them. A theory of religious appreciation must, therefore, include the possibility of a large element of intellectual understanding within this religious experience.

Because of the potentially vast intellectual content in religious appreciation, this experience might very well go beyond any contingent relationship to its verbal expression in a mundane-sacred judgment. Indeed, it appears that, among the ways a religious man can show that he experiences a mundane-sacred object in light of some particular mundane-sacred predicate, he may choose to express merely the predicate itself. That is, the verbal expression of religious appreciation, the mundane-sacred judgment, is often the very means by which the experience is *justified*. This justification tends to consist of making *comparisons* – as when, say, a Buddhist explains a sculpture of the footprint of the Buddha as “joyful” by comparing it with expressions of joy. Now, this is not so unlike the way some factual statements are

justified: through patterned forms of reasoning. So, like the justification of factual statements, the verbal expression of religious appreciation can also involve a pattern of ratiocination. When this happens, the mundane-sacred judgment rests on what might be called a “ratiocination of comparisons”. The kind of reasoning that is present in the use of mundane-sacred judgments exploits *comparative reasoning*. For an example of this, recall the passage from Sri Aurobindo:

One of these buildings *climbs up bold*, massive in projection, up-piled in the greatness of a *forceful* but *sure* ascent, preserving its range and line to the last, the other *soars* from the *strength* of its base, in the grace and *emotion* of a curving mass to a rounded summit and crowning symbol.¹⁴⁴ (Italics mine)

Here, Aurobindo *argues* that one building has a “bold”, climbing movement, despite, he seems to suggest, the heaviness of its massive projection. In comparison, the other building “soars” from the “strength” of its base, and this leaves us with the impression that this second building enjoys a movement which is both lighter and less arduous than the first building. Thus, to express his experience, Aurobindo appeals to the way the buildings counteract with one another; he wields concepts such as “forceful”, “bold”, “soaring”, “emotion” and so on. Aurobindo justifies his experience using two judgments about the architecture, and in those judgments he makes certain comparisons with other things.

The implication of this kind of reasoning is that if one can come to notice these features of the buildings, then one will also be in a position to agree with the mundane-sacred judgment about those buildings, perhaps one will even experience the response that it serves to express. Through comparisons with other things, the character of the buildings changes for the onlooker, possibly altering them from being mere objects in his perceptual field to looking like sacred objects. It is as if Aurobindo’s description about the *relationship* of the mundane-sacred object to other

¹⁴⁴ On line at: www.hindunet.org/srh_home/1996_11/msg00034.html.

things – such as the way the “boldness” and “massiveness” of one building plays off the “soaring” and “emotional” quality of the other building – is trying to show that the mundane-sacred objects share some property in common with those other mundane things.

Thus, if we merely described Aurobindo’s thought process in terms of “religious feeling”, we would miss the *intellectual content* inherent in his mundane-sacred judgment. As we shall see, one of the more interesting things about religious appreciation is the *thought* upon which the entire experience rests.

CHAPTER 19

ANOTHER PROBLEM: THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS PARTICULARITY

The intentionality-dilemma rests on the contention that there is a logical relation between a state of mind and its intentional object. That is to say, responses toward objects presuppose a certain mental experience like belief. Had this contention been true, it would have undermined our argument in earlier chapters, namely, that the meaning of a mundane-sacred judgment is not fruitfully explained through the concept of truth-conditions. We avoided this unwelcome consequence by, on the one hand, conceding that there is a logical relation between conceptions and responses, but, on the other hand, denying that the mental state in charge of any given response *must* be a belief or an emotion. Now, however, we face another problem, a quite similar one. This problem arises from the theory that a logical relation between a state of mind and its expression exists. We shall call this the “Problem of Religious Particularity”. The argument resembles Spinoza’s metaphysics, but it is most powerfully advanced in the aesthetic theory of Collingwood;¹⁴⁵ it can even be found in Wittgenstein’s remarks on aesthetics.¹⁴⁶ And so, given the great minds that have embraced it, the challenge of the argument is not easy to overcome.

In the context of mundane-sacred judgment, the Problem of Religious Particularity argument goes something like this. A mental state and its expression are,

¹⁴⁵ Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, ch. 2, 29-36.

¹⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, 28 ff., esp. 34-6; *The Blue and Brown Book* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998), 177-178.

in fact, two aspects of one process, and not two separate phenomena. That means, if a religious man voices a mundane-sacred judgment, saying in his judgment that a mundane-sacred object expresses a particular feeling, then he is not suggesting that there is a relation between the mundane-sacred object and some *other* object. This is because for him the mundane-sacred object is *unique*, a single whole. It cannot be properly understood by reference to something else. Accordingly, when a man says that he *understands* the particular feeling of any given mundane-sacred object – its quality of mourning, for instance – his understanding cannot be expressed without vigilant attention to and participation with *that* particular object. He will say that, if we try to identify his understanding by any other means than how it is expressed, we shall be left with the unacceptable consequence that the mundane-sacred object, which is the expression of this understanding, is only *contingently* connected with his experience. That means we would be able to describe the religious experience as if the sacred object were irrelevant to it. What is more, the upshot, for us, is that any general or philosophical explanation of the experience – that is, any explanation that would permit us to say that this religious experience could be felt towards some other mundane-sacred object – would not be a description of what it is to appreciate the value of *that* particular mundane-sacred object. It would not be an explanation of anything that would lead us to believe a religious man appreciated the religious quality of *a* sacred thing. Consequently, according to this reasoning, the response-resemblance theory would divorce the religious experience from its circumstances, the very circumstances that, in ordinary language, we call “religious”. That result is manifestly absurd. So, the reasoning goes, the response-resemblance theory must be flawed.

This argument is powerful. It is as frequently found in aesthetics as it is in the phenomenological theory of religion. To see this, consider a brief comparison between the aesthetician, Collingwood, and the phenomenologist of religion, Eliade. When Collingwood drew a distinction of kind between art and craft, he contended that art, unlike craft, was an end and not a means; so, too, the phenomenologist Eliade, in arguing that there was a distinction between religion and other social phenomena, contended that religious phenomena could not be “reduced” to some deeper cause, because religion *qua* religion had to be understood as an *end* and not a means. And, just as art, in order to be properly appreciated, could only be viewed as an autonomous activity having no purpose or rationale independent of itself, so too for Eliade the concept of a “sacred object” had to be regarded as “irreducible”, if one were to grasp its religious meaning. Moreover, just as “true art” for Collingwood would never point beyond itself to objects and states of mind that are separately identifiable, so too, for Eliade, true religious objects would be ends in themselves, enjoying a singular value. Indeed, like art, religious objects do not express any state of mind that are independently understood, since if that were so, the object would have an external end, which would be the expression of *that* identifiable state of mind. Like in art, the expression of religious objects is fundamentally opposed to reductionism and “deeper” explanation. Religious objects, like the greatest artworks, present us with a *particularity*, something unique, autonomous, and valuable in itself, as has been argued in earlier chapters.

Eliade’s contention is, without question, a muscular challenge to our response-resemblance theory. It renders utterly futile any attempt to independently describe the experience of religious appreciation – indeed, it makes futile *any* explanation of religious experience independent of its object, including presumably Eliade’s own

theory of “archetypes” (though he does not admit as much). It argues that a man’s response toward a mundane-sacred object enjoys its chief expression only in the appreciation of *that* object, and, therefore, the response cannot be identified separately from the expression. The strength of the argument hinges on a deduction from the necessary connection between response and expression to the necessary connection between expression and object.

This idea is remarkably similar to the intentionality-dilemma and, unsurprisingly, it offers a similar conclusion. But, note, it also argues that any attempt to independently describe religious appreciation inevitably fails to portray the *whole* nature of it. For, under this interpretation, religious appreciation is logically connected to the *particular* circumstances – that is, the particular mundane-sacred object – in which it finds expression.

As a neo-Wittgensteinian might put it, if we say that a mundane-sacred object expresses an experience of a certain kind, then this implies we can identify and describe *that* experience independently. Yet, if this could be done, then it is not impossible we would be able to find another way, besides the mundane-sacred object, to express that experience, and this different way would serve the religious man’s purposes just as well. A religious man would then be in the position to treat mundane-sacred objects experimentally and instrumentally, trading in a traditionally accepted sacred object for something else, provided, of course, the new object stimulated or expressed the appropriate feeling or experience inherent in religious appreciation. But, in fact, this experimental process is quite alien to the way the religious man relates to holy objects. A religious man, generally speaking, relates to a *particular* thing, an object deemed valuable, and that object is what is crucially important to him.

Given this, the problem with the response-resemblance theory, according to the Problem of Religious Particularity, is that it treats the experience of a mundane-sacred object as if it were just haphazardly chosen to stimulate an experience. And that is nonsense. Sacred objects, be they temples or gods, scriptures or dances, are essential to the religious life, often part of an ancient communal heritage. We cannot barter with them. Such a flippant regard for mundane-sacred objects would be to treat them as a *replica* for some other experience, making their role wholly instrumental rather than integral and essential to a form of life.

Now we have agreed with this theory of the mundane-sacred object to some extent, but under a different interpretation.¹⁴⁷ However, the theory is again posing difficulties to our theory of response-resemblance.

We can nevertheless also reply to this aspect of the Problem of Religious Particularity, albeit somewhat sophistically.¹⁴⁸ The reply is that the Problem of Religious Particularity conceals an analytic truth about the identity of mental states, which is trifling at best. If we adopt a strong criterion of identity, whereby two mental phenomena are regarded as belonging to the same category of mental state if and only if their expression are numerically identical, then the problem says nothing more than that sacred objects do not express absolutely the same thing. Thus, when a religious man states that the *particular* feeling expressed about a mundane-sacred object (say, the sacred hill *Tirukkalikkundram* in Southern India) is not identical with the *particular* feeling expressed by another mundane-sacred object (say, the Muslim *muezzin* chants), then the man says nothing more than the analytic truth that the two objects are not absolutely identical.

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter 9, where we argued that, without an external purpose, there can be no rules for the assessment of mundane-sacred objects.

¹⁴⁸ The following is how Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, section 48; and Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, pp 80-82 reply to a similar argument in aesthetics.

While that analytic truth is true, it is not a fatal challenge to the possibility of an independent description of religious experience. The argument, in proffering that the religious man responds to a *particular* object, hinges on the erroneous belief that the term “particular” has *only* an intransitive use, governed only by the strong criterion of identity mentioned above. But, there is another sense to the idea of “particularity”, which a religious man may be employing.

As Wittgenstein noted, the term *particular* has not only an intransitive but also a *transitive* application.¹⁴⁹ If a pious Jain asserts that the great Jain statue of *Bahubali* at *Shravana-Begola* in Karnataka, Mysore expresses a *particular* feeling, or that he responds toward it in a *particular* manner, then he may very well be applying the term “particular” intransitively, as Eliade would contend. In which case, the Jain means to stop us from asking him any further questions, such as: *What feeling is expressed? In what manner do you experience the statue?* Rather, it is as if the man, in employing the word “particular” to his feeling, were telling us to *hush up, ask no more questions of me. I am using the word “particular” in such a way as to indicate there is a strong criterion of identity inherent in my mental state toward this, and only this, object.*

Of course, that the man chooses or implies the intransitive sense of the word “particular” does not logically prove that we cannot describe the man’s feelings and responses toward the mundane-sacred object *independently of that object*. Instead, his point is only that he does not *intend* to provide us with any fuller description of his experience. His mundane-sacred judgment identifies and refers to his particular feeling expressed by, or felt in response to, the statue of Bahubali. Thus, he is only drawing our attention to what, for him, is the most significant attribute of the statue. It is this particular expression of the mundane-sacred object that he wants us to see.

¹⁴⁹ *Brown Book*, 158ff.

If, by contrast, he wants not merely to draw our attention to his mental state, but also to *describe* that mental state, then what he means is that his “particular” feeling, or “particular” response, ought to be understood *transitively*. In which case, he permits us to question him – “*Which* feeling or *which* response or *what* expression are you experiencing?” We are allowed this question because, in this context, the man’s use of “particular” stands as a linguistic substitute for a broader description that he has yet to articulate. Here, then, is an experience that can be described independently.

Now, does the fact that there is an intransitive and transitive sense successfully sidestep the problem of particularity? Unfortunately, it seems the answer is no. If it were true that *all* uses of the word “particular” when applied in religious contexts intended the transitive sense of that word, then, yes, it would settle the issue. We would then be justified in offering independent explanations of religious appreciation that do not make any reference to any particular mundane-sacred object, on the ground that the transitive understanding of “particular” is being utilized; thereby allowing us to feel confident in giving a general response-resemblance theory for *all* religious appreciation.

However, it appears manifestly true that, when the religious man indicates the feelings that are expressed by mundane-sacred objects and the responses that those objects awaken in him, he often does intend the intransitive sense of the word “particular”, indicating a remarkable relationship to a particularly remarkable object. Now, this is merely a result of the way in which mundane-sacred objects happen to be appreciated in the world of religion. No doubt, if the religious man were always, only and merely relating to us the feelings that mundane-sacred objects aroused *in* him, then we would have an empirical indication that the religious man appreciates

mundane-sacred objects as, simply, a means for provoking those feelings. This would be a justifiable interpretation based on empirical evidence. We could say perhaps that his responses to mundane-sacred objects are analogous to the way some people value pornography. As long as a photograph, film, narrative or show scintillates the appropriate level of lust in them, then it is no less valuable than any other pornographic object. It serves just as well. Likewise *any* object, a scripture as much as a pop song, can be a “mundane-sacred object” provided it arouses the appropriate “religious experience”.

Yet, such an idea about sacred objects breaches a widespread observation that the religious man, for the most part, does not relate to his holy objects in the way people appreciate pornography or drugs¹⁵⁰, as merely a *means* to some other end. Whether it be the glorious figures of the apostles at the Cathedral of Santiago in northwest Spain, or the haunting melodies of holy men beside the Ganges in India, or the secretive Hopi kivas in the American Southwest, a mundane-sacred object, by and large, does not possess value because it *just happens* to excite people, as if any other object that thrilled in the same way could step in as a substitute. For the religious man, these objects are approached as *ends*, enjoying timeless significance, whether or not they arouse feelings in onlookers. Indeed, this is the main reason why thinkers such as Eliade, as well some neo-Wittgensteinians and dialogical philosophers, tend to deny the psychological and logical-positivist reduction of religious experience to the category of “emotion”. If a mundane-sacred object – a temple, a hymn, a theatrical enactment of the gods – served only as a means for rousing feelings in people, then it would follow that we could develop experimental tests whereby “the best” or “most holy” mundane-sacred object would be the one that provoked the most emotion of the

¹⁵⁰ Pace Aldous Huxley and his argument in *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963).

most suitable type. We could create a hierarchy of mundane-sacred objects, just as pornographers rate and categorize erotic websites. And, we could do this because such objects interest the religious man only as a stimulus for certain feelings, rather than because of their very status as *sacred objects*.

But, religious appreciation is evidently not like that. Religious experience does not reduce to intoxication, as if the worth of a sacred object were no different than a good shot of whisky. Nor does the evaluation of a mundane-sacred object simply involve an analysis of its instrumental capacity, as if the object only enjoyed value because it has *causal power* to stir up human passions. In the eyes of a religious community, an object earns the status of “sacredness” because of what it *is*, and not for what it *does* to the feelings of the community, even if it does a lot to them.

The protest against such reductions to emotion, or to some other category, is longstanding in the theory of religion.¹⁵¹ It is associated with (sometimes hysterical) disdain for Freudian, Marxist, and logical-positivist views of religious experience. It is often combined with an effort to define religious experience as an autonomous territory of the mind, whose value and place in human experience can be independently delineated. It tends to argue that it is a confusion of the “language-game” of religion to reduce religious experience and language to some other linguistic paradigm. It also frequently charges that such reductions confuse and conflate fundamental conceptual distinctions, the distinctions between causes and reasons, between emotions and thoughts, between means and ends.

Yet, however justified such objections are, there is, nevertheless, room to question their implications. For, do we truly have to concede that religious appreciation cannot be independently described – particularly in the manner we would

¹⁵¹ See, e.g., Part II of Russell T., McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999).

like, through a response-resemblance theory? Can we find a way of characterizing religious appreciation wherein we maintain the possibility of the intransitive use of “particular” while not forestalling a philosophical explanation? Is it possible to preserve our intuition that the mundane-sacred object is an “end in itself” while still referring to an experience that is independently described from that object?

Surely, what philosophers such as Eliade, Wittgenstein and Buber have revealed is that it makes no sense to say that a mundane-sacred object expresses a *particular* experience, when the word “particular” is meant intransitively. Nor, does it make sense to say that, in religious appreciation, a mundane-sacred object stimulates a *particular* response, when “particular” is again meant intransitively. They are right to point out that it is important to recognize that religious people, generally speaking, *do* frequently intend the intransitive use of “particular” when talking about their mundane-sacred objects. This is because religious people wish to direct our attention to the sacred objects themselves, and not to any emotion or experience that could be independently described, however wonderful these experiences and responses may in fact be.

Conceding these points, how can we go forward with a response-resemblance theory? We are trying to proffer a general theory of the experience – but that does not seem possible.

It seems that the only way to proceed is to find an explanation of religious appreciation that includes the *perception* of an object: that is, sensory contact with a *particular* thing. Religious appreciation would then be a kind of religious experience that essentially involves the perception of *a thing*, and therefore explainable partly in terms of the human sensory perception of that thing. This not only coheres with the evident sensory dimension of mundane-sacred objects, it also helps us further analyze

how it is possible that religious appreciation remains an interest in a *particular* object considered as an “end in itself”. This is so because the perception is focused on *a* thing distinctly, although this theory of perception will have to be different than how it was understood given the discussions in earlier chapters. If our analysis proves successful, it will allow us not only to see how religious appreciation can be classified into kinds and, thus, described independently of their physical object, but also to see how the experiences are compatible with an appreciation of any *particular* mundane-sacred objects upon which they are focused.

To begin this task of elucidating religious appreciation, we need to probe further into the philosophy of mind, particularly noting some philosophical distinctions between cognitive and non-cognitive states of mind. In so doing, we shall observe in later chapters that there are subtle and important differences between the mental state of *belief* and the mental state of *imagination* and in how they are related to *perception*. In recalling these distinctions, we shall be in a position to see how “aspect seeing” is a species of the imagination, and how this category of mind and perception might enable us to meet the Problem of Religious Particularity.

CHAPTER 20

YET ANOTHER PROBLEM: THE LANGUAGE-DEPENDENT THEORY

The Problem of Religious Particularity is not the only challenge we need to repudiate in order to go forward with a response-resemblance theory of religious appreciation. A number of epistemologists, particularly those of an idealist and postmodernist leaning, have contended that the concept of belief can only be explained through an appeal to the language in which it is found. What this means is that there is no way to identify the concept of belief except by way of the more primary concept of verbal communication. Yet the response-resemblance theory, as we have proposed it, hinges on the possibility that declarative sentences have, at least, two possible sets of meaning, those that express *beliefs* and those that do not. Our contention, at its heart, proposes that beliefs *can* in principle be identified independently of the sentences that express them. But this suggestion is rendered absurd if beliefs can only be identified through language, for, how would we distinguish those declaratives that do *not* express beliefs from those that do? There would be no way of distinguishing them. Even worse for us, there would be no means to differentiate mundane-sacred judgments in terms of experiential conditions from truth-conditions. Our theory, then, would collapse. It would rest on a phantom-like semantic distinction, offering yet another example of philosophical muddling with mankind's ordinary understanding of the declarative sentence.

Let us call this criticism "the language-dependent theory".

To counter it, a strategy that indirectly subverts the criticism might be our best, if not only, approach. By a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, we could try to show that the implications of the theory – that the concept of belief is dependent on language – eventuate in paradox and implausibility. Consequently, out of deference to common sense, the language-dependent theory would then need to be rejected. Such a counter-demonstration would, at least, allow us to carry on confidently with a response-resemblance theory, secure in the knowledge that our approach could not be any less plausible than its sceptical alternative. That is the modest goal of this chapter.

To begin, let us notice that our critic would have us think that we can ascribe beliefs to a being if, and only if, we are in a position to *say something in language* about what that being believes. Undoubtedly, this suggestion has a certain amount of persuasiveness. As deconstructionists are apt to remind us, we cannot step outside language in order to explain language. Just as “rationality” is assumed in every argument, and therefore, on pain of circularity, rationality cannot be justified *by* argument, so too language is assumed in every description about belief, and therefore, without language, we cannot *know* about another’s beliefs. This argument posits that if we wished, for example, to catalogue the total number of beliefs in the universe, then we could do nothing more than add up the total number of declarative sentences. Otherwise, how else would we tally beliefs, except through calculating the sum amount of actual and possible statements in the universe? Moreover, if, in this cosmic calculation of declaratives, we felt that two different sentences expressed the same belief, then it would appear that our only criterion for this synonymy would be their identity in linguistic meaning. In turn, this would imply that the concept of belief could only be grasped through sentences and their meanings. Belief, language and meaning would then be intimately and radically fused, so much so that we could

deduce that *without a language* no being, whether it is a god or a man, could express any clear-cut beliefs. Mere *behaviour*, in and of itself, would never have the same kind of definitive power that language possesses in expressing belief. Only language can provide such definiteness. Given this, we then would be forced to conclude that the ascription of belief to any being would be *dependent* on that being's capacity to exhibit that (a) it agrees with some sentence, and/or (b) it can employ that sentence as a premise in theoretical or practical linguistic processes.

Make no mistake about it: this argument savages the response-resemblance theory, since our theory relies entirely on the linguistic possibility that only *some* declaratives convey beliefs. Remember, we are saying that there is a distinction between declaratives expressing beliefs and declaratives that do not. But our opponent is now refusing that such a distinction can be made. All declaratives, if they are meaningful, express beliefs, he says. Indeed, our adversary might further point out that, in both day-to-day speech and formal grammar, non-philosophers do not recognize such a contrast. Our contrast, then, is also a philosophical fantasy, and not a genuine linguistic practice.

Given all that, how can we feel justified in advancing a theory of mundane-sacred judgment that proposes that, unlike other kinds of declaratives, its linguistic meaning is dependent on a mental state other than belief?

Well, there is a way.

When we examine the language-dependent theory, we find that it generates paradoxical consequences. Ironically, the arguments that this theory utilizes to condemn competing theories, such as our own, in the end return to condemn its own persuasiveness.

Notice: the language-dependent theory argues dubiously from the premise that *beliefs can be identified in language only through reference to declarative sentences* to the conclusion that *beliefs are dependent on language for their existence*. But, if the logic underlying this reasoning is valid, then it should follow that a similar argument could be advanced which would validate the ontological dependence on language of every other entity that is similarly identified through language. Such entities would include mankind's bedrock concepts like *information, truths, facts, states of affairs* – the very concepts that make human life possible and give it meaning. Like belief, these concepts can only be identified through language; therefore, their ontological dependence *on language and language alone* would also necessarily follow.

But, while old-school nihilists and idealists might gleefully accept this conclusion, the argument nevertheless suffers the age-old paradoxes and truth-dilemmas that such thinkers have never truly faced to the satisfaction of their more pragmatic critics. Remember: if a concept such as “truth”, be it interpreted as a property or as a relation or as a perspective, is dependent on language and only language, then what makes the language-dependent theory anymore “true” than any other competing theory? Just because this criticism has been voiced, to the point of cliché, in just about every first-year philosophy seminar from time immemorial, it is no less powerful. Indeed, if we accept the logic underlying the language-dependent theory, applying it as consistently to the concept of belief as to the concepts of truth, language and fact, there would be nothing to prevent us from collapsing into outright solipsism. Such paradoxes and untenable philosophical consequences should be sufficient reason to reject any such philosophical contention, and not just with respect

to the concept of truth, but also – for our purposes – with respect to the ontological relation between belief and language.

To further illustrate the improbability of the language-dependent theory, also consider how Scruton shows, within the context of his “affective theory” of aesthetic experience, that the concept of “information” plays a similar role as belief in language. His analysis of the two words reminds us that the concept of belief, like the concept of information, cannot be strictly identified with the language through which it is expressed. Thus,

It is commonly assumed in scientific circles (whether rightly or wrongly) that this concept [of information] can be used in the description and explanation of the behaviour of machines; and yet it shows just the same kind of relation to language and meaning as does the concept of belief. Information is identified in language with just the same constructions of indirect speech that are used to identify beliefs. We speak of the information that... , where the gap is filled by a sentence which conveys the precise piece of information that we wish to consider. It is often thought to be true, nonetheless, that the concept of information can be applied to the behaviour of a machine: a guided missile, say. Such a machine may be said to receive and respond to the information that a metallic object is moving ten miles above it at a speed of five hundred miles an hour. It does not matter whether this use of the concept of information is a stretched or extended use. For here we have a sentence in indirect speech, for which no immediate substitute is available, and which is thought to offer a plausible and verifiable explanation of the machine's behaviour. Whether it is the best kind of explanation is another matter: it is certainly the simplest. And no air of paradox attaches to the fact that here explanation rests on a construction in indirect speech. Why should not the same be true, therefore, of the sentences that identify beliefs? We can see this concept of belief as giving a particular kind of explanation of human and animal behaviour (explanation by “reason” rather than by “cause”). If the concept of belief is introduced in this way then it by no means follows that a creature that has beliefs must also have a language in which these beliefs may achieve “direct” expression.¹⁵²

This kind of counter-reasoning against the language-dependent theory suggests that, for concepts such as information or belief or truth, paradox is avoided only if we resist the temptation to consign their *existence* to language and language alone. We should,

¹⁵² Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, 86.

then, abandon the language-dependent theory. In itself, this rejection of the language-dependent theory does not deny that, when we wish to refer to beliefs, we often find it necessary to point to the declarative sentences that express them. But, still, the mental state of belief *can* in principle be understood independently of its language. And that is all we need to know. Thus, we are still justified in our hypothesis that mundane-sacred judgments are a kind of declarative that need not express belief. Even if slightly wounded by this objection, we can still press on.

CHAPTER 21

BELIEF AND CONTEMPLATION

Let us pause to review the course of our argument so far. First, recall the intentionality-dilemma from Chapter 16. We argued that if we accepted the phenomenological and cognitive psychological theory of intentionality, then two alternatives were available to us with respect to the meaning of mundane-sacred predicates: either (1) a word such as “mourning” was applied to a mundane-sacred object because it involved *belief* about that object feeling such an emotion, in which case our theory that the concept of belief and truth-conditions were not necessarily involved in mundane-sacred judgments was false; or (2) the word was applied to a mundane-sacred object *without* belief, in which case we were left puzzled as to *why* the word was being applied at all, and to *what* the content of the response toward mundane-sacred objects actually included. We noted that if we wished to split the horns of this dilemma, and thereby keep our theory that mundane-sacred judgment did not involve truth-conditions, then we needed to find a mental state other than belief which, on the one hand, could be incorporated into the response of religious appreciation and, on the other hand, could simultaneously explain the use of ordinary terms in mundane-sacred judgment.

In Chapter 17, after denying that *belief* was a necessary condition for intentional responses, we hinted that the mental state of *imagination* might be the missing mental experience for which we were searching. Here was a mental state that, like belief, sparked responses, but importantly did not ascribe properties to its objects.

Here was a mental state that was not a belief and yet was a definitive awareness underlying certain kinds of response. And, here was a mental state that, because it only sometimes included emotional content, was not reducible to the concept of feelings; it even sometimes included a kind of intellectual reasoning (Chapter 18). Imagination was, it appeared, exactly the kind of mental awareness we needed to explain the response and language of religious appreciation. If we could plausibly argue that imagination, or some species of it, was the “awareness” underpinning the response of religious appreciation, then our response-resemblance theory could be salvaged from the horns of the intentionality-dilemma. That is, we could still feel confident in advancing the idea of a particular religious experience toward mundane-sacred objects, which was at the same time independent of the other more recognized kinds of religious experience.

In Chapter 19, however, we noted that philosophers, such as Eliade, Wittgenstein and Buber, in their different ways, proffered that it made little sense to argue that a sacred object expressed a *particular* experience, when the word “particular” was meant intransitively. Even if these philosophers were at times not faithful to their own insight, the objection, nevertheless, made it difficult for us to say with poise that in religious appreciation a mundane-sacred object stimulates a *particular* kind of response when “particular” was meant intransitively. Accordingly, we conceded that these great twentieth-century philosophers were undoubtedly on to something: it is imperative for us to remember that religious people, generally speaking, *do* intend the intransitive use of “particular” when talking about their mundane-sacred objects. They wish, by and large, to direct our attention to the sacred objects themselves, and not to any human emotion or experience that could be independently described. This seems to be the case even when the experiences and

responses are breathtaking and beautiful, in the way that religious experiences are most often described. Mundane-sacred objects are valued as ends in themselves, as unique, as particular, no matter what people experience as a result of encountering them. Any persuasive theory of religion, religious language, or religious experience would, therefore, need to take this into account.

Hence, out of deference to the “end in itself” quality typically ascribed to mundane-sacred objects, we went on to suggest that, perhaps, the only way to proceed with a response-resemblance theory was to find an explanation of religious appreciation that included a perception of a particular object. We needed an experience that included sensory contact with an existing thing. Thus, we were back to the notion of “perception”, albeit understood rather differently from the theory of “religious perception” presented in Chapter 11. With regard to our theory, religious appreciation would be a religious experience that essentially involved the perception of a *thing*, and, therefore, would need to be explained partly in terms of human sensory perception, but it was not about perceiving religious properties, instead just the perception of the object.

So, though this religious experience was focused on a distinct thing, it did not attribute religious properties in the way that a typical “religious perception theory” might propose. We suggested, without elaboration, that if this requirement of perception could be shown to cohere with our other requirements for religious appreciation, then it would provide us with a way of explaining how religious appreciation has remained an interest in an object considered as an “end in itself” *while also being an experience that could be described independently of any particular object*. If this analysis were successful, it would have the advantage of allowing us to see how religious appreciation could be classified into kinds, and thus

described independently of its physical object, while also being related to the appreciation of an *intransitively particular* mundane-sacred object.

To begin elaborating this theoretical project, we proposed investigating the subtle differences between the mental state of *belief* and the mental state of *imagination*, and how they were both related to *perception*. But then, before we could proffer this analysis, we immediately got sucked into another imbroglio. In Chapter 20, we were defied by the language-dependent theory, wherein it averred that we could not distinguish declarative sentences that relate to the mental state of belief from declarative sentences that relate to other mental experiences such as imagination because the concept of belief was dependent for its identification – and, tacitly, its existence – on language. There was no way to ascertain beliefs that were independent of language. Hence, if this criticism were true, our distinctions broke down and our theory was rendered impotent.

But the fallacy of the language-dependent theory, we discovered, was that its logic applied as much to the concept of truth as to the concept of belief. And this in turn rendered the criticism itself vacuous and ineffective. Like a virus that ends up killing the very host that gives it life, the logic upholding the language-dependent theory could not be trusted. So the criticism was jettisoned. Consequently, we were able to retain our initial hypothesis that there was a fundamental distinction between declarative sentences expressing belief from those that do not.

This, of course, did not mean that belief was also *not* identified by way of referring to sentences and meanings. It meant only that its *existence* was not dependent on language. While language was indeed often necessary for us to identify beliefs, the concept of belief itself was distinct from the concept of language. And that

was all we needed to escape the language-dependent theory: the concept of belief could in principle be understood independently of its sentences.

But, because language is often necessary to locate beliefs, some philosophers have been inclined to discuss the concept of belief indirectly through the concept of an *assertion in language*.¹⁵³ Although at first sight this indirect approach may appear an empty semantic distinction, it provides us with a helpful way to differentiate belief from other kinds of thought. This is because not every sentence in language is also asserted. There are unasserted sentences, and these can be justifiably interpreted as *sentences without belief*. Here are some obvious examples of sentences that occur unasserted:

“Assume, for a moment, that *the universe is infinite*.”

“Suppose that you were in his shoes.”

“If Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal.”

“It is possible that *aliens are alive on Mars*.”

The above utterances, while recognizably ordinary grammatical sentences, nevertheless do not assert anything and, therefore, do not commit their author to a definite belief. But what is especially important to notice here is that the conceptual division between asserted and unasserted sentences does not correspond to any distinction of grammar. Both kinds of sentence, however different in meaning, can be expressed in identical grammatical form: a sentence such as “The universe is infinite” under certain conditions can in fact mean “Assume that the universe is infinite”. This could happen if the context made clear that the declarative was an assumption (for example, in a fictional narrative).

¹⁵³ Peter T. Geach, *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), sections 22-23; Bruce Aune, *Knowledge, Mind and Nature* (New York: Random House, 1967), 213 ff.

This discrepancy between grammar and meaning can be confusing, leading to various fallacies of ambiguity. We all know that, to avoid such confusion, we sometimes need to invoke the total context of an utterance in order to clarify whether or not it is an unasserted sentence. Legend has it that when Orson Wells broadcast on the radio that aliens were attacking the earth some latecomers to his show heard the report, believed it, and out of panic committed suicide. That is an extreme example of what can transpire when an unasserted sentence – heard in the *middle* of a fictional narrative – is mistaken as asserted. Indeed, as regards many verbal accounts, it can be nearly impossible to know that the sentences are meant as unasserted: if, for instance, prior knowledge of the initial assumption that the sentences are fictional is missing, any of us could form erroneous, even fatal, beliefs through misunderstanding the assertoric nature of the narrative's chain of sentences.

We have in language, then, the sometimes-confusing phenomenon of unasserted sentences. This phenomenon in turn raises a question for the philosophy of mind. What is the mental process corresponding to this use of language? What happens when we indulge in this kind of speaking?

We might begin to answer this by recalling some distinctions in folk psychology. Let us call the underlying mental state of unasserted declaratives the *contemplation*, not belief, of an unasserted proposition. That is to say, it is a mental act mirroring the verbal act of saying an unasserted sentence; just as believing – or more precisely judging – is the mental act that reflects an asserted sentence. This mental act of “contemplation” would be a kind of thought that involves, unlike belief, the *entertaining* of a proposition. There is no commitment to its truth on the part of the contemplator. Rather, contemplation is the mere consideration of a possibility, a

supposition, or an assumption. Here, the mind gazes, as it were, upon a proposition, which hovers before the mind's eye like actors on a stage before an audience.

Many thought processes are of this nature. Ideas, images, propositions, voices, even tastes, often float before our minds without any commitment of belief or faith on our part. We might summon before the mind the taste of a cigar without actually believing we are smoking; we might daydream that we are kissing our beloved even when she has passed away; and, in all of this, we can sometimes feel as if it were truly happening. Whatever the cause of this mental power, its very possibility allows us to know what it means to say and understand an unasserted sentence.

As Frege pointed out, the concept of "assertedness" is not a component that comprises the meaning of a sentence.¹⁵⁴ A proposition must *mean* the same thing in both its asserted and unasserted uses.¹⁵⁵ With regard to any declarative sentence, its meaning can come before the mind, irrespective of whether or not one *believes* in the truth of that sentence.¹⁵⁶ Only in this way are we able to consider the various arguments, logic, and interpretations on any given subject. It is this feature of the mind that also allows us to tell a story, to reason, to imagine. When we imagine something – or watch a fictional film or read a thriller – we are for the most part uninterested in its veracity. Even though the substance of our imaginary stories borrows the contents of a belief, the kind of mental processes behind them are nevertheless independent of belief. In such contexts, it is as if we are indifferent to truth.

What happens in this mental process? The contemplation of an unasserted proposition appears to include at least two specific notions: (1) a proposition "floats"

¹⁵⁴ G. Frege, "Sense and Reference", in Peter T. Geach and M. Black, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*; Peter T. Geach, "Assertion", *Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), 449-465.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

before the mind, as it were, and (2) the proposition's truth is not established or even necessarily desired. The idea also seems to presuppose that the mental state of contemplation can only arise in beings that have language. Crediting this kind of mental state to non-human animals is difficult to hypothesize. To identify such thoughts, we seem to require acts of speech. In fact, unlike beliefs, this mental state needs verbal language in order to be expressed at all. Otherwise, without the possibility of linguistic assertion, there would be nothing to contemplate as unasserted.

How is any of this relevant to substantiating a response-resemblance theory of religious appreciation? Recall from Chapter 16 that we are looking for a mental state that will avoid the horns of the intentionality-dilemma. We want to find a thought process that (a) evinces an awareness of its object but (b) does not require a belief about it. Now, we have just differentiated belief, and its associated act of assertion, from the contemplation of an unasserted proposition. This differentiation seems to meet the criteria we are seeking. So is this the kind of mental act for which we have been searching?

Unfortunately, no. The concept of "contemplation" is hardly muscular enough to fill out a response-resemblance theory. True, the thought process involved in religious appreciation is directed at, and awakened in response to, a particular mundane-sacred object, but the meagre contemplation of a proposition about a sacred object cannot be genuinely called a *religious reaction* to it. It seems too indifferent, too passionless, to count as a psychological explanation of mundane-sacred judgment and man's propensity to voice this kind of utterance.

But we do find that the concept of contemplation opens a way for describing other kinds of thought in terms of the idea of entertaining a proposition. And that is

helpful because the above analysis provides some explication of the concept of “thinking about”. When a religious man *thinks about* a mundane-sacred object, it may entail entertaining propositional thoughts of it. He has, before his mind’s eye, sentences in which the subject place of the sentences is the mundane-sacred object. If he thinks of the mundane-sacred object, there is certainly no mental requirement that his thoughts about the object should also be beliefs about it. He *can* think of things that are pure fantasy (whether or not such fantasies are sanctioned by his religious community). As with contemplation, “thinking about” may be totally unconcerned with truth. Indeed, to test the veracity of this, think of any fantasy or imaginary flight you have ever indulged in about some object or person. Its truth was irrelevant, was it not? Indeed, its lack of truth may have been what was most important and exciting about it.

Now, this irrelevance of truth may be a solution to the problem of religious responses to mundane-sacred objects. By employing the concept of “to think about X as Y”, we might now be in a position to elucidate how it is that a mundane-sacred object comes to be described as “mourning” or “joyful”, because “to think about...” is clearly a species of thought that is distinct from belief. When a man thinks about (let us say) his future, he might envision it as prosperous or impoverished. And, he may come to the conclusion that one outcome is more likely than the other. But again, these propositions that he entertains are not necessarily asserted. He may merely think about X (his future on earth) as Y (prospering) when he in fact knows that it is impossible that X will be Y (say, if he is on death row scheduled to be executed in an hour). Here, whilst having this thought in his prison cell, he need not assert to himself that his future looks bright and hopeful. When he thinks of his future as flourishing, it

may involve, for whatever reason, little more than the entertaining of the proposition “my future looks prosperous”.

Of course, there is more to this kind of thought process. Merely entertaining a proposition is certainly not a sufficient condition for the concept of “to think of X as Y”. To see this, consider the example of insults. If you think to yourself “My boss is a cow”, then you are doing a few things: you are expressing something about your mental disposition, since it would not be sufficient that you should have a disposition to entertain this proposition if you always immediately discarded it as a description of your boss. Indeed, if the insult is to be a genuine description of the way you think about your boss, the insult must seem to you as somehow appropriate to him. Something about his character or physical dimensions seems to you suitably described as bovine. This does not mean that the insult has an asserted quality. Surely it would grossly fail to describe your insult to say that you are under the belief that your boss is, literally, a cow. Nothing so quixotic is happening. For when thinking about X as Y – especially in this kind of insult – we very often think about X (our boss) and then think of some description “Y” (he is a cow) as uniquely suitable to X. We choose it over calling him, say, a jackass. We accept the proposition without belief, even though its acceptance is also done rationally (by, for example, regarding the description of him as a cow as more suitable than some other description), and even though, like belief, it exhibits the character of a disposition instead of an action.

So, we say that it is precisely this kind of thought that is involved in the acceptance of at least some mundane-sacred judgments. It appears, at least superficially, to explain a judgment such as “the Buddha’s footprint is joy” or “the roads to Zion mourn”. Here X is thought of as Y, and this description is at once unasserted and, yet, still considered appropriate to its object. From this suggestion, we

are inclined to argue that this kind of thought – “To think of X as Y” – is the mental process involved in all exercises of imagination, the mental state which we have suggested might break the horns of the intentionality-dilemma. Imagination, so it appears, is essentially a thought process that is unasserted but which is entertained as suitable to its subject. And, religious appreciation, if it is indeed one of the species of imagination, will then necessarily exhibit the basic features that this particular kind of thought process includes.

But will this argument prove satisfactory? To see if it will, we would do well now to consider more rigorously the concept of imagination. So, in the next chapter, we shall digress into a conceptual analysis of imagination before we return to its potential role in explicating religious appreciation.

CHAPTER 22

UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGINATION: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

The concept of imagination has exercised the minds of a number of eminent philosophers. What follows here, in this somewhat digressive chapter, is a brief review of some of the insights and arguments about imagination that will become relevant later to the response-resemblance theory of religious appreciation. So as to avoid a debate about whether or not the thinkers, on whom I relied, have been correctly interpreted, let the reader simply ascribe anything he finds intelligent, important and well-known about the idea of imagination to those philosophers,¹⁵⁷ and everything confused, odd, or mistaken to this author.

¹⁵⁷ The books and articles from which these ideas derive are: Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, chapter VIII (London: Hutchinson, 1949); Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948); Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952); Hide Ishiguro, "Imagination" in *British Analytical Philosophy*, eds., Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); Martin Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman" in *The Knowledge of Man* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1997); Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, chapters 7 and 8; Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects* and *The Mind and its Depths* and "Imagination and Identification", *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, sections 621-655 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) and *Philosophical Investigations*, part II, xi; Roderick Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*, chapter I, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961); Peter Strawson, "Imagination and Perception", in *Experience and Theory*, ed. Lawrence Foster and J.W. Swanson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970); Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

The Varieties of Imagination

First, we should recall that the word “imagination” is an umbrella term for a number of separate but related phenomena. It can sensibly refer to any of the following occurrences:

Predicative Imagining – when we express such sentences as “John is imagining that...”, “John is imagining what it would be like if...”; “John imagines what it is like to” (This category would also include Buber’s dialogical concept of “imagining the real”.)

Adverbial and Adjectival Imagining – when we do something, with imagination modifying that action; or, in the adjectival sense, when imagination modifies a person, place or thing.

Picturing – when we form an *image* of something.

Perceptual Imagining – when we use imagination to see something. Closely connected with this is a type of *aspect seeing*, when it refers to an activity of imagination rather than to an activity of judgment.

As we discuss these species of imagination, we shall find they may well bear on our theory of religious appreciation. We have been, so far, too vague in claiming that “imagination” is the mental state that might break the horns of the intentionality-dilemma, because we have failed to specify the kind of imagination we are talking: Picturing? Adverbial Imagining? Seeing-as? and so on.

Predicative and Adverbial/Adjectival Imagining

In order to make our response-resemblance theory more specific, let us begin by briefly elucidating some of the species of imagination, beginning with *predicative imagining* and *adverbial/adjectival imagining*.

When denoting predicative imagining, we predicate the act of imagining to a subject. We use language such as:

Romeo *imagines kissing Juliet*. (X imagines Y).

Don Quixote *sees the windmill as a dragon*. (X sees Y as Z).

Romeo *wonders what it would be like if he were to marry Juliet*.
(X imagines that P, what it would be like if P).

Don Quixote *forms an image of Dulcinea* in his mind. (X forms an image of Y).

In each of these kinds of sentence, the predicate confers an action of imagination onto a subject. Here imagination behaves as a verb.

The use of imagination as a verb contrasts subtly with adverbial/adjectival imagining. In adverbial/adjectival imagining the subject's action is not the act of imagination as such. But the subject's act – be it a mental or physical act – is described as imaginative. The subject does something *imaginatively*. Here we use language such as: “The way Einstein arrived at the special theory of relativity was imaginative”; or, “The architect imaginatively used the materials available to him”; or, “He is imaginative on the football field”; and so on. In these sentences, imagination is being predicated on a *performance* of some kind, rather than the performance itself being an act of imagination. Adverbial imagination therefore qualifies and identifies the nature of behaviour, perhaps similar to the way words such as “stupidly” can be used to modify certain acts in daily life. When we do something imaginatively we do it thoughtfully, yet our thought is not rigidly determined by standard theoretical reasoning: imaginative acts extend the normal or expected way of doing things by doing them *creatively*. In doing something imaginatively, we do more than is customary; we add our own innovation to timeworn procedures. While some actions may be judged to be foolish or whimsical, an action done imaginatively seems surprisingly inventive. In this way, the concept of the imagination is extended to modify such things as plans, people, hypotheses, artworks, actions and so on.

Picturing

In considering the varieties of imagination, the following question naturally arises: What is the distinguishing feature that all the acts of imagination have in common? At first glance, we might be tempted to say that the presence of images is what all acts of imagination share. Picturing, it is intuitive to think, is the primitive concept inherent in every instance of imaginary flight. We are inclined to use this metaphor of “picturing” because the mental image appears before our mind like a portrait or photograph; it is as if we were witnessing a private mental drawing of some real world, slightly faded perhaps, but produced as though it were a reproduction of an actual sense-impression. We might call this idea the “image-theory” of imagination.

No doubt, because of this unique human capacity to “picture” worlds not our own, we take our acts of the imagination – in literature, in film, in drama, and so forth – with immense seriousness, measuring and arguing over their powers of communication and vividness, and even instituting the study of them in our school systems. Indeed, despite the inability to verify the truth of such imaginary scenes, we human beings have a pronounced tendency to regard such images as possessing profound insights into life, value, and reality. This accreditation of significance to this mental phenomenon has rendered the concept of an image a seminal concept in folk psychology and explanations of human behaviour. It is hardly a wonder that the idea of an image so often sneaks into explanations of imagination.

Yet, as with so many often-used concepts, this common-sense theory, upon closer scrutiny, exhibits philosophical puzzlement. According to Ryle and Sartre, the image-theory of imagination cannot distinguish the idea of imagery from the idea of sensation.¹⁵⁸ According to Husserl and Sartre, it fails to note the intentionality of

¹⁵⁸Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, chapter VIII; Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*.

imagery.¹⁵⁹ And according to Wittgenstein, it makes the image into a private object and, therefore, becomes something of which nothing can be said.¹⁶⁰ The upshot of these arguments, if you accept them, shows the idea of “image” to be an insufficient explanation of imagination.

Still, *pace* its inability to wholly explain imagination, we might nevertheless wonder about its nature.¹⁶¹ Undoubtedly, the concept of an image is prominent in imaginative thinking and therefore worthy of our philosophical contemplation. Regardless of whether the concept of an image is insufficient to account for imagination *qua* imagination, it is still hard to deny that images are often acutely involved in the mental process of imagination.

So let us ask: what *is* an image? How does this concept connect to the ideas of imagining and imagination? Does it also relate to concepts of memory, perception and belief? At the very least, we know that imagery is somehow related to thought, and that there is a logical requirement for third person criteria with regard to the truth of a proposition that a man’s image “pictures” something. But we might still explore the positive characteristics of an image, widening our comprehension of imagination.

Let us pause to wonder: what does it mean to have an image of some object? The Wittgensteinian assumption denying the possibility of a private language holds that we cannot look to traditional phenomenology for answers to this question. If we decide to reject a Cartesian or any other introverted method for disclosing the meaning of psychological terms, we are forced to look to third person criteria for their meanings, and not inward to our Self. Under a strict introverted epistemology, such as phenomenology, the knowledge that we are able to glean from our own personal

¹⁵⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*.

¹⁶⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, sections 621-655 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) and *Philosophical Investigations*, part II, xi.

¹⁶¹ See Hide Ishiguro, “Imagination”.

images is, in fact, too instantaneous to offer any useful cognitive information. Such knowledge is not based on anything since, when left strictly to our own consciousness, we cannot be sure, much less check, that any two images are the same. Differentiation thus becomes impossible. Introverted knowledge fails to rely on features that would allow us to determine what the images are. In short, simply observing our images could never provide us with the kind of information that we would need to be sure of their identity. And that is the crucial problem with phenomenology more generally.

Of course, that is not to say that there are no interesting phenomenological descriptions of inner things such as images. But they are not descriptions in the accurate sense. Such radically self-centred descriptions, of necessity, could not offer us information about images in the manner of, say, a description of a physical object; they would not permit us to confirm the features of the inner object in the manner that a genuine description provides information about the features of physical objects. Why? Because unlike a physical description, phenomenological descriptions of mental terms cannot be checked against anything but our own immediate experience. This leaves us without any criteria of identity upon which we can rely. At best, phenomenological descriptions convey what the mental item might be like, hence acting more like metaphors than descriptions. In light of this, Wittgenstein thought that, in order to grasp the meaning of psychological words, we must avoid the temptation to go *solely* inward.¹⁶² Counter intuitively, we properly understand our psychological concepts only by looking outward toward *others*, by asking what are some of the features that must be present in order to say sensibly about another person that he has images (or some other psychological state).

¹⁶² *Philosophical Investigations*, 243-275.

Picturing and the Will

Yet, among those features that help us identify whether a man can be said to be picturing or imagining something is the stated presence of his *will*.¹⁶³ This feature of both imagery and imagining often helps us to distinguish them from other kinds of mental state. When a man expresses that his mental state is subject to his will – when he says that the image in his mind appears when he calls it forth – we are apt to *say* of him that he has an image.

Try to do the following: *imagine* the earth is flat; now, try to *believe* the earth is flat. Can you genuinely believe it *on command*, honestly counting this proposition among the things you now believe you know about the world? Most likely, you were able to comply with the first request, but not the second. This is because the presence of the will has helped to distinguish your two mental states.

Of course this feature of the will is not always and only present in mental picturing. Indeed, man's will can be at hand in other mental states as well – in certain sensations, perceptions, and beliefs, for instance. But, note, inviting another person to imagine or form a picture of something makes particular *sense* in our language. And that is helpful for a philosophical understanding of the meaning of the word “imagination”. Our ability to comprehend and obey this kind of language indicates something about the sense of this psychological term because, immediately and with no problem, we can fulfil the request to picture something. Imagining or forming an image coheres with the imperative mood of our language, and thus it enjoys a particular sense for us. Upon demand, you can summon an image before your mind's eye. This tells us that, even when an image is involuntary, that feature of

¹⁶³ Zettle.

involuntariness is only a contingent trait of *that* particular image. Its involuntariness is not part of its essence, of its definition, of its logic.

Another thought experiment: let us say a man reads the second and third chapters of Anselm's *Proslogion*. He follows the argument, step by step, and thence comes to the conclusion that, yes, Anselm has conclusively demonstrated that God exists. Is it not utterly unimaginable that such a man after deducing the truth of the ontological argument could then *choose not* to believe in God's existence? Such a conclusion would *determine* what he does and does not believe, would it not? After accepting the veracity of the argument, it is not as if he can one moment decide to believe in God's existence, and then in the next moment not believe, and so on, back and forth believing and not believing in God at will. After *proving* God's existence, it is as impossible to imagine him doing this kind of ping-pong with the idea of God, as it is to imagine him choosing, and then not choosing, to *see* an object before his very eyes. Again, imagining is something man's will engages with, believing is not.

Indeed, it is this conceptual distinction that has provided the fodder for theological explanations as to why, of necessity, we cannot prove God's existence. Since, if we are able to demonstrate the being of such a miraculous and awe-inspiring substance, then we undermine another key principle of the religious life: namely, our free will, our freedom – our risk in choosing – to take the leap of faith. Only the possibility of God's non-existence makes this aspect of the religious life possible. For, assuming God's existence could be proved, religious commitment and conversion would entail nothing more than dispassionately demonstrating the steps of an argument – rather than the existential choosing, with fear and trembling, that God's presence be in one's life.

One might retort that you *can* imagine choosing to believe or not believe something such as God's existence, just as you *can* choose to see something at will. For instance, we can wholly put out of our mind the evidence in favour of God's existence and, thereby, not believe in God, even if we thoroughly believed in the deity only a moment ago. The same goes for the act of seeing an object. We can choose to close our eyes.

Yet the problem with that retort is that, in these examples, all we are doing is choosing to *evade* the evidence, whether that evidence is of a logical argument or of merely opening our eyes. We are simply doing something that enables us to steer clear of a belief or a perception. We are not, in fact, discussing the belief as belief or the perception as perception. Our *will* is merely occupied with the actions that *produce* the belief or perception, and is not occupied with the belief or perception in themselves. And that is the critical difference. In itself, the request to believe or to see something is (usually) nonsensical. It makes little sense in our language, especially after we think something has been demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt.

The phenomenologist or cognitive psychologist might still deny this reply, however. He could say that the construction of a sentence such as *Picture that P* means that the proposition P identifies a belief that is implied to be wrong. Images therefore *do* involve belief or intentionality, albeit belief in something wrong, which in turn means that, if belief is not subject to the will, as we just argued, then neither can picturing be obedient to the will because it hinges on the presence of belief.

But, even if we accept the dubious contention that one can believe in something which one knows to be false, what the phenomenologist/cognitive psychologist is also forgetting is that there are at least two different uses to the word

imagine. One use denotes a mental act; the other, a derivative use, refers to the act of *making a judgment on another person's beliefs*. In the first use, a sentence of the form *Picture that P* does not mean *Believe wrongly that P*. When we ask someone to imagine something, we are not inviting that person to believe anything, falsely or otherwise. We are asking him to entertain or contemplate an unasserted proposition. He is not meant to *commit* to that assertion, just to *consider* it. But, in the derivative use of the word, when we intend the word "imagine" to be a judgment on a belief, then we indeed are meaning something like *Believe wrongly that P*. This is the use the phenomenologist or cognitive psychologist is emphasizing in the argument above. He could also appeal to another derivative use, as when "imagine" means a speculative belief: for instance, after a question about the whereabouts of someone, you might reply with the speculation "I *imagine* that he is at home". But these are only derivative uses of the word "imagine" and, therefore, are not enough to deny the thesis that imagination and belief can be distinguished by the presence of the will.

Yet, it could be added against us that there are certain senses to the word "belief" wherein man's will plays a role. In certain contexts, you *can* sensibly request someone to *Believe that P*. For instance, a friend tells you: "Believe me that your wife is having an affair." Here *Believe that P* is behaving as a command or request. It is a sentence that appeals to your will, because it is indicating that the informant is being a truthful individual. This context confers plausibility on the proposition, and, hence, makes it possible for you to *obey* the imperative sentence. Here "Believe that P" means something like "I vouch for the truth that P". There are also sentences such as: "I *will believe* you, just tell me, yes or no, if you had an affair." Here again *belief* seems connected to a man's will. He is *choosing* to trust his wife and that compels him to believe what she says. You might even describe the act of faith as an act of

“wilful belief”. Without evidence, a man may *choose* to believe in the Bible as inerrant, and, thus, he believes everything it says. This might be because he has found no reason against believing, so he has decided to believe simply because he *wishes* it to be true. Certainly that is an act of will, the kind of which Pascal and William James once invited us to try, the will to believe in the truth of religion.¹⁶⁴

Still, these instances do not seem to absolve the idea that belief and imagination have different relations to the will, and this difference helps to distinguish the concepts. Even in the above senses of *belief*, the concepts of truth and evidence still act as a constraint on one’s choosing. It takes *further evidence* to move from one state of belief (believing) to another state of belief (not believing). This is not so with imagination. Regardless of the context, in imagination we can jump back and forth at will in imagining something. Using our earlier example, one moment we can choose to picture our wife having an affair, and the next moment choose not to imagine this gruesome scene. But, you cannot choose to *believe* this one moment, and the next not, without further changes in the circumstances (for instance, if the informant of your wife’s infidelity later turns out to be an abject liar).

The mental state of imagination also, for the same reason, seems to be distinguished from other mental states such as perception, sensation and desire. We cannot sensibly *request* that someone feel an earache. “Feel that your ear hurts” – that order cannot be fulfilled. It is not something we can reasonably ask of someone, since the sensation is not obedient to his will. We can order, of course, someone to do some act that would *cause* such pain. But that is entirely different. The sensation itself is not subject to his will, only producing the act that would cause the pain is.

¹⁶⁴ William James, “The Will to Believe” in *The Will To Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1959); Jeff Jordan, ed., *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal’s Wager* (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1994).

One might reply that this is only a contingent feature of human beings. There is nothing illogical about the idea of a person that can *will* sensations (or perceptions or desires). But it is debatable. Can we actually imagine such a person? In describing a person who complies with a request to feel an earache, we invariably end up describing him as first doing something else. For instance, we say the person *thinks* or *imagines* the earache and then, as a result, feels the pain. But, here, the pain is merely the causal effect of the mental act of thinking or imagining. The choosing, the willing, is on the level of thinking or imagining, and not on the level of sensation, perception or desire.

If such arguments are persuasive, then we can conclude that the concept of *picturing images* is distinguished from other mental states, such as *belief*, because of its special relationship with man's will. Picturing an image, as with all species of the imagination, is an act a man can choose. It is subservient to his self-control, his willpower, his determination. It is not something he must necessarily endure and suffer. And, thus, a kind of *freedom* must be part of the nature of man's imagination.

The Rationality of Imagination

Now, because we have distinguished imagination from belief, and because we instinctually associate the concept of rationality with the concept of belief, we might wish to conclude that imagination is an irrational or, better yet, an a-rational activity of mind. In imagination, we do not *give reasons* for the descriptions of our images, at least not in the way we do with belief. Perhaps in this way, too, the mental act of imagination can be distinguished from belief. We could say: imagination is connected to man's will *but* it is independent of his reason.

Yet, sharper analysis of the concept indicates that there is a peculiar rationality connected with imagination. To ask “Why?” is not a senseless question when it comes to imaginary descriptions. In light of this, man’s imaginary activity seems to involve, at least, two features, which yield a kind of logic. First, when man imagines something he is, in principle, able to give an account or description of its content; he offers *unasserted propositions* that tell us what his imaginary scene is about. Second, his unasserted propositions are often judged to be *appropriate* or *inappropriate* to the content of the imagination.¹⁶⁵ Accordingly, we make a kind of rational decision about what is and is not a correct unasserted proposition of imaginary phenomenon, a process which is comparable to the rational procedures we go through in order to determine the truth or fallaciousness of a belief.

To see the grounds for the thesis that imagination is subject to a kind of rational discussion, consider first that, even though we have associated images with acts of the imagination, it is, nonetheless, likely that the concept of an image *qua* image is distinguishable from the concept of imagination *qua* imagination. It is not just in mental items such as in imaginary picturing that we experience images. Think about the images involved in the mental act of memory. Here there is what could be called “memory images” as opposed to “imagination images”; there are also “dream images”. These different kinds of imagery confer some autonomy on the concept of image. That is, this concept of image *qua* image cannot be reduced to one and only one mental experience; it is found in a variety of mental processes. Consequently, we cannot correctly argue that the idea of an image is a sufficient condition for imagination. Now, this distinction, in itself, might justifiably lead us to define imagination other than by the concept of an image.

¹⁶⁵ Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination*.

We might now consider the concept of *thought*. Exploring this concept, we might end up in a better position to elucidate more generally the concept of imagination by describing it as a *variety* of thought. Indeed this suggestion would cohere nicely with the linguistic fact that we can often substitute sentences of the form “*Imagine X*” with sentences of the form “*Think X*” without any change in meaning, as well as without any further constraint on our freedom of will. It consequently appears that the act of imagination, rather than being delineated entirely by the concept of an image, is more likely a kind of thought, a type of thinking that would be described by the two conditions mentioned above. That is, imagination is:

- (a) an *account* containing unasserted propositions; and
- (b) an account whose unasserted propositions can be judged *appropriate*.

Just as an insult can be appropriate or inappropriate to its subject matter, and thus is often not merely a random choice of language, so too can the descriptions of an act of imagination be evaluated as particularly suitable to its subject. If this description of the imagination is correct, then to say that *a man imagines X* means something like: *X is a thought capable of being described by unasserted but appropriate judgments*. We would have to conclude, then, that a man’s imagination is connected both to his will *and* to his reason.

But what does it mean to say of a man that his imagination entails thought which is *unasserted*? It means his thought includes propositional content that is *not believed*. For instance, we would not say that a man *imagines X* when the propositions he presents about his imaginary scene are based on or deduced from what he believes he knows. We would not say he is *imagining X* when X is an empirical object that he is presently observing and examining, as, for example, when X is a tool being chosen for a medical operation. Nor would we say he is *imagining*

X when he believes X to be true and he is studying its practical consequences, as, for instance, in the study of a scientific hypothesis. And neither would we be correct in saying that a man *imagines* X when X is a prediction based on evidence and coherence with other believed knowledge, as when, for example, a detective anticipates on the basis of evidence where he will find his suspect. The concept of imagination does not accurately depict what is happening in the agent's mind in any of these circumstances. This is because imagination as imagination, containing as it does propositional content that is not believed, necessarily transcends commonplace beliefs and forecasts. That is what it means to say imagination is unasserted thought.

It might be replied that a man can believe that X is the way he would imagine, or had imagined, it to be. But, even so, this is not an act of imagination when X is something a man believes or has reasons to believe. Imagination is a type of speculative thought. It neither asserts nor aims to assert that its propositional content is a description about the nature of the way things are. It is not an assertion about states of affair.

Now, what does it mean to say of a man that his imagination is *appropriate*? We say this when the propositional content, which is not believed, is of a special kind. That is, in imagination not just any unasserted thought will do. It must be fitting to the subject matter of the thought in the imagination, for imagination does not only mean "thinking about X as Y". It is not *just* speculation. It is a unique type of speculation. We recognize this when we recall that, in imagination, there are two distinguishable phenomena at work. One phenomenon is what might be called the *subject* of the unasserted thought. This is the image or proposition that is imagined. The other phenomenon is what might be called the *unasserted description* of the subject. This is how the image or proposition – the subject of the imagination – is described. Yet,

pace deconstructionism, not just *any* description will satisfy us. When a man imagines X, he is not merely engaged in a mental act of inventing descriptions about X that he would not be willing to assert. He is not just randomly and meaninglessly casting about for an account of his imaginary-subject. Not any old stick will do.

For instance, if, before we read the *Iliad*, we ask someone, “Why did Achilles refuse to battle?” And he randomly answers us, “Because Achilles, the wimp, never fought before and was scared”. Then, upon reading the *Iliad*, we would be correct to think this person has offered us an inappropriate and ignorant answer; the answer fails to do justice to Homer’s imagination and the character of Achilles; it does not accurately explain *why* Achilles, in the opening chapters, is brooding in his tent rather than slaying Hector. An appropriate answer would carefully search out in the text a description that one thinks is particularly suitable to the subject of Homer’s imagination. In this way, we say that imagination is a *rational* process. There are appropriate and inappropriate answers to why-questions about imaginary scenes. To say Achilles is a coward is simply inappropriate.

Such rationality is manifestly exemplified in great artworks. Here the master artist, as he penetrates the subject of his broad imagination, is seeking to create an account of that subject which is particularly fitting to it. Not just any description will please him. Mere propositions, he fears, may fail to capture the nature of his subject matter; so he will try to find a *correct* unasserted proposition that does appropriately point to the subject’s essence. Only by finding an unasserted thought that is *appropriate* to the subject of his imagination will the artist accurately disclose its being. In the same way, we witness – in the actual practice of life – art and literary critics often debating with one another, challenging each other over the appropriateness of certain descriptions of artwork. Implicit in this activity is a basic

assumption: the critics wish to bring what they say into harmony with the subject of the imagination. If this were not the case, the prevalent and observable practice of why-questions in criticism would be inexplicable.

Now, how do we decide what counts as an appropriate description? This is no small question. Out of this capacity for “appropriate” description – or the belief that we have this capacity – we distinguish among the acts of imagination: we say that some activities of the mind are “really” imagination while others are only fantasy or whim. These distinctions are born out of the assumption that there are appropriate and inappropriate descriptions related to the various contents of the imagination. But how do we make these distinctions?

Evidently the appropriateness is not connected to the concept of probability. We do not judge the appropriateness of an unasserted proposition of imagination because we think it is “more likely”. It is not an issue of *causality*. A story, for instance, is thought to be particularly appropriate to X, but that is not because one thinks the story is *likely* or *true*.

In these acts of imagining, the unasserted propositions are entertained for a reason; but, importantly, the “reason” is not connected to truth or probability. It is *in* the subject matter of the imagination wherein such reasons are derived. That is, we appeal to the content of the imagination when we give our grounds for our unasserted propositions. We do not look outside the imagination for causal explanations that make our propositions appropriate. And yet, because we also do not just randomly provide explanations, we are right to say that there is a logic to this activity of mind.

Whatever its nature, we can see that this rationality of imagination is of a different sort than the kind of rationality we find in belief. In imagination, rationality is *practical*. It is a variety of practical reason, for, unlike in the rationality of belief,

why-questions about the imagination invite replies that provide reasons why such-and-such *was said*, not believed. The reasons are internal to the imaginary activity; they refer to the imagination itself, irrespective of its truth or believability.

“Why did Achilles refuse to battle?” a student asks; the teacher appropriately replies: “Because, being a proud warrior, Achilles would not tolerate being insulted by...” This would count as an appropriate response, even though it is neither asserted nor believed. But, in the rationality of belief, the type of reasoning is not so practical: why-questions invite explanations about why something was asserted or believed, and not just said. In the rationality of imagination, the teacher’s reply to the student is not an assertion about something which the teacher believes to be the case in the actual world; the explanation refers to the imaginary world of Homer’s epic, and its justification is found therein.

Some Features of Picturing Images

Recall that we have suggested that images – or the act of picturing images – are not exclusive to the imagination. There are dream-images as well as memory images. We also proposed that picturing images could be a type of imagining, since it is often involved in imagination. We still need to explain further what picturing imagery means, and how this mental process is related to the imagination.

We noted that the concept of thought was perhaps a better means of explaining imagination than was the pure concept of an image. Still, we should note that there are some important analogies between the two concepts of image and thought. We might even want to say, at times, that an image is a kind of thought about some object. For example, an image of your childhood home is a kind of thought of how it used to look. In that regard, an image, like thought, has intentionality: it is an image *about* something. Accordingly, we can only picture images of something that we can also

think about. Furthermore, images, like thought, are susceptible to first-person philosophical analysis; that is, like thought, images seem to be something of which I, the first-person, have immediate knowledge. The Self knows immediately and on the basis of nothing else the character of its own thoughts and images, or at least so the Self is tempted to believe.

Moreover, we have mentioned that picturing images are subject to the will. So too is thought. Our thoughts are reactive to our will.

Also, thoughts and images are identified similarly through verbal language. Both consist principally in descriptions about one's mental state. This appeal to language is the criterion we employ in determining if a man is having a thought or picturing something. To identify if he is having an image, we listen to what he describes. If we think he has an image of X, then we think that if we ask him what is in his mind, he will give us verbal descriptions *about X* – the way it looks, the way it smells, the way it tastes. He would use language that in some way refers to the mental picture, and this use of language would be similar to how we would determine if he was having a thought.

All of this shows that picturing images and having thoughts are not totally unrelated or dissimilar processes. But, we should also note some features of imagery that are not so prominent in the concept of thought. Indeed, in some ways, picturing images have more in common with sensations and sense-impressions than with thought. Below are four features of picturing imagery that are shared with sensations: images may have *intensity, precise duration, an experiential component, and the language of sensory experience.*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ The discussion of these features is derived from Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, ch. 7.

The Intensity of Picturing Images. Picturing images admit degrees of vibrancy, like sensations. Try to form an image of your childhood home. At first, the image may appear cloudy, almost distant, as though it were a dusty old photograph. Then, in the hope of capturing the image with superior intensity, you might be tempted to close your eyes, tightly squeezing them shut, as if this physical act would bring greater focus of mind. Through this act of concentration, you hope to dust off your mental picture and reveal your old home in all its beauty. Indeed, with more concentration, it may appear more intense: the picture is now incredibly vivid and concentrated, as if you were again standing outside your old home, observing it in sharp detail. Now, such a commonplace practice of picturing images, which you may have observed in others, demonstrates some of the varying degrees of intensity that an image is said to possess.

The Duration of Picturing Images. As with sensations, an image manifests itself at a specific moment, and it continues without change for a specific amount of time. It is an occurrence of the mind that can be located in the temporal flow of events, having a mortality all its own. To recall this, let us imagine a woman standing on a street corner. Before her mind, she has a vivid image of something – her ex-husband, say. His image hovers before her inner eye. But then something happens: a handsome man passes by on the street, and this new man distracts her attention. Now the image of her ex-husband has faded. It is pushed aside with a new image. The picture of the handsome man that walked by has now taken its place in her inner eye. So the old image is complete; a new one has begun; and she could, in principle, chart moment by moment the lifespan of the image of her ex-husband as well as the emergence of the new image.

This feature of duration is integral to the idea of an image. That, of course, is not to say that the concept of duration is totally absent from the concept of thought. When we contemplate a proposition, for instance, we have before our mind something that is delineated by chronological borders: a proposition can hover in front of the mind for varying lengths of time, beginning at a definite time, lasting for a definite time, and ceasing at a definite time. But, except perhaps in cross-examinations or criminal investigations, we do not typically employ the idea of duration as a way of understanding a thought. That is, it is not a normal practice to define the meaning of a thought by its precise beginnings, duration, and endings. It is also perhaps more difficult to demarcate the start of a thought than the start of an image.¹⁶⁷

The Experiential Component of Picturing Images. Images are expressed in a way similar to how we voice our experiences, and the ways by which we refer to our images seem to involve an experiential component that is more immediate than any thought that is associated with the image. Just as when describing an image we often say that, at one moment, we “had it” but that, at another moment, we “lost it”, so too when describing our experiences we often say, “at this moment I was able to experience it” but “at that moment I did not”. We often hear this kind of talk from those who frequently meditate. In both mental states, we are conscious of something – be it an image or an experience – that is or could be vanishing. That is, we can be aware of an image or experience we once had, even if at the present moment we are unable to summon again the image or experience itself. We might at one moment have a vivid image of our childhood homes – and then later cease having that image but, nevertheless, be able to remember the experience of that image. Now, this does not seem to be a feature of thought: can we be aware of a thought we once had, even

¹⁶⁷ For instance, if you say “Let me think, what did my home look like?” At what point did your thought of your home begin: when you said “Let me think” or just after? See Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, 102.

while the thought itself is completely forgotten? By recalling the thought, do we not ineluctably again have the thought? This is not the case with images: we can remember our images without recalling them, just as we can remember our experiences without re-experiencing them.

Images and the Language of Sensory Experience. When we speak about our images, we inevitably describe them in terms of the language that we employ to describe our sensory experiences. If a man says that he has an image of his childhood home, he will describe it in terms of a visual image. It is as if he were *seeing* his childhood home, and, therefore, that kind of visual language is what he uses to refer to the image. This use of language – our public expression of imagery – implies that experiencing an image is analogous to the experience of seeing something. Indeed, if a man does not imply this sensory aspect of the image then we are not inclined to say that it is an image that he has. Our public expression would not allow this. We would say that it is something else in his mind, a thought perhaps.

As we shall now see, by noting all these features of an image – its degree of intensity, its duration, its experiential component, and its language of sensory experience – by grasping all this, we are in a better position to say something more specific about the relationship between picturing and the imagination, the topic of the next section.

Picturing and Imagination

We have made a distinction between the phenomenon of picturing an image and the phenomenon of the imagination, as well as a distinction between an image and a thought. These distinctions, however, should not lead us to conclude that “picturing images” does not enjoy a special status in the act of imagination, which, remember, we said was a kind of thought or speculation. Images *can* act like

speculative thought, although with certain qualifications like those previously mentioned.

To show how “picturing an image” is related to the imagination, it is well to keep the following distinction in mind:

A memory image is a mental picture of something that has previously been experienced through the senses. Sometime in the past we have seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled X, and now we remember those experiences of X in terms of a memory image.

But,

An imaginary image is a mental picture of something that has not been experienced. Here there is no memory of an X, but the invention of an X – be it invented unconsciously in dreams or consciously in daily life. This kind of image also can, and indeed must, be described through the language of the senses.

When we are in the act of imaginary picturing, we are forming imagery that transcends our actual experience. We are going beyond what we have strictly encountered in life. This is not exactly so in memory imagery, where our image is demarcated by what we have encountered before.¹⁶⁸ So, to sum up the relationship, we can say that the imagery of imagination is an unasserted thought that can be described appropriately or inappropriately, and is delineated by the features we mentioned above – intensity, duration, sensory language, and so on.

All this together helps mark out the kind of relationship that “picturing images” has with the imagination. The apparent linguistic connection between the word “image” and the words “imagery” and “imagination” also adds to our deeper intuition that the meanings of these concepts share family resemblances. Picturing images, when experienced as part of the imagination, exhibit both the general features found in the image *qua* image, as well as the general features found in the imagination

¹⁶⁸ This is the case even when our memory image is about an imaginary image we experienced (or “sensed”) at some previous time.

qua imagination. Indeed, understanding these features widens our comprehension of what is occurring when we picture images in our imagination.

Once we see the relationship between images and the imagination, we then can draw further conceptual distinctions. For example, we can now demarcate the *imagination of an experience* from the *imagination of an object*. In *imagining an experience*, we form an image that corresponds to or reflects what we think an experience X is like; in *imagining an object* we form an image of X that allows for *description* of its features, whether or not X is an existent thing which we have, or could have, experienced. In *imagining an experience*, a man does not need to note the image's features – indeed it may not even have any – but he is able to call the image of the experience to mind. He imaginatively “feels” what it is like to make love, say. The image of lovemaking is not so much an object of his mind that he wishes to describe, as much as it is an experience that he senses, undergoes, or suffers. Here the image of making love is not *just* being thought; it is being felt, as if it were matching the actual experience. It is a kind of knowledge by acquaintance.

But, in *imagining an object*, things are slightly different: it is as if a man were merely observing an actual thing, which has features that can be identified and described, just like an object in the real world. Nevertheless, however vivid the description of the image, it is not necessarily *felt*. It is a kind of knowledge by description; that is, the man can give an account of the image without experiencing it, or ever having experienced it. His learning of language permits this ability. Accordingly, we can distinguish these two types of imagining by saying *imagining an experience* possesses an *intensity* that *imagining an object* does not. The latter can be remarkably vivid and verbal, but it lacks the force of the former, which need not be vivid or verbal at all.

Perceptual Imagining

So far we have looked at a variety of family-related phenomena brought under the name of imagination – predicative imagining, adverbial and adjectival imagining, and picturing images. We now turn to the kind of imagination that relates to *perception*, and which may prove decisive in filling out our response-resemblance theory of religious appreciation. Some types of “seeing” can be said to require the imagination. For example, it is common in comparative religion courses to be taught that, if we wish to see how a man experiences his religious objects, we need both to learn and to imagine the circumstances of his life, his social upbringing, his conceptual framework, his emotional disposition. We need to see the sacred object as he sees it, and, in so doing, we shall come to appreciate his religious experience. Only when we “imagine the real”, to borrow Buber’s phrase, do we come to understand *this* religious person, only when we imagine our selves in his shoes, as it were, are we able to learn about the religious life of man. This, at its most basic level, is how the dialogue between the scholar and his subject of study unfolds and provides us with knowledge. It first comes about through a kind of “imaginative perceptiveness”.

We can distinguish two types of imaginative perceptiveness. One we might call “cognitive perceptiveness”; the other, “aspect perceptiveness” or “aspect seeing”. In cognitive perceptiveness, we say sentences such as: “Imagination enables John to see that X *is* Y”. That is, imagination facilitates his ability to see that, let us say, his friend is in a state of mourning. Here, his friend is, in truth, mourning, and imagination helps John to construe this. In aspect perceptiveness, however, we say sentences such as: “Imagination enables John to see the Y *in* X”. That is, imagination allows him to see the sorrow in his friend’s expression, whether or not his friend is actually in a state of mourning. His friend, in fact, may not be mourning at all; he may

indeed be feeling cheerful. So here, John sees an aspect without necessarily attributing it as a property of the object. It is as if John were saying, “Yea, I can see how my friend’s face could be construed as mournful”. In cognitive perceptiveness, the imagination is used to form something like a hypothesis about a state of affair. Hence, we call it cognitive, since it refers to a kind of judgment, albeit a judgment that transcends the immediate evidence. But in aspect perceptiveness, in aspect seeing, the imagination is employed so as to reveal an aspect Y of some X, rather than to say that X *is* Y. This kind of perceptiveness does not relate to a judgment about X, but instead intimates the *noticing* of a characteristic of it. Here the Y, which one *sees* in X, is not necessarily *believed* to be there in X, as was the case in cognitive perceptiveness.

Perhaps think of it this way: when confronting a mundane-sacred object, the religious man is not seeing *that* the road to Zion is the type of object that tends to make people mourn, nor is he seeing *that* the road itself is mourning. Neither of these is what makes up this type of imaginative seeing. More simply, imagination permits the man to perceive the aspect of mourning in a mundane-sacred object, while not forcing him to commit to the additional judgment that the object itself is mourning, or that it tends to make people mourn. He is not, in other words, exercising cognitive perceptiveness. He is practicing aspect perceptiveness.

One may be tempted to say that aspect perceptiveness is, in fact, nothing more than adverbial imagining, and therefore a superfluous conceptual distinction. But this would be a mistake. Perceiving an aspect does not mean “seeing imaginatively”. This is because the act of seeing – with one’s physical eyes – is an *involuntary* action. Here “involuntary” is the operative word, for an involuntary action is not something that can be modified by the imagination in the way that, for example, utilizing the

available tools to light a fire can be. To see this, ask yourself: When the doctor is testing your involuntary reflexes, tapping your knee, is it possible for you to respond to the tap imaginatively? Or, more likely, does your leg just kick up, no matter what you are thinking when he taps the appropriate spot? Well, it is the same with strictly seeing with the eyes: vision is not subject to the power of your thought. Vision is either simply there or it is not. The eyes are either open or they are shut. But if eyesight were modified by the imagination, it would need to be obedient to your thought, since, as argued earlier, imagination is a kind of speculative thought. Therefore, when we do add the extra ingredient of the imagination to our physical seeing, we are producing a different mental phenomenon: namely, we are engaged in cognitive or aspect perceptiveness. It is not just seeing, which somehow has imagination as an adverbial modifier.

Now, aspect perceptiveness stands a good chance of being the mental experience we have been pursuing, the one essentially involved with mundane-sacred judgment. Rather than seeing the waves of Hawaii to *be* sweet and holy, the religious surfer is seeing the sweetness and holiness *as* aspects of the water; instead of seeing that the cast of the Buddha's footprint *is* joy, the monk is seeing it *as* joy; in lieu of the road to Zion *being* mournful, it is seen *as* mournful. At any rate, if this mental state is involved in our religious experiences, it would certainly account for our previous theory about the non-descriptiveness of mundane-sacred judgment, since this mental experience would not be associated with belief or the attribution of properties.

We, however, are getting ahead of ourselves. Before we can proffer such a suggestion, we shall need to make further clarifications and arguments. We shall need to expand on what is involved in aspect perceptiveness, how it relates to perception, and indeed later, how it connects to religious appreciation.

To begin, it is helpful to recall philosophical discussions about ambiguous figures. We all know Jastrow's duck-rabbit: it is a drawing that can be seen as either a duck or a rabbit, but not both at the same time. The figure has led philosophers to note several peculiarities about it. For one, the visual experience is not solely the perceiving of a resemblance of some kind between the figure and an actual duck, since perceiving a resemblance could also be done when seeing it as a rabbit. For similar reasons, the experience of perceiving an aspect cannot be reduced merely to the seeing of a likeness of appearance between the figure and a duck (or a rabbit). All this is because, in a nutshell, the relationship is not symmetrical between the figure, on the one hand, and the look of ducks and rabbits, on the other. A symmetrical relationship would entail that, if X resembles Y, then Y resembles X. But no such relationship exists between the figure and the physical object. In this way, we come to the idea of an aspect *of* the figure, which is what we compare with the duck (or rabbit). That is, we see a resemblance not between the figure and the object, but between a certain aspect of the figure and the object. How this happens is a seminal question in the philosophy of mind, and we shall not pursue it here.

A number of philosophical conclusions, though, have been drawn from the phenomenon of aspect seeing. One is that, *pace* classical empiricism, some visual impressions are not established by the image on the retina of a person's eyes, because the image on the retina is exactly the same when a person sees the duck in the figure as when the person sees the rabbit in it. Another philosophical conclusion is that some visual impressions cannot be entirely explained in merely Euclidean terms, given that the duck-aspect and the rabbit-aspect share the same points in space. Still another conclusion often drawn is that our *expectations* sometimes determine what we

perceive. Our thoughts about a situation influence what we see in it, because, if we have no concept of, say, a duck, then we shall never see such an aspect in the figure.

Upon examination, aspect seeing is also distinct from the idea of seeing an “appearance”, an experience with which we might be inclined to compare it. For when we see an appearance, we are prepared to say things like: “I *see that* there is a resemblance between her and her mother”. Here the appearance is connected to certain beliefs about the object of comparison. We say, for example, “Yes, they have the same colour eyes, similar facial expressions, a way of walking”, and so on. But, although analogous, seeing an aspect is not quite like that. We do not remark on the similarity of appearance between an aspect of the duck in the duck/rabbit configuration and an actual duck, as if the two had similar eyes and facial expression and so forth. We cannot entirely reduce the experience to the terms “seeing that”. So, evidently, there is a unique “experience” associated with seeing an aspect, a kind of surprising feeling, as it were, which goes beyond beliefs, even beyond perceptual beliefs.

All these philosophical conclusions raise questions about the nature of this odd practice. In short, what are some of the features involved in aspect seeing?

Some Features of Aspect Seeing

To which category of mind should we classify the experience of aspect seeing? What are its seminal features? How is it related to the imagination?

These questions are not altogether easy to answer. Clearly, to see an aspect of some X is not a simple sensation. A certain amount of *thought* seems embedded in this experience. It is unlikely that, when we see the “rabbit” in the figure, we are not at least thinking something about “rabbit-ness”. The idea of the appearance or shape or behaviour of rabbits somehow enters our mind, and thus we think about this aspect

as if it could do something that rabbits do, such as hopping. This is perhaps similar to the way the concept of thought is involved in picturing images, because seeing an aspect also seems to include intentionality. There is something *about* or *in* the figure that we see. It has that “about-ness” quality to it.

Also, it has that other quality often present in thought, namely, the feeling that we immediately know the object that we are presently seeing. We do not confuse the aspect with something else; it is as if it is immediately known to us: *That’s a rabbit*, we say without hesitation, or *That’s a duck*, we say confidently. But, when normally seeing things – with our eyes alone – we do not always have that immediate first-person sense of knowledge about what we see. That instant recognition is often missing until someone else informs us about that which we perceive, or that we think we perceive. So, like thought in general, there is a feeling of first-person privilege to the experience of seeing an aspect.

Having said that, however, there are also third-person criteria, which provide the basis that allows us to ascribe the experience of aspect seeing to someone; that is, this experience has a shared *language*. Just as, via language, we are able – or think we are able – to identify whether someone is thinking, so too we look to the kind of descriptions that the person applies to the ambiguous figure to determine if he is seeing an aspect of it. We observe him, and if he is applying unasserted sentences to the perceived rabbit or duck, we conclude that he is indeed seeing these aspects. Or, similarly, we might look to his behaviour – particularly, his emotional reactions such as amusement – to see if he is seeing the aspect. After interpreting his reactions, we confidently conclude that it is the expression of some thought, thoughts perhaps such as: *Hey, a rabbit. Wait, a duck. Wow! How weird.* All these thoughts meanwhile are

also unasserted. They do not attribute any property to the figure; they do not fasten the man who “sees” the aspect to any belief about the physical nature of the figure itself.

Another feature, which is related to the above characteristic, is that aspect seeing can have a certain *logic*. It is, to be sure, an experience that goes beyond what is believed or asserted, and which even goes beyond what is exactly given in perception, but it, nevertheless, has a particular rationality about it. Here one can make *mistakes* because the seeing of an aspect raises the issue of what is seen *in* the object. And that implies that there are appropriate, as well as inappropriate, things to be seen and said about the aspect. Accordingly, aspect seeing is subject to debate about whether what is seen is also “appropriate”. The conceptual distinction between “truly” seeing the aspect, as well as “falsely” perceiving it, is at work in this mental experience. Indeed, aspect seeing can be altered in light of argument. Through reasoned discourse, you can be moved from seeing *only* the duck-aspect to seeing *both* the duck-aspect and the rabbit-aspect, or it can be argued that the purpose of the figure is to see just one aspect, or that you miss the point if you do not see both, and so on. In other words, by giving various descriptions of the aspects, we can persuade, justify and denounce certain descriptions of those aspects. The upshot, then, is that reasoning in terms of appropriateness can be applied to aspect seeing. This further impresses on us the idea that aspect seeing is a kind of thought.

Yet another feature of aspect seeing is that, as with all the other species of unasserted thought, it is subject to man’s will. One *can* request a man to see an aspect of some figure. Once he has seen the various aspects of the figure, he can then often do so at will, now choosing to see the rabbit, now the duck, back and forth. But this, of course, does not mean that a man is *always* able to abide by the request to see the aspect – only that it makes sense to ask this performance of him. In this regard, we

should note that obeying a request to see an aspect might often prove more difficult than the request to picture an image, because aspect seeing is confined to the perimeters of a figure or object in which the aspect is found, and this is not true when picturing an image before the mind's eye, the borders of which are indeterminate. The aspect, unlike the mental image, is seen within a set frame, and this can establish obstacles to some observers when following the request to see some X *in* some Y. This is the case even within auditory boundaries such as in a piece of music: you might, for instance, ask, or even cajole, someone to try to hear the touch of sadness in the sound of Bach, but they might only be able to hear its joy. They are limited by the borders of the music in a way they might not be when you request them to envision a purely mental image.

What does all this tell us? Well, the features of aspect seeing are shared with thought.¹⁶⁹ Like thought, aspect seeing has intentionality. Like thought, it gives one the feeling that knowledge of the aspect is an immediate, first person experience. Like thought, there are third person criteria for judging if someone is seeing an aspect (in this case, the unasserted sentences he is prepared to say about the figure, as well as his behaviour). Like thought, it has a kind of rationality. And, like thought, aspect seeing is subject to the will. All this suggests that aspect seeing is a kind of thought, as was imagination more generally. But, certainly, being a "thought" is not all that aspect seeing is. There are other features to this experience.

There is something quite *sensuous* about the experience. That it happens using sense organs is no small fact. Indeed, like imagery, aspect seeing enjoys some, but not all, features normally associated with sensual experience.

¹⁶⁹ Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, chapter 8.

It has, for instance, the feature of *duration*. In principle, you can time the perception of an aspect. You can note the exact amount of time it took you to see the duck-aspect before you then saw the rabbit-aspect, and vice versa. This is an important feature, since many people are often tempted to think of aspect seeing as simply *interpretation*. But we see that, given this phenomenon's capacity to be precisely timed, aspect seeing is *not* mere interpretation. For the act of interpretation does not seem situated in time in this kind of way; we do not have the same kind of temporal borders regarding our construal of, say, a verse of Shakespeare or the way we interpret a dream. An interpretation is not subject to such strict timing, as is the case when seeing the duck-aspect in Jastrow's figure.

Another feature is that of vividness. As with visual experience more generally, seeing an aspect can, at times, stand out to a greater or lesser extent. True, this is not quite the same experience of "intensity" that we encounter in the picturing of an image. But here too there is the potential of seeing the aspect in various degrees of detail, as if certain features of it were more illuminated than others.

Still another feature of the experience of aspect seeing, which reminds one of its sensuous character, is that it has irreducible elements composing it. Just as seeing the shape of a circle and seeing the shape of a square are similar but *irreducible* perceptual experiences, so too seeing the aspect of a duck and seeing the aspect of a rabbit are related but yet irreducible experiences. That is, separate *parts* are what constitutes this experience. Because of this, seeing an aspect can be compared to seeing things like shapes and colours, all of which present similar but separate elements of a particular kind of perceptual experience. Or, in other words, seeing red and seeing blue are both instances of seeing colour, but neither experience is the same. And so it is with aspect seeing: the perception of the duck is *like* the perception

of the rabbit – that is, it belongs to the same category of experience – but they are not the *same* experience. Like visual experience more generally, there is variety to seeing aspects. The conscious character of seeing the various aspects of the world does not share exactly identical features, even though they are all parts of a wider and unified kind of experience.

For this reason, employing the term “seeing” to the experience of “aspect seeing” is not arbitrary. A conceptual relation exists between *the act of genuinely seeing something* and *the seeing of the aspect of something*. Aspect seeing poignantly refers to and is expressed by the language of visual perception. When describing an experience of seeing an aspect, a man says sentences such as: *It is as if I were seeing a rabbit*. Here, in this experience, the “as if” is conceptually crucial. He cannot say in what precise way the seeing of the rabbit-aspect is similar to seeing a real rabbit. But through his language he does intimate to us that there is a resemblance. The likeness between the two experiences is given in the very linguistic expressions by which he is disposed to describe his experience. He does not *assert* any genuine seeing; he asserts *as if* he were seeing. And therein lies the critical difference between the two experiences, the one is assertion of seeing something, the other an *as if* seeing something.

To conclude, we should say that aspect seeing resides somewhere on the border between *thought* and *sensation*. It enjoys features of both.

Picturing Images and Aspect Perceptiveness

Recall our discussion of picturing images. We, too, argued that picturing an image shares many features we find both in thought and sensation. It has intentionality. It has a sense of first person immediacy. It has, through language and behaviour, third person criteria by which outsiders determine its presence. It is subject to the will. It

has duration. It is often expressed through the language that denotes sensory experience. It has an experiential component. And it has various intensities. In other words, like aspect seeing, picturing images exist somewhere between thought and sensation.

This leads to an intuition that there is a remarkable relationship, or analogy, between aspect perceptiveness and picturing images. But philosophers have not just pointed out that there are shared features involved in both experiences. They have also disclosed that the two mental experiences often supplement and aid one another. Indeed, we can distinguish two kinds of activity that inter-penetrates aspect seeing and picturing images. To see this, let us call the first activity “the physical to the mental relation between aspect seeing and picturing images”, and the second activity “the mental to the physical relation between picturing images and aspect seeing”.¹⁷⁰ They are conversely related and explained below.

The Physical to the Mental Relation. This relation between aspect seeing and picturing images is a two-part process. First, it so happens that we can sometimes see an aspect of something on a physical thing; for example, we see an aspect of something in a photograph. Then, if the aspect fades, it often happens that we continue seeing the aspect in the mind’s eye; that is, we picture its image as if we were still seeing the aspect of the physical thing. For example, imagine you are looking at a duck in a photograph. The image of the duck within the photograph comes before your eye. It is a clear visual impression derived from a physical object. *There’s a duck in that photograph*, you say to yourself. But then your sight of the duck begins to fade because, let us say, the photograph itself is rapidly fading out, disintegrating in your very hands; the actual visual impression of the duck on the

¹⁷⁰ These are ideas derived from Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, but these concepts – “the physical to the mental relation...” etc. – are not his terminology.

material photograph is therefore becoming less and less clear. Yet, surprisingly, you are still able to see the figure clearly as a duck, even though many of its features that were once plain to you no longer remain so in your actual visual field. How can this be?

The only answer is that your mind has now supplemented the disappearing features of the visual impression with a mental image of those features; the image, rather than what you are looking at, now possess those features of the figure, thus allowing you to remain seeing the duck vividly even though the physical object from which you initially saw the duck has ceased to be clear. By picturing the image in your mind, you have now added to the physical world those characteristics that are no longer capable of being seen. Thus, you began with something physical (the photograph that produced an aspect perception) and yet you effortlessly moved to something mental (the clear and unmistakable picturing of that aspect). This tells us that aspect seeing and picturing images *can* profitably work together to capture and freeze a scene, and that they thus have a closer relationship than just shared features. They actually can supplement one another.

The Mental to the Physical Relation. This is the converse of the above relation. Here, we begin with a mental image; we are picturing it before our mind. Then, in order to express our image so that another person can also see it in his mind, we draw a physical picture and ask another to focus on a particular aspect of the picture. If the other can see the aspect, we say that he has also seen our mental image; if not, then he has failed to see what is occurring in our mind. For instance, suppose you have a simple mental image of a frowning face, with a triangular nose, and which is free-floating sideways on a white background. You tell your partner about this image but she does not understand what you are saying or imagining. So you reply,

“Here look at this. My image looks exactly like this.” And you draw on a white piece of paper the following picture and say “Bend you head sideways”.

:>(

If your partner is able to see the aspect of what you have just drawn, then she will discern that which you are imagining. In this way, what you were previously picturing in your head is now referred to a physical object, an actual picture of which another person must come to see appropriately in order to know your inner image. But if all she sees on the white page are random geometrical shapes, rather than the aspect those shapes can give off, then she has failed to see your mental state. So, in this case, knowledge of your mental picture can only be gained through the perception of an aspect of a physical thing. Thus, here you began with something mental (the picturing of some image) and you effortlessly moved to something physical (the aspect perception of some thing). This, again, shows a noteworthy relationship between picturing images and aspect seeing, a relationship that goes beyond the mere sharing of features. It tells us again that the two experiences can aid one another.

Both processes – aspect perceptiveness and picturing images – involve intellectual and sensory attributes. This is what allows them to play off one another in the examples above. In aspect seeing, it seems to us as if we *picture an image* of something and instantaneously see it in some other object. Conversely, in picturing a mental image, it seems as if we *see an aspect* of some object; and this aspect, even though imaginary, is the product of an almost-real sensory experience. This interrelationship between these processes therefore bolsters the notion that both experiences, on their own, belong to the same kind of mental category: it may very well be that they both are found in the category of the imagination. Both are species of a particular kind of thought, a thought which is compounded with distinctive

sensory features, and which recurs in various forms of human experience, but which is not properly described as illusions or hallucinations. On the basis of their shared features and their interdependence, we can deduce that picturing an image and aspect seeing are two possibilities of the imaginary mind.

A Derridian View of Aspect Seeing

What processes are involved in the experience of aspect seeing? It seems self-evident that, at the very least, aspect seeing is intimately tied to perception. There appears to be a steady stream of perceptual concepts flowing through man's experience of ambiguous figures, wherein his imagination forms part of what he sees in the figures. This also seems to be the case in man's encounter with aesthetic objects, where imagination again helps him perceive, for example, the joy or pain in a sound of music. And the same is conceivably true with regard to his appreciation of mundane-sacred objects, where possibly imagination aids a religious man in seeing the mourning in a road, the joy in a footprint, the sweetness in the ocean's waves.

All of these instances, wherein imagination is brought to bear on sensory experience, might invite us to reconsider the idea that aspects are properties, that there are some significant analogies, for instance, between aspects and simple properties such as colours. Indeed, this must be one reason why some philosophers may be willing to conclude that religious appreciation is, in fact, the perceiving of properties of mundane-sacred objects. Under this theory, to call the cast of the Buddha's footprint "joy" is a result of seeing the *property* of joy in that sacred object. But this analogy would be hasty. We must first understand in what way the experience of aspect seeing is tied to everyday perception before we can argue that aspect perception is like seeing properties such as colours.

Some might be inclined – under a kind of Derridian or postmodernist inspiration – to argue that all acts of seeing are or involve aspect perceptiveness. And, if this inclination were true, it could be deadly to our attempt to include aspect seeing in the category of the imagination; for, given that we have argued that imagination extends beyond the content of sensory experience, we would have difficulty delineating the distinction between imaginative perception and normal perception, if the latter *always* included imaginative perception.

To be sure, it is an interesting idea that *all* our perception includes aspect seeing; at any rate, it would certainly make life quite a bit more fun. In our sensory experience of any object, so this argument seems to contend, we have the power to move from perceiving one aspect to another. And, thus, evidently there are no absolute criteria from which we can judge the “reality” from the “appearance” of those objects, for all is appearance, all is aspect, and all perception includes aspect perception. This is shown by the simple fact that it is regularly possible, through the power of man’s immense capacity for thought, to experience a change of aspect even as we remain looking at the objects we immediately perceive. By thought alone, a man can make the carrots that he *sees* in his soup bowl alter into little beings swimming away from his spoon desperate to save their lives. He might even take pity on the orange creatures and refrain from eating them. But, if he can produce such a weird experience from a sliced carrot, then there must have been *another* aspect of the carrot out of which it changed. That is, the carrots in the soup had an aspect one moment in “normal seeing” but then changed into the aspect of desperate vegetable fear. How? Clearly, normal perception *always* includes aspect perception. Our decision about which aspect is “reality” is therefore sheer construction and social agreement.

Okay. Now ignore the obvious question about how the above idea or “aspect” could possibly be true with aspect seeing permeating all perception and with no criteria by which to measure them. Instead, face another question. Does the fact that we *can* experience odd changes of aspect really prove the point that *all* normal perception includes aspect seeing? Does it show that seeing the carrot as a vegetable and seeing it as a drowning little being come to the same thing? Everyday sensory experience often involves, at least at a minimum, a predisposition to *believe* in the existence of the object entering one’s sensory field. Even if this predisposition proved unjustifiable, it would still seem true that in everyday life there often is a tight conceptual association between sensory experience and perceptual belief. And, if this is the case, then sensory experience – quite unlike the aspect seeing of desperately afraid carrots – is logically connected to the concept of belief. Accordingly, sensory experience is not obedient to man’s will in the way that aspect seeing is. And so, they cannot be conflated. There is a conceptual distinction.

We have argued earlier that aspect seeing includes the concept of unasserted thought. Given the argument above, this would mean that our everyday, normal sensory experience of, say, carrots in a bowl of soup, includes not merely belief that the carrots exist but also unasserted *thoughts* about them. We are always entertaining thoughts when we have sensory experiences. But, if unasserted thought requires language, then we would have to conclude that a being without a language – say, a jackrabbit – cannot *see*. That is a hard pill to swallow.

There is no denying that man *does* at times amuse himself with propositions about what he perceives, and he indeed does so easily and voluntarily. This commonplace behaviour, however, is not conceptually integral to sensory experience *qua* sensory experience. At a minimum, what is integral to sense impressions is the

belief that an object is present, and that that object can be described by some explanation. In contradistinction to the unasserted thoughts of aspect perception, however, such a belief involved in sense impressions is not subject to man's will. That is the critical point for, when we enjoy a change of aspect of some object, we imagine that the object ceases to exist and instead think of it *as* something totally different. The image becomes alive in what we see. When Prince Siddhartha, just before he set off to realize enlightenment, came upon the tempting women of his harem, he imagined that they did not exist and instead thought of them *as* rotting corpses. This was a religious change of aspect, a taking of immediate sense impressions for something else. There was no "change of aspect" from some *other* aspect, but there was the realization or dawning of an aspect where, before his spiritual search, there was nothing but immediate sense-experience.

The Varieties of Seeing-As

Wittgenstein once suggested that many of our philosophical problems arise because we have an unhealthy tendency to take one use of a term – one picture of the way things are – as the rigid standard by which to judge all the rest.¹⁷¹ We try to squeeze the many employments of a term into one paradigm. An example is the many ways we might fail to understand the term "to see X as Y". When the argument is made that *all* perceptual experience includes aspect perception, we are failing to make distinctions in the various uses of the locution "seeing-as". Of which kind are we speaking? We cannot take all its meanings and shove them into every act of perception.

"To see X as Y" can refer to a report of seeing a likeness of appearance between two things. "I *see* her *as* a 'cat' type person", one might say. In this example,

¹⁷¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, 89-133.

“seeing-as” has little to do with the belief in some state of affairs inherent in the immediate sense-impressions.

The term “seeing-as” can also go beyond belief altogether, and refer to emotions and attitudes, as when, for example, the German National-Socialist philosopher, Martin Heidegger, *saw* Americans *as* the *katestrophenhaft*, the site of catastrophe, “the unrestricted organization of the average man”.¹⁷² (Whatever that means.) Another example is my neighbour’s frequent statements to me that she *sees* her husband *as* selfish. Both these examples show that the locution can point to feelings and attitudes, and not to perceptual beliefs at all.

Seeing-as can also refer to various modes of interpretation of imperceptible phenomena. For example, when we interpret the *motives* of someone, we might say, “I *see* her laughter with the boss *as* crass affectation, while you *see* it *as* genuine amusement.” Here the term “to see X as Y” relates to a kind of hypothesis, a subtle, tentative search for truth. (Interestingly, in this example, there is no possibility of a double-aspect. Both interpretations cannot be true at once.)

Yet another use of seeing-as occurs when “to see X as Y” denotes a kind of mental picture, as when we form a memory of something. “Looking over the course of my life”, an old man on his deathbed might say, “I now *see* it *as* charged with meaning and direction, when while in the springtime of my youth I *saw* it *as* boring and ridiculous”. Here, again, the locution does not refer to perceptual belief. Like the examples above, the locution has nothing to do with immediate sensory experience.

All these examples show us that we need to be careful to distinguish what is meant when philosophers say that all normal perception includes

¹⁷² Quoted in “A genealogy of anti-Americanism”, by James W. Ceaser. Summer 2003, online at: <http://www.thepublicinterest.com>.

seeing-as. And we should, therefore, also note that “aspect seeing”, when it refers to imagination, is only one other locution of “seeing-as”.

Aspect-Perceptiveness and Thought

Before closing this chapter on the varieties of imagination, we ought to offer a little more comment on the nature of the “thought” that is involved in aspect-perceptiveness, especially since we shall soon be proposing it as an ingredient of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment. We suggested earlier that aspect perceptiveness contained at least two mechanisms, thought and sensory experience. As with the concept of imagery, we proposed that the concept of “aspect perceptiveness” was absorbed in the concept of “thought” because it possessed key characteristics that were definitive of thought. We also suggested that the kind of thought that is involved in aspect perceptiveness is not so much a type of interpretation about a state of affair, but more likely an imaginative way of thinking about an object. In other words, the perception of the duck in Jastrow’s figure is not to mistake the geometrical lines on the canvas as a real duck, but to see imaginatively the “duck” *in* those lines. Having said that, we must not forget that aspect perceptiveness, while certainly having intellectual content, is not only *thought*. We cannot dismiss the sensory qualities of the experience, the concreteness of this peculiar happening of life. And, indeed, the thought inherent in aspect perceptiveness cannot be independently and fully described from everything else that is involved in this experience.

This is an important point, for when perceiving the aspect of, say, a Sikh Guru painted on the walls of a Gurdwara, we cannot neatly split the thought and the sensory experience of the painted Guru into two sharp compartments – even if there are thoughts which control the way the picture is seen by a devout Sikh person, or even if

his thoughts are what is seen in the picture. We can only intimate these interrelated components of the mental experience of the religious man. And, if we hope to describe the thought involved in the experience, we shall, at best, only point to certain analogies with interpretation.

Why is this?

Well, to see that the thought inbuilt within aspect perceptiveness cannot be cut off from the total experience and thus described independently, consider some of the following thought experiments. Suppose that my friend Gurpreet, a Sikh, is looking at a picture and sees it as the Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Under these circumstances, it appears correct to say that she is thinking of the picture as the Guru. Yet it appears manifestly incorrect to say that she has in her mind a proposition such as “This picture or pattern of lines *is* the Guru.” Why? Because she certainly does not mistake the picture – the lines that make it up – literally as being the great Sage in flesh and blood. Rather, if she entertains a proposition at all, it is that the thing *in* the pattern of lines represents the Guru, and not the lines or pictures themselves.

Similarly, when I go with Gurpreet to the Gurdwara and she points at a painting and says to me “This is the Guru Nanak” – to what exactly is she referring me? Clearly, the “this” in her proposition refers not to the figure or picture, but to that which is *in* it. The “this” cannot be taken referentially, but must stand as a substitute for an intentional object of perception. If I were to take her meaning otherwise – if I said, for example, “Oh, the Guru Nanak is a bunch of colourful lines splashed on a wall in Southall.” – she would rightly think I was obtuse, if not mad. The possibility of such a mistake can only imply that the thought that I have must be described in terms of the aspect that I “see” rather than what I see described by reference to the thought. So, while aspect perceptiveness certainly has a thought-ingredient, our

understanding of that thought hinges first on sensory experience. Similarly if my friend says to me “This is the Guru Nanak” and if my back is to the painting that she is pointing at, I might reply, “Which particular Guru Nanak? There are many pictures of Guru Nanak on these walls.” Her only answer to me could be *This Guru Nanak*, tapping me on the shoulder, and pointing to a particular picture. Here again, the thought is secondary to, or at least dependent on, the immediate sensory perception of a particular thing. Without that sensory contact, the thought is meaningless.

The upshot, then, is that we cannot describe the thought independently of the perceptible object to which it refers. It seems demonstrably mistaken to interpret aspect perceptiveness under the formulation “to think of X as Y”, or even as “to see X as Y”, although there certainly are uses wherein they make sense. But these formulations do not fully capture what is happening in our experience of seeing aspects. Instead, we might better describe this experience as “to see Y *in* a particular X”. Only in this way can we make sense of a word such as “this” in a proposition such as “This is the Guru Nanak” when pointing to a painting.

Now this suggestion – that the thought involved in aspect perceptiveness is intimately tied to sensory experience – is not as radical as we might think. Remember, there is a sense in which “belief” is intimately tied to everyday sensory experience, too. Kant has made a good case that certain beliefs are inherently related to sensory experience, indeed they make sense of them. When I see my friend at the entrance of the Gurdwara, I have a visual experience of her, but connected with this sensory experience is also *perceptual belief*, namely, a belief such as “There is Gurpreet”. My visual experience of seeing her irreducibly includes the belief of her being there, of her present attendance in my present sensory moment. Yet, as with my thought in a visual experience of an aspect, I cannot specifically delineate this belief

in her presence independently of its sensory character. It seems rather simplistic to claim that my perceptual belief is only “There is Gurpreet”. The visual experience is far richer and more complex than that, or any other, proposition by which we might wish to capture the belief. I see Gurpreet – her black curly hair sneaking out of her headscarf, her broad smile, her waving arm. I see all that – and more. The visual experience is a multifarious web of visual attributes. Accordingly, any attempt to proffer a *complete* account of the perceptual belief associated with the visual impression simply cannot be produced. No proposition can capture the substance of what is seen. And yet, if we attempt to describe the belief, all that we can do in the end is appeal to the numerous *visual appearances*, the way she looks. In other words, we could only identify the perceptual belief through describing the sensory experiences. So, like aspect perceptiveness and its relation to thought, so too we cannot specify the belief independently of the direct experience. It, too, is intimately tied with an immediate perception.

Given all this, we can conclude that, just as perceptual belief has an irreducible sensory quality, so does the thought involved in aspect perceptiveness. Neither is able to be fully and independently described. Yet both can be intimated. Something of their nature can be described, even if it is only a partial description. With particular respect to aspect perceptiveness, we can, nevertheless, show its relation to other forms of thought – such as “thinking of X as Y” – and this allows us to understand it as somehow a kind of “unasserted thought”.

To finish off, it might be said that aspect perceptiveness and its intellectual and sensory components are like the relation we saw earlier between imagination and belief. For, in the same way that imagination, if it were asserted, would become a belief, aspect perceptiveness is the integrating of a thought that would constitute an

actual perception only if it too were asserted. There is thus an “unasserted” nature to aspect perceptiveness – and, as we shall see in the next few chapters, this nature likely shapes the makeup of the experience of religious appreciation.

Conclusion

This brings to a close our (rather ponderous) detour into the concept of the imagination. It is hoped that a comprehension of the forgoing discussion will help us advance with more detail and sophistication our response-resemblance theory of religious appreciation, by allowing us to sidestep some of the dilemmas that have continued to plague us up until now. In the following chapter, we shall show how aspect perceptiveness may very well be involved in religious appreciation. After that, we shall provide an explanation of the conditions of religious appreciation more generally, the conditions that make the experience unique and different from all other kinds of religious experience.

CHAPTER 23

IMAGINATIVE THOUGHT AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION

Recall the intentionality-dilemma from Chapter 16, the problem that set us on the long discussion of imagination. To avoid the dilemma, we have traversed a lot of philosophical ground looking for a mental state other than *belief*; a mental state that, like belief, stimulates emotional and intellectual responses to objects. Our discussion about the imagination brought to our attention that aspect-perceptiveness meets the criteria we have been seeking. Now it is time to discuss the kind of aspect-perceptiveness that is involved in mundane-sacred judgment. We will contend that there are indeed significant links between aspect-perceptiveness and mundane-sacred judgment. From this contention, we shall propose the not unfair conclusion that aspect-perceptiveness is an important feature of the experience of religious appreciation. And, if this conclusion proves correct, then the horns of the intentionality-dilemma have been successfully split.

To begin our discussion, let us take an example of a mundane-sacred object, that of Gregorian chant. It is quite typical to hear religious as well as non-religious people describe this mysterious Catholic music as “melancholy” or “sad” or “heavy” or “mystical” or “haunting”. We find this kind of language applied to all sorts of religious music from around the world, such as to Tibetan chanting or the Islamic calls to prayer in Jerusalem. It is fair to say that when voicing such judgments about religious music the mental recognition of these mundane-sacred predicates – the

melancholy, the sadness, the heaviness, the haunting quality of the music – entails some kind of sensory experience. That is, one hears the mundane-sacred predicate – one hears the “heaviness” – *in* the sound of the music. Such language in itself suggests that the experience is like the examples of “seeing as” that we discussed previously.

The analogies between *seeing* the aspect of the Guru Nanak *in* the picture at my friend’s Gurdwara and *hearing* the “haunting quality *in* Gregorian chant” are worth remarking upon. Both experiences, it seems intuitive to say, fit into the same category of mind, both have the same characteristics of unasserted thought. Both seem to indicate the experience of perceiving aspects. Both find their expression in language, in verbal communication, wherein a man applies everyday predicates to a visual or auditory object of the sensory world. And, barring a peculiar metaphysics, the man in both cases does not intend the descriptions to be taken *literally*. His judgments, if they are to be understood at all, do not postulate that the Guru Nanak – the real man who lived long ago – *is* the picture, the geometrical lines splashed on the wall. In the same way, we never think that Gregorian or Tibetan chant is actually *sad*, as if sound waves could in reality feel emotions. Rather, such descriptions point us to the mental phenomenon of unasserted thought.

Furthermore, as with seeing aspects more generally, man’s *will* is also present in such judgments. It makes sense – and indeed it happens – that a man can be *ordered* to see or hear the expressive quality of a mundane-sacred object, just as a man can be ordered to see the duck in Jastrow’s duck-rabbit. A religious teacher, for instance, can ask obedience from his disciple, demanding that he see or hear the mourning, the sadness, the joy *in* a road, a statue, a melody, or a mountain. Moreover, it does not matter that the student might not be able to hear or see what is

required. All that matters is that the logic of this kind of judgment tells us that the request *makes sense*. It fits into the intelligible uses of religious language. Similarly, it makes sense to try to *persuade* someone to perceive a mundane-sacred object under a certain description. This might happen, for example, when a religious man is seeking to proselytize another man. “To feel the soul of the chant, *try to* hear the longing, aching, sorrow of it”, one might say, in an effort to persuade another to feel the music *religiously*.

In this kind of example of mundane-sacred judgment, it seems incorrect to say that the mode of thought involved is a kind of interpretative “seeing-as”, since in this example, the expressive judgment is not *interpreting* the mundane-sacred object as literally sorrowful. The thought associated with the judgment is not so cognitive; it is not aiming to be an objective description of a state of affair. It also does not seem right to say that the point of the mundane-sacred judgment is to subsume the mundane-sacred object under a rigid set of concepts because no music or road could ever literally fall under a rigid concept like “sorrowful” or “mourning”. Furthermore, it seems mistaken to say that the function of this judgment is to specify analogies because, while it may be true that its justification will appeal to analogies, its meaning will not (when we abandon the notion of truth-condition as the condition that provides its meaning). Having rejected the concept of truth-condition in the context of mundane-sacred judgment, we are left, so it would seem, with the comparison between mundane-sacred predicates and aspects. It may be only in this way that we will be able to fruitfully describe the conditions for the acceptance of this kind of mundane-sacred judgment that has emotional or psychological predicates.

We noted earlier that two aspects may be perceived in the same first-order features of a figure. The same seems to be the case with two contending

interpretations of a mundane-sacred object. Thus, the phenomenon of a double-aspect may arise in mundane-sacred judgment. Indeed, in the context of many mundane-sacred objects, more than one interpretation may prove helpful in elucidating its meaning. As an example, recall Sri Aurobindo's comments on Indian temple architecture:

One of these buildings *climbs up bold*, massive in projection, up-piled in the greatness of a *forceful* but *sure* ascent, preserving its range and line to the last, the other *soars* from the *strength* of its base, in the grace and *emotion* of a curving mass to a rounded summit and crowning symbol.¹⁷³

Aurobindo offers us an analogical interpretation of the mundane-sacred object in that he draws our attention to analogies between its features and other concepts such as “soaring” and “strength” in order to express the mundane-sacred object. Such analogical interpretations are, so it seems, highly similar to the kind of reasoning involved in double-aspects. For, on the one hand, Aurobindo may see the temple – the mundane-sacred object – as emotionally vigorous and uplifting, citing x, y, and z features as justification for his judgment. But, on the other hand, another man may see the same temple as calm and stately, even as he also cites the *same* x, y, and z features to substantiate his judgment. Therefore both men may justify their judgments to one another *by referring to the exact same first-order features*.

Debating interpretations is, of course, a common practice in religious discourse. And here it would seem we are witnessing the phenomena of the double-aspect within the religious realm, particularly in the realm of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation. Indeed, such emotional uncertainty has often been appreciated and highly valued in regard to the interpretation of many mundane-sacred objects. For instance, in a sacred book such as the *Song of Songs*, or in some of the poetry we find among the Sufis, or in some of the music of the Troubadours, or in

¹⁷³ Summer 2002, online at: www.hindunet.org/srh_home/1996_11/msg00034.html.

some of the esoteric Tibetan texts – in all these mundane-sacred objects - their authors often purposely obscured their intentions so as to make it ambiguous whether the love they expressed was religious or sensual. The love expressed in such religious texts seems intended to convey both the religious and the profane at once, as if there were no difference between the two.

Of course, such ambiguity, intended or otherwise, raises the question whether there is a “correct” interpretation of the mundane-sacred object’s aspect. At what point, in other words, do we cease making mundane-sacred judgments that are based on the same set of first-order features? Or *must* we embrace pluralism?

One answer might be that *the context will determine which of the interpretations are appropriate*. Yet this reply will not do for the context itself will require interpretation. And thus, by pursuing this train of thought, we would only push our original question backwards onto something else, that is, the context.

Thus, if we wish to avoid such a regress, perhaps we ought to conclude that the answer will not be connected to the quasi-interpretive idea of “seeing as”, as if there were a “right answer”. We shall need to accept that we cannot bring to a halt our worries over the *right* mundane-sacred judgment, even if we tried to show that the mundane-sacred object is literally “mourning” (or whatever). After all, the mundane-sacred judgment is radically different from the interpretation of the general feelings and emotions of human beings because, when considering the feelings of a man, only one of the interpretations of his feelings will be correct, however many competing interpretations of his emotional state we may have. But, in the case of mundane-sacred judgment, the phenomenon of a double aspect of the mundane-sacred object may remain – indeed may be *intended* to remain – obscure or ambiguous.

Nevertheless, we still wish, or often wish, to know the *thought* that is embodied, as it were, in the perception and reaction to mundane-sacred objects. If a man advances a mundane-sacred judgment such as “The sacred river is mourning”, we want to grasp the thought being communicated. The mere thought that “the river is mourning” does not seem enough, since it is not clear how the road could mourn. In the same way, if we say that some example of Gregorian chant is “sorrowful”, it is not clear to what entity we are attributing the “sorrow”. To the music itself? To its audience? To the composer?

Perhaps the best we can do is to define the thought inherent in the mundane-sacred judgment by way of the experience that produces it. So, what we can say about this thought is that the experience of hearing the sorrow of a mundane-sacred object is analogous to the experience of hearing the expression of sorrow in, say, another human being’s voice. In that respect, it is like “seeing as”. Hearing the sorrow in the sacred music, or seeing the joy in the Buddha’s footprint, is an unasserted auditory or visual perception of sorrow or joy. What this interpretation suggests, then, is that the mundane-sacred object is not analogous to human emotion as such; but, when voicing such language, the religious man is undergoing an *experience* that is analogous to his ordinary perception of such emotion. Thus, as in aspect-perceptiveness, we can explain the use of mundane-sacred judgment under the category of “unasserted thought” rather than under the categories of belief and truth-value.

With this interpretation, there is no question of the religious man ascribing joy or sorrow as *properties* of the mundane-sacred object, as if the object were being understood under the theories of “religious perception”. The religious perception, as talked about in earlier chapters, is really more analogous to aspect perceptiveness than to any direct or commonplace perception of an object’s properties. Exploiting the

notion of aspect-perceptiveness also allows us to describe how a mundane-sacred predicate, such as “joy”, can have the *same* meaning when applied to a mundane-sacred object and when applied to human beings. It is, then, no different from the way the term “rabbit” has the same meaning when ascribed to an aspect and when used to pick out a real rabbit. Its meaning remains the same in both the aspect perception and in the actual perception.

If all these conclusions are true, then our response-resemblance theory, which encompasses them, may be our best interpretation of mundane-sacred judgment and religious appreciation. Now having offered our interpretation – even if only in rough outline – about the kind of perception and mental state involved in this religious experience, it is time to consider some of the other psychological features embedded in religious appreciation.

CHAPTER 24

EMOTION AND RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION

We have hinted that the conditions for accepting some mundane-sacred judgments are a kind of felt response. Yet, we may wonder, at what point this response occurs? Certainly, religious appreciation of a mundane-sacred object does not transpire merely *after* the object has been confronted with the sense organs; it seems to happen *during* the meeting between man and his sacred object. And indeed, given the similarity between religious appreciation and aspect-perceptiveness, it is not unfair to say that there is an experience which *goes together with* the hearing or seeing of a mundane-sacred object, and which cannot be separated from the immediate sensory contact with that object. Now we have identified the nature of the thought of this experience – or more precisely the “unasserted” or “imaginative” thought of the experience – but we still have not described the feelings, desires and reactions that might blossom out of this thought. Undoubtedly, feelings will often play an important part in religious appreciation. Indeed, if the confrontation with a mundane-sacred object has any real religious value, it may well be due to the emotions and desires that the object provokes.

The theories of the last few chapters have suggested that the psychological state of imagination, with its accompanying reactions, are in some ways different from what arises out of the psychological state of belief. Indeed, the concept of imagination has been brought out in this dissertation precisely because of its contrast

with belief, since relying on the concept of belief seems to consign the practice of mundane-sacred judgment to bizarre metaphysics, to the attribution of human psychological states to inanimate phenomena. That interpretive result is a little unfair to those who practice a religious way of life, to say nothing of what it means to those secular people who also voice mundane-sacred judgments.

Now, should it be the case that there are “religious emotions” whilst confronting mundane-sacred objects, then such emotions must be grounded in the imagination and not in belief.¹⁷⁴ These religious emotions therefore will not be identified in the way we analyze emotions based on belief.¹⁷⁵ Accordingly, our theory of religious appreciation will confer on these emotions a certain psychological autonomy.

But, as was pointed out in earlier chapters, there are undeniable problems with the phenomenological idea of religious autonomy. Remember, we want to maintain our ability to claim that the religious response to a “mourning” road and the ordinary response to a mourning man are in some way similar. Otherwise, we shall find it impossible to explain the meaning of the mundane-sacred object’s mourning; that is, we shall not be able to understand why that mundane-sacred predicate is applied to that inanimate object. But, again, the problem is that the reaction and the verbal behaviour of a man are grounded on a *belief* about that man’s psychological state, while in the case of a mundane-sacred judgment about a road they are grounded on an “unasserted” or “imaginative” thought. This leaves us with an obvious question: how can the “religious emotion” involved in religious appreciation be comparable with the emotions that are founded on beliefs? Indeed, how can the latter be used to identify and clarify the nature of the former? By appealing to the imagination to explain

¹⁷⁴ This assumes, again, that we are not describing a religious tradition that deliberately and consciously ascribes feelings to what we believe are inanimate objects.

¹⁷⁵ This is something psychologists of religion might ponder.

religious appreciation, are we on the verge of wiping out the basic link of religious appreciation and non-religious experience?

Stoics, phenomenologists and cognitive psychologists, as mentioned earlier, claim inherent connections between belief, emotion and desire. Many of our emotions are identified, at least partly, in terms of our beliefs. From the assertion that a mother is terrified it follows that she *believes* that there is or might be something threatening her child. Typically, it also follows that she *desires* to keep her children clear of that harmful thing. Now this truth might lead us to conclude – rather hastily – that human emotion is a composite of belief and desire, in which all three – emotion, belief and desire – are connected in a causal chain.

Yet, if religious emotions are not founded on belief, but instead on the entertaining of unasserted propositions, then how are we to construe the emotions found in religious appreciation? There can be no doubt that, when a decent human being stands in front of man in mourning, he will feel concern for his fellow man, and that concern will be connected to an *awareness* of a pitiful object. However, when a decent man stands before “the road to Zion” that is said to be “mourning”, will he have the same kind of awareness that is present when he confronts a man in sorrow? Unlikely. Any propositions that he contemplates about the road will have an unasserted quality about them. And this distinction, between the asserted proposition about a man in mourning and the unasserted propositions about inanimate mundane-sacred objects, raises the question about how the emotions stemming from these beliefs might be compared. Indeed, in the religious context, it may be the case that one *wants to see* the “mourning of the road”, while in the ordinary context of life only sadists delight in the mourning of another human being. So, without the *beliefs* that are typical of mourning, the religious man may have no desire to avoid seeing the

mourning of the mundane-sacred object. A Theravadin monk, for example, who meditates on a rotting corpse, indeed wishes to imbibe the harrowing aspect of his sacred object. He wants to observe the *dukkha*, the suffering of it. But, again, this raises our question: if neither the belief nor the desire that is characteristic of mourning or suffering is present, then in what way can the man of religious appreciation be feeling anything similar to what he feels in everyday, non-religious confrontations with mourning and pain?

To answer this, we might compare religious emotional reactions to ordinary emotional reactions in terms of the *outcomes* of these psychological states. That is, we might continue to point out that normal, everyday emotions, such as the concern we feel for a man in mourning, entail, in most cases, a desire to relieve the condition of our fellow man's pain; but, in some religious cases, such as in the appreciation of "the road to Zion" or the meditation on a "rotting corpse", a desire to observe the object and not to avoid or alter it might instead be provoked.

So, obviously, a comparison of the two emotional states in terms of their outcomes is hardly profitable in terms of our question. Not only are the outcomes of these emotions often divergent, but also we cannot anticipate every reaction from these emotions, be they religious or otherwise.

Suppose, however, that the man of religious appreciation, while "seeing" the mourning aspect of the mundane-sacred object, begins to *imagine* what in that mundane situation of confronting a man in mourning he would also *believe*. He would, it would seem, be contemplating propositions that, in the mundane world, he would believe to be true. It seems possible, if not probable, that in this religious experience he is entertaining, along with his imaginative propositions about the mundane-sacred object, certain *desires* that would also, in more mundane

circumstances, flower out of those beliefs. In other words, just as he is “contemplating” propositions in his imagination, so too, we might say, he is now also “contemplating” the desires associated with those propositions. He entertains the desires, as a man might entertain the idea of winning the lottery, experiencing those “lottery desires” that would unfold in him: the desire for a nice flat, for freedom from one’s boss, etc. In a similar way, the man of religious appreciation imagines the mourning of the road in the sense of “imagining what it is like”. He imagines the thoughts he would have in the face of human mourning and, in turn, establishes in himself the feelings and desires which these thoughts generate.

Consequently, when describing the religious emotions embedded in the religious appreciation of a mundane-sacred object, it is helpful to speak of a “mundane counterpart” to his emotional reaction to the mundane-sacred object. It is precisely in terms of this mundane counterpart – such as the “normal” emotional reaction to a man in mourning – that we can say the emotion he feels in response to the mundane-sacred object is the *same* as, or classifiable into, the emotion he would feel towards a living being in mourning. His *feeling* towards what he sees in the mundane-sacred object is, like his *perception* of it, only unasserted or contemplated.

Is the emotion he feels as *intense* as the emotion he feels toward a man in mourning? Surprisingly, the emotion may be *more* intense. Unlike the emotions that we have toward artworks, which often evoke milder feelings than in daily life, sacred objects are often *expected* to stimulate intense reactions. Fervour is – depending, of course, on the religious tradition – often valued. The mundane-sacred object is not truly appreciated if the observer is not fully engaged emotionally and intellectually with that object. Here one thinks of the dances of the Hasidim around the Torah, or the intensity of meditation on a Bodhisattva’s “qualities” depicted in a mandala. In

this regard, the intensity of the religious emotion is a result not of the degree of belief in the man's thoughts, but instead on the level of *imaginative involvement* he has with his sacred object.

It is obviously the case that religious appreciation incorporates emotion, and that without emotion human beings would probably find their experiences of mundane-sacred objects rather dull, perhaps even without value altogether. The expression of a mundane-sacred judgment, therefore, seems to be more than the mere expression of a thought. It is quite common for someone, while looking at a mundane-sacred object, to comment that it inspires certain *feelings* – of joy, mourning, heaviness, and so on. These verbal comments are, as we argued, not to be dismissed as metaphors. They often transpire in circumstances that prevent us from interpreting them as the mere expression of intellectual thoughts. A man who speaks with such emotional language wishes to describe his feelings in precisely *that* way, with *that* diction. Evidently for him, those emotions are an integral part of his experience and, thus, give rise to his choice of language. Indeed, given certain rituals, the man of religious appreciation will describe his feelings toward the mundane-sacred object in terms that can themselves be interpreted as a statement of feeling. For example, he may describe the object in a certain *tone of voice* – perhaps he will express his mundane-sacred judgment deeply and slowly, as if to imply that not any tone of voice is appropriate for this grave occasion.

Now, regarding religious emotions, someone might say, “Yes, what you claim is all well and good. But what I want to know is what *do the emotions of religious appreciation feel like?*”

Well, if we are assuming the truth of Wittgenstein's private-language argument, then in answer to this question we can do no more than point to the

imagined thoughts of the experience and their relation to beliefs, to the language and desires that typically accompany them, to the physical symptoms of the stated emotions, such as trembling or relaxation or palpitations, to the social behaviours that follow, and so on. In other words, to “know” the “religious emotions” we can only refer to the circumstances wherein they are found. We cannot make a phenomenological investigation into its “pure feeling”. It is this impossibility that renders the religious emotions allegedly “ineffable”. Accordingly, if we attempt to define the emotions inherent in religious appreciation, then we can do no more than communicate thoughts, language, behaviour and circumstances.

CHAPTER 25

THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS APPRECIATION

So far we have outlined the kind of thought and emotion that plays a part in religious appreciation, but we have not yet provided a more complete account about the nature of the experience. We have only asserted that *emotions resulting from the imagination* are components of this religious experience and language. Clearly, though, there must be more to the experience than just imagination and its resulting emotions. Otherwise we would need to conclude that human imagination and religious appreciation are simply the same phenomenon. In truth, imagination is only one component in the wider experience of religious appreciation. And, although it is a key component, there are yet other characteristics to this religious experience. Our task in this chapter will be to elucidate – or rather to speculate about – what these other features are. If our speculation proves to be correct, we shall have delineated the qualities that comprise the nature of religious appreciation. In the end, we shall suggest that the qualities composing religious appreciation are a combination of several features: imaginative or unasserted thought, as we noted earlier; often a sense of enjoyment or passionate interest in a sacred object; a kind of consciousness based on direct sensory contact with a sacred object; a logic of normative rules that surrounds one's responses and language to that object; and a non-utilitarian interest in the mundane-sacred object, an appreciation of it "for its own sake".

Religious Terms

Now our argument began in Part II with a discussion about the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment. We suggested that the meaning of at least a large number of mundane-sacred judgments could be defined by way of the conditions for their acceptance, similar to the way in which Hare elucidated the meaning of moral judgments¹⁷⁶ and Scruton the meaning of aesthetic judgments.¹⁷⁷ We came to conclude, after analyzing what the conditions must be, that the mental state of imagination was an important component in religious appreciation. Imagination seemed to be the only means by which we could salvage the meaning of mundane-sacred judgment from bizarre metaphysical beliefs, to which few would, at any rate, concede.

Yet now, if we recall the many examples of mundane-sacred judgments given in the Introduction, we see that our response-resemblance theory did not offer a *general* explanation of their meaning. Indeed, given that mundane-sacred judgments are indefinitely being produced, it is not possible to give a complete account. Moreover, we have so far only dealt with those mundane-sacred judgments that use language from ordinary discourse. That is, we analyzed mundane-sacred judgments that employ terms such as “mourning” or “joy” and so on. But what about those mundane-sacred judgments that use more decidedly religious words, terms such as “sacred” or “holy” or “evil”, or terms such as in the Buddhist context “kusala” and “akusala”? How do we explain these “sacred words” that describe mundane-sacred objects?¹⁷⁸ Do they likewise have the same meaning or same experience associated with them? Such more decidedly religious mundane-sacred judgments seem to

¹⁷⁶ Richard M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

¹⁷⁷ Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination*.

¹⁷⁸ And, how do we explain other such distinctly religious terms found in other languages?

contain all the customary terms of religious praise and scorn, and they seem almost to stand apart from the rest of the terms that we find in mundane-sacred judgments. To be sure, a mundane-sacred judgment like “The River Ganges is *holy*” seems to have a more distinctly religious quality about it than a mundane-sacred judgment like “The River Ganges is *mourning*”, and this is by dint of the fact that the predicate “holy” does not also have the same kind of commonplace/secular use as does the word “mourning”. Indeed it is the unique presence of such words as “holy” in our wider use of language that prompts us to conclude, in the first place, that there is such a thing as “religious language”, and that “the religious” is an area of concrete human experience. Yet, so far, we have not even bothered to analyze them in mundane-sacred judgment!

Let us, then, now ask: how do we construe the meaning of these “special” mundane-sacred judgments? What do we make of a statement such as “The River Ganges is *holy*”?

Evidently all that can be said in response to these questions is that, if our previous discussion about the meaning of mundane-sacred judgments landed upon the correct procedure for elucidating their meaning, we might likewise attempt to explain the meaning of these more decidedly religious mundane-sacred judgments in terms of the states of mind that are expressed by them. If we can successfully offer a theory that explains these special religious statements, we shall have in our possession the experiential conditions whereby mundane-sacred judgments in general acquire meaning.

We shall begin, then, by considering some of the immediate characteristics of mundane-sacred judgments that employ more religious-based terms. Obviously such language is often *evaluative*. The employment of terms like “holy” or “evil”, or

“kusala” or “akusala” expresses respect or fondness or dislike at an object. It also appears that, when such religious judgments are made, there are distinctively religious attitudes associated with them. These “attitudes” are, as it were, expressed *through* the judgments that employ these terms. We might go so far as to say these attitudes are what determine the structure of religious appreciation and its language. That is, they are what provide this language with its point.

Now it may be objected that the more decidedly religious terms are not only evaluative. They are also *descriptive*. To call a mundane-sacred object “holy” or “evil” is not just to appraise it, it is also to say something about our feelings. A worldly thing that is said to be “evil” indicates not so much the nature of the object as our feelings toward it; an action that is called “kusala” says something about our feelings about that action. According to this theory, we express our feeling by *describing* the mundane-sacred object in terms of the way we feel: we call it holy, glorious, wicked, sacred, and so on, because that is what the object excites *in us*. In this way, these words provide *organization* to our emotional states. For example, a mundane-sacred object may be described as both “glorious” and “holy”, but it is hard to imagine it being both “wicked” and “holy”, since the words seem to indicate divergent, almost incompatible emotions. Here, then, our choice of mundane-sacred predicates seems to convey the compatibilities and incompatibilities of our feelings about mundane-sacred objects. Consequently, we are not merely dealing with evaluations of objects, but also with descriptions of our subjective feelings about those objects.

But is that theory correct?

Well, that idea may be correct, and at some intuitive level it seems to be correct. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that the choice to use these “religious terms”

hinges not so much on a desire to indicate *one's own feelings*, but more on a desire to say something about *the character of the mundane-sacred object*, that thing standing outside ourselves. It seems self-evident that there is a distinction of intention. If a man who uses mundane-sacred judgments means only to demarcate his personal feelings, then why does he choose that kind of religious language, which seems to speak of things outside himself? Why does he not use, say, the language of psychoanalysis, a language-game expressly developed for the purpose of describing one's inner states? Undoubtedly, if there are distinct feelings involved in mundane-sacred judgment, those distinctions are made possible by prior distinctions in the objects they describe, and not the other way around.

But, then, this raises another question. If the point of employing religious terms is not solely to describe personal feelings, if these terms also ascribe a certain character to mundane-sacred objects, how do these evaluative judgments manage to express something specific about those objects to which they are assigned? What exactly are they saying about mundane-sacred objects?

The Quality of Enjoyment and Passionate Interest

To begin to examine this question, we ought to note some of the ways religious terms are used. First, they frequently occur in *interjections*. It is not uncommon to hear people exclaim, "How holy!" or "What evil!" or "Jesus!" or even "God damn it!" when they come across objects in their life. Such exclamations have, for the most part, an evaluative use, conveying positive or negative attitudes towards the objects to which they are directed. Second, religious terms often seem to indicate enjoyment, pleasure or intense interest in an object. For example, it does make sense to say, in a non-religious context, "Drugs are fun, but they disgust me", or "John is a kind fellow, but he bores me". But it hardly seems right to say, "The River Ganges *is* holy and

beautiful, but it disgusts me”, or “That object is definitely sacred, but it bores me”. Such statements would require special circumstances in order to make sense. At least ordinarily, the ascription of a word such as “holy” or “sacred” conveys a sense of attractiveness, a sense of joy in that object, a desire for interjection, as it were. Such words tell us that the object is worth being around, that its presence is a pleasure. Accordingly, *pleasure, enjoyment or passionate interest seems to play an important part in religious appreciation*. And that seems to bear some relation to the fact that mundane-sacred predicates are so often connected to interjections.

The Quality of Normativity

Now another use of religious terms is that they often seem to indicate that the speaker is not indifferent to how others are reacting to the mundane-sacred object. If a man tells you *the River Ganges is holy*, then it is not a matter of unconcern to him that you might disagree. Indeed, if you reply, “Actually, I think the Ganges is a dirty, disgusting river and not the least bit holy”, then you may very well come to suffer blows for your insult. Such an extreme example – and there have been many such in history – shows that the use of religious terms in mundane-sacred judgments presupposes that the responses of others are typically viewed as important. By calling something “holy”, there is often the tacit assumption that *you too* should find it holy. And if you do not, then surely you must have failed to notice something about the mundane-sacred object. Otherwise you *would have* had the appropriate response. In this way, *reasons* start being offered for and against the various judgments about mundane-sacred objects. When a man asserts that X is holy (or not-holy), he may be required to give rational support, and not just a cause, for his judgment.

This fact suggests that embedded in religious appreciation is an almost Kantian “ought”, in which the voicing of a mundane-sacred judgment tacitly *demand*s

agreement from everyone. This interpretation may be a bit strong, however, since not all mundane-sacred judgments have the same degree of fervour associated with them.¹⁷⁹ Even so, it is hard to deny that there is some *normative* force to all mundane-sacred judgment; religious appreciation *does* appear to include a connotation that there is a correct or appropriate response to any given mundane-sacred object. It is merely a matter of observation that people often *do* debate their judgments about mundane-sacred objects, as if in voicing such language they are saying, “you too should respond to this object as I do”. To be sure, in uttering a mundane-sacred judgment, there is a kind of search for *agreement*. And this search, at times, may take the form of logical *persuasion* – by citing, as Aurobindo did with Indian temple architecture, certain features of the mundane-sacred object – or it may take the form of *coercion*, as when religious people resort to violence to convince others of the rightness of their own relationship to some mundane-sacred object. We might even hypothesize that the various rituals surrounding mundane-sacred objects are born out of this prior necessity to establish an agreement in a religious community as to what is the appropriate response to those objects. Such rituals tell us – *all* of us in the community – how we are to react to and speak about the sacred.

Now, given that, it is therefore persuasive to say: *the concept of the “appropriate” is embedded in the experience of religious appreciation*. The feelings and responses toward a mundane-sacred object will be partly a result of a man’s sense of what is correct and acceptable, and this sense will imbue his understanding, interpretations, language and expectations about the mundane-sacred object. *What we have here, then, is something of the “moral” in religious appreciation*.

¹⁷⁹ It is doubtful, for instance, that a typical surfer will care much if you disagree with his contention that the beaches of Hawaii are sacred.

This normative, almost-moral quality to mundane-sacred judgment clearly raises the question of its relation to moral judgment. What are their similarities, and how are they distinguished? Clearly, present in both moral and mundane-sacred judgment is an attitude of disapproval against those who would violate or disagree with the moral or religious code being set out in the judgments. And, in both, this attitude of disapproval comes in various degrees of passion. The range of reactions, in both the moral and religious sphere, can spread from a “live and let live” acceptance of others’ judgments to righteous anger and the application of communal punishment.

Such reactions show that there are similarities between moral and mundane-sacred judgments. However, there are differences too. In religious appreciation, the experience does not turn entirely on the enforcement of or advocacy for a code of behaviour; it also aims at encouraging the capacity to enjoy or to feel a passionate interest in the mundane-sacred object. In other words, a mundane-sacred judgment does not merely say *you should* appreciate some object X. It says *you should appreciate object X because it stimulates. To see X as I see X stimulates pleasure or passion, and so it may be stimulating for you too.* So, unlike the moral judgment, the mundane-sacred judgment seeks to educate or develop the capacity to respond to the world joyfully or passionately, to see some physical object – rather than strictly an action – under the spectacles of eternity, to see it as *ultimate*.

But now we may wonder what kind of “enjoyment” or “passion” is involved in religious appreciation. What does it mean to see an object, especially a physical object, as “ultimate”?

The Qualities of Uniqueness and Ultimacy

As we argued earlier, one answer to the question of what it means to call an object “ultimate” is that the enjoyment of or passionate interest in a mundane-sacred object derives from regarding that object *for its own sake*. Here the mundane-sacred object is *ultimate*. And to see something as ultimate means to see it as unique, as standing on its own as if *infinite*, as if containing never-ending value for the mere fact of being. Indeed, it is because of this “infinite value” that a secular man most likely chooses to use religious language when he comes across something breathtaking in his life. It serves as a way of isolating the object as something particularly special among the world’s manifestations.

Borrowing notions of the aesthetic object, we can define the interest in a mundane-sacred object “for its own sake” as *a desire to continue to have sensory contact with an object, when there is no further reason for that desire in terms of any other desire in which the experience of the mundane-sacred object may satisfy, and where the desire originates from a concept of ultimacy about the mundane-sacred object.*

If we want to understand what it means to regard something as an end in itself, we need only imagine a man who desires one thing in his life – say, prestige. If prestige is all he desires, then he will end up valuing, say, his profession or his wife only in so far as it or she brings him prestige among his fellows, since the admiration of others is all he desires. By contrast, if he appreciates his work or wife *for its or her own sake* then clearly he appreciates it or her as something ultimate. His profession or wife possesses, as it were, infinite value. No amount of approval or disapproval from others can rob him of their importance. And so it is with all things valued for their own sake.

The regard of the mundane-sacred object as unique and ultimate is the impulse to *observe* and *confront* the sacred object, rather than to *use* it. It is the desire to be in its presence rather than exploit it for the presence of something else.

In this respect, religious appreciation is like aesthetic appreciation, and mundane-sacred judgment is like aesthetic judgment. Just as aesthetic judgment hinges on a description of a scene or a melody without reference to an interest beyond that scene or melody, so too does mundane-sacred judgment consist of a reaction to what is seen or heard in the mundane-sacred object, not in order to achieve some further end for it, but to draw attention to *that object*. As with a great artwork, the mundane-sacred object brings our attention and desires to a stop, as it were, by focusing on a particular thing.

We ought to emphasize, if we have not done so before, that, *in religious appreciation there is an element of the "aesthetic"*. Like the aesthete before his beloved artwork, the man of religious appreciation faces the mundane sacred object as if "all else lives in its light". The holy object is not valued because there is no reason for wanting it, but – like great artworks – because there is no other reason but itself for which the object is wanted. As in aesthetics, the desire for the sacred object is not based on a need, but on a conception of it as an end in itself.

Now the "end in itself" quality of mundane-sacred objects is not all there is to religious appreciation, of course. A dog that stops and stares blankly at some object is no more experiencing religious appreciation than it is having an aesthetic experience. It is not enough that some animal merely *sees* an object in order for it to be experienced as a mundane-sacred object. It is not even enough that the animal sees it without any further interest. Simply *to stare* at something is not religious

appreciation. To have an experience of religious appreciation invariably includes thinking *about* the sacred object, even if only to think, “That’s sacred”.

And, because the experience requires some *conception* of the object, it is clear that religious appreciation involves a thought, as we argued in the last chapter. Indeed, regarding something as a mundane-sacred object is grounded with a simultaneous conception about it, in that the conception provides some reason for the desire to continue confronting it. That conception is grounded in some variety of the imagination.

The Sensuous Quality

So far we have characterized religious appreciation in terms of three features. One, it involves a sense of what is appropriate, not unlike the normative quality which we find in moral attitudes. Two, religious appreciation involves enjoyment or passionate interest in an object, not unlike aesthetic attitudes, which are characterized by “pleasure in” aesthetic objects. Three, it includes conceiving and appreciating an object for its own sake, as if it possessed ultimate value. Besides those three *intellectual* and *emotional* features, however, we also need to note the sensuous aspect of religious appreciation. Indeed the main, and perhaps most interesting, quality of religious appreciation is the *perception* of the object itself, the fusing of man’s religious thoughts with his sensory experience of the world.

Let us say a man, after reading the Gospels, is inflamed with admiration for the character of Jesus Christ, and let us assume that he has never seen a sculptural version of Jesus on the Cross. But one day he comes across such an image. Is it not clear that he will now look and study the features of the suffering figure while contemplating the character of the great man of whom he read about in the Gospels? Combining his deep admiration for the character of Jesus with the suffering which he

now *perceives* in the wooden cross before him, it is fair to say he will likely come to experience the character of Jesus *in* the appearance of the image. In this way, through religious appreciation, the sculpture of Jesus on the Cross acquires a sacred aspect for this man. The thoughts of Jesus commingle with the perception itself. His admiration of Jesus, in other words, has become part of his raw impulse to *see* this particular object, since the mental object of his admiration – that imaginative conception – is now manifested in the appearance of the physical object. Here, then, is an example of how the sensuous quality of religious appreciation comes to mix with those other features we mentioned earlier – enjoyment or passionate interest, uniqueness, ultimacy, normativity, unasserted thought.

As we said, the sensory quality of religious appreciation possesses an essential relationship with man's imagination. In religious appreciation, we might say that a man's unasserted thoughts – for example, his contemplation about the suffering of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels – are combined with, or suffuse, the perception of an object (such as a *sculpture* of Jesus nailed to a cross). As we pointed out earlier, thoughts of absent objects can be associated with a perception, as when, for example, someone *chooses* to see an image of a face in the passing clouds, or when one comes to see a sculpture as depicting the agony of Jesus Christ.

Make no mistake about it. Although, in this religious experience, the response towards mundane-sacred objects generates the thoughts and emotions typical of imagination, they are not trivial, just as our responses to great artworks are not trivial. The objects of religious appreciation – the sculptures, the rivers, the mountains, the sacred foods, the scriptures – serve as a physical point in the sensory world on which diverse thoughts and emotions are focused. It is, in part, man's imaginative capacity which allows him to fill his physical, sensory world with religiosity. That is to say, it

is his ability to take what is not there – the nailing of the real Jesus to a cross some two thousand years ago – and see it in what is there – in a sculpture in a Cathedral.

But, again, it is not imagination alone which allows him to do this. It is also the raw physical object. To obtain a fuller grasp of this unique sensory quality of religious appreciation, it is helpful to look at what Buddhist philosophers have taught us about the mind and the sensory world. Consider what has been written about the three successive meditative stages of *nimitta* or “mental signs”, and how *nimitta* may relate to, or illuminate, the idea of religious appreciation. What is *nimitta*? Rupert Gethin, of the University of Bristol, describes it like so:

The concept of *nimitta* is most easily explained with reference to meditation on the coloured disks. To undertake this kind of meditation the mediator should first prepare a disk of the appropriate colour. He should then set it up in front of him and, sitting down, begin to try to place his attention on the disk. The “initial” or “preparatory sign” (*parikamma-nimitta*) is the gross physical object. After some practice, the meditator will no longer need the actual physical object to contemplate, but will be able to visualize the object in his mind directly; the object of meditation is now the “acquired sign” (*uggaha-nimitta*). As the *meditator* investigates and explores the acquired sign, there eventually arises the “counterpart sign” (*patibhaga-nimitta*). The arising of the counterpart sign is concurrent with the attainment of access concentration. Whereas the acquired sign is a mental visualization of the physical object exactly as it appears – an eidetic image – the counterpart sign is a purified conceptual image free of any marks or blemishes. In the case of, say, the white or red disk the mind becomes completely absorbed in the concept of “whiteness” or “redness”. The arising of the counterpart sign is compared to the moon coming out from behind clouds.¹⁸⁰

This brief description of one form of Buddhist meditation may help us clarify the role of the sensory world in religious appreciation. If we compare the experience of “religious appreciation”, and its focus on the “mundane-sacred” physical object, with the “*parikamma-nimitta*”, the consciousness associated with the observation of a “gross physical object”, we find that their *differences* clarify how the sensory world is not only a feature of religious appreciation but also a crucial, defining feature of it. In

¹⁸⁰ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 182-183.

Buddhist meditation, concentration on a physical object, such as a coloured disk, is but an initial stage along an ever more refined path toward *inner* and *non-sensory* mental clarity. But the man of religious appreciation, unlike the Buddhist mystic, is *not* so concerned with some mental abstraction such as “whiteness” itself, perceived solely *in the self*, rather he rejoices in the *external* white object before his eyes – with all its blemishes! He does not desire to go beyond that stage. He does not see it as a *means*. The psychological motive of religious appreciation is not concerned, as it were, with Euclidean purity, of the pure circle resting in front of the mind’s eye, but instead focuses its attention on those concrete, sensory things that make up our everyday life. Here, in this religious experience, the negation or minimization of the sensory world results in the misunderstanding of the whole of religious appreciation.

So this experience of religious appreciation cannot be reduced wholly to “imagination” or any other purely mental category, like a “pure” vision of some inner object. Religious appreciation is too fixed on the physical world.

Religious-Based Terms Revisited

Now, having outlined the main features of religious appreciation, let us conclude with the question from which this chapter began. How do we make sense of the more decidedly religious terms found in mundane-sacred judgment? Our theory of religious appreciation ought to explain the meaning of this language. It is all well and good to say that religious appreciation includes general features – such as an interest in an object for its own sake, normative force, a sense of enjoyment, and so on – but that does not help us explain why there are so many different mundane-sacred judgments employing so many different religious (and mundane) terms. *The River Ganges is Holy* and *The River Ganges is sweet* and *The River Ganges is Evil* may all be “mundane-sacred judgments”, but clearly they cannot be substituted for one another.

Each carries some distinct meaning, and thus some distinct experience. These terms have particular connotations, which are learned in different situations, possibly even under different experiences. They reflect, as it were, different *tastes*, and the different tastes simply mean that different objects are being appreciated. Accordingly, it would appear that terms such as “holy” and “kusala” and “evil” and “mourning” and so on, draw our attention to distinct properties of mundane-sacred objects. And since there are so many mundane-sacred objects, and so many ways of describing their properties, no general theory of religious appreciation could possibly account for all this linguistic meaning and existential experience.

However, borrowing an insight from Wittgenstein’s theory of aesthetic terms, we might be able to meet this challenge. It is conceivable that religiously-based terms were and are learned *first* as interjections. Only later are they converted into adjectival form. Assuming that, *all* mundane-sacred predicates – be they religious terms like “holy” or mundane terms like “mourning” – come with an associated non-descriptive meaning, that is, an immediate, primitive experience, as with all interjections. This experience is the one we have been describing. Our confusion may only rest on the descriptive appearance of mundane-sacred judgments, because once the adjectival form comes into use, once the interjections are translated into *apparent* declaratives, the implication immediately arises that we are facing a true/false descriptive statement. In this way we are misled into thinking that these words refer to properties, or that these statements are making statements about things that can be true or false. And this mistake will be further bolstered by the fact that each term will be learned in the distinct area where it is appropriately applied: to call something “holy” immediately excludes it from the class of all things “evil”, to call something “mourning” immediately excludes it from the class of things called “joy”,

to call something “kusala” immediately excludes it from the class of things called “akusala”. Quite reasonably, such distinctions might lead us to think that different properties are being denoted by these terms.

But, if the origin of this language rests in interjections, we are mistaken to think these terms refer to properties since it is not even essential to suppose that a mundane-sacred predicate such as “holy” or “mourning” has a descriptive meaning, even if it does signify that a man’s appreciation of a sacred object is focused on certain general features about that object. It is perfectly possible that the various mundane-sacred predicates do not draw our attention to features that are present, but only to those realms in which the appreciated features may be discovered. They connect us to areas or objects where a certain kind of religious experience can be stimulated.

One may then ask: why do we have separate mundane-sacred predicates? The answer, perhaps, is because religious appreciation, hinging as it does on unasserted and imaginative thought processes, has a distinct character, which is dependent on the mundane-sacred object it happens to be contemplating. A mountain, a melody, a tree, a sculpture - all these and more - constitute different areas of religious appreciation, generating in turn often different linguistic responses. A man’s religious appreciation of the Himalayas will be a different experience from his religious appreciation of a cast of the Buddha’s footprint, and his religious appreciation of his wife will be distinct from his religious appreciation of his daughter. Each mundane-sacred object of appreciation will be connected, through his thought, to its own distinct area of concrete, real-life experience. This connection to tangible experience will dictate a man’s physical, intellectual, and linguistic responses to the mundane-sacred object. And, so, the character of religious appreciation will be wholly determined by the

sacred objects of his world. But that does not mean that there is not a core experience, such as the one we have been describing, out of which the fuller, more particular experience develops. What we have been discussing is merely the initial layer of a very wide religious experience of the things of the world. So surely, any given experience of the world, given all its uniqueness, enjoys further traits than the ones we have been describing.

But, in trying to answer the question of why we have separate mundane-sacred predicates, we should always point to the fact that religious appreciation is a *contemplative state of mind*. When a man chooses language for a particular mundane-sacred object, he chooses words – “holy”, “joy”, “evil” and so on – to classify those objects of religious appreciation into different kinds. In order to divide up his experiences, he has access to a loose, flexible vocabulary. And this helps him demarcate the entire mundane-sacred phenomena that he comes across in his life. But that breadth of language, from which he draws, in no way undermines the core experience of religious appreciation associated with his judgments. Whether calling something holy or evil, mourning or joy, there are certain qualities to his experience, those very qualities we have been describing: enjoyment of or passionate interest in a sensory object; a conception of that object as possessing value “for its own sake”; a desire to have others agree with one’s judgments about the object; and an imaginative conceptual framework about that object, which is independent of belief and yet at the same time bound to the rational discussion.

Of course, readers of Kant will recognize the similarity between the features of this experience and the kind of features by which we ordinarily describe aesthetic experience. Indeed, that similarity, as stated in the Introduction, is the reason why we first named our experience after “aesthetic appreciation”, since, in the end, this

religious experience, no matter what other features we add to it, shares the imagination, the passion, and the earthiness of our encounters with art and nature. It is, in short, the aesthetic dimension of religious experience.

CHAPTER 26

SOME FINAL REMARKS

One final set of issues that we have not touched upon, but which is no less important, and which we ought to at least raise, concerns the relation of religious appreciation, mundane-sacred judgment and the mundane-sacred object to culture and to politics. What is the connection of the mundane-sacred to the cultural and political health of a society? How *ought* it to be connected? In what way does it relate man with man?

These are no small questions, and certainly deserve more space than a couple concluding remarks. Still, an initial thought is the idea that the concepts of religious appreciation and mundane-sacred judgment severely undermine cultural relativist interpretations of religion, and thus the political and cultural assumption upon which such philosophies are based. The foregoing ideas almost certainly destabilize the popular concept that the various religious and secular tribes comprising humanity subsist as if on isolated conceptual islands, wholly unable to communicate with one another because of their radically different theoretical “frameworks” and “paradigms”. No doubt part of the impulse for seeing religious and secular people in this metaphysically apartheid manner derives from philosophy’s traditional and near-obsessive concern with the otherworldly dimensions of religious language. If humanity’s greatest philosophical minds continually alarm us by pointing to the drastically different religious depictions of the ultimate, if they only concern themselves with the experiences of mysticism and prayer and miracles, then it is a

natural step for us to conclude that, yes, each of the different religions is worlds apart. And mankind (you and I) is therefore also worlds apart - conceptually, intellectually, morally.

With respect to religious appreciation, however, we have discovered a religious experience that seems to subvert this view. Why? Remember the basic constituents of religious appreciation. Religious appreciation hinges on objects of *this* solid concrete world, on things that any of us who have eyes, ears, or hands can perceive, no matter the status of our religious beliefs, no matter from what culture we come. So, at some level, the objects of this experience are open to *everyone*. And, remember, too, that this religious experience is voiced by people who need not be classified as religious in any traditional sense; as we noted, even an atheist beach-bum may express something of this experience; even Bertrand Russell's essay, *A Free Man's Worship*,¹⁸¹ exhibits the basic features of religious appreciation. So, again, at some level, this experience of the sacred is open to all of us, even if our prior metaphysical commitments add or subtract differing ingredients to or from it. Also, remember that mundane-sacred judgments about these things of the physical world employ language gleaned from *ordinary* discourse; that is, words that *everyone* uses. This means that if man can learn a foreign language – and man obviously can – then he can also learn the meaning of the words used to describe mundane-sacred objects in another culture. That is, any man can gain some semantic comprehension of what this experience is intending to communicate, no matter what his personal belief about that object. From that fact dialogue can blossom, as well as further understanding.

All three of these features of the experience of religious appreciation – its physical objects, its day-to-day language, and its presence among the traditionally

¹⁸¹ Bertrand Russell, *A Free Man's Worship and Other Essays* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1976).

religious as well as the robustly secular – reminds us of our shared humanity, our common aspiration to be enthralled by the world we all inhabit. This is a here-and-now experience – concrete, tangible, physical. Thus, when cultural-relativists interpret religion, claiming we are cut off from one another, suffocating in our cultural isolation, as it were, they are guilty of simplifying religious language and reducing religion solely to metaphysics and epistemology. But we have seen that there is an *aesthetic* dimension to religion. And this, the experience of religious appreciation, may very well be the bridge of dialogue between and among us, the desperately needed common ground from which a broader and deeper understanding of one another can be built.

APPENDIX

MORE EXAMPLES OF MUNDANE-SACRED JUDGMENTS

When... I prayed with my heart, everything around me seemed delightful and marvelous. The trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, the light seemed to be telling me that they existed for man's sake, that they witnessed to the love of God for man, that everything proved the love of God for man, that all things prayed to God and sang His praise.

The Russian Pilgrim¹⁸²

Form is a revelation of essence.

Eckhart¹⁸³

Forget all about the brush and ink. Then you shall learn the truth about landscapes.

Ching Hao¹⁸⁴

The music of Cheng is lewd and corrupting, the music of Sung is soft and makes one effeminate, the music of Wei is repetitious and annoying, and the music of Ch'i is harsh and makes one haughty. These four kinds of music are all sensual music and undermine the people's character, and that is why they cannot be used at the sacrifices. *The Book of Songs* says, "The harmonious sounds are *shu* and *yung* and my ancestor listened to them." *Shu* means "pious" and *yung* means "peaceful".

Confucius¹⁸⁵

When you see the type of a nation's dance, you know its character.

Confucius¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² R. M. French, trans., *The Way of a Pilgrim* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1941), 45.

¹⁸³ Franz Pfeiffer, *Meister Eckhart*, trans. C. de B. Evans (London: John M. Watkins, 1924), I, 380.

¹⁸⁴ Shio Sakanishi, trans., *The Spirit of the Brush* (London: John Murray, 1939), 95-96.

¹⁸⁵ Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Confucius* (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), 265

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

Among the grasses
An unknown flower
Blooming white

Zen Haiku by Shiki¹⁸⁷

There are two things in this world which delight me: women and perfumes. These two things rejoice my eyes, and render me more fervent in devotion.

Muhammad¹⁸⁸

In many respects, Tibet was like any other human society with its share of foibles and miscreants. But in another sense, not only for many modern people but also – poignantly enough – for the Tibetans themselves, Tibet came as close as perhaps a human culture may to being a vajra world. The shocking splendor and magnificence of its landscape; the warm and earthy character of its people; their seeming wholeness and rootedness in their lives; the brilliance of Tibetan philosophy and ethics; and the color, vividness, and drama of its religion – all communicate a life lived close to reality and drawing on it deep springs.

Secret of the Vajra World¹⁸⁹

As a tradition, far from being otherworldly, the Vajrayana directs attention to this world of sensory experience, of happiness and sorrow, of life and death, as the place where ultimate revelation occurs. The practice of tantra opens up an appreciation for ordinary life as the font of inspiration, wisdom and liberation. I suggest to the reader that the color, energy and vivacity of Tibet are owing, in some significant way, to its tantric foundations.

Secret of the Vajra World¹⁹⁰

Unhappy is the land that has long lain sown with the seed of the sower and wants a good husbandman, like a well-shapen maiden who has long gone childless and wants a good husband...

Zend-Avesta¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 232.

¹⁸⁸ Washington Irving, *Life of Mahomet* (London & New York: Everyman's Library, 1944), 231.

¹⁸⁹ Reginald A. Ray, *Secrets of the Vajra World: Tantric Buddhism of Tibet* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2002), 1.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹¹ Mircea Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World*, 174.

In general, rites begin with primitive practices, attain cultured forms, and finally achieve beauty and felicity.

Hsun Tzu¹⁹²

Body is *vehicle*. Body is a temple in which Hari lives...

Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan
Singh Khalsa Yogi Ji¹⁹³

Shabbat is also a time of joy, of good food and wine....

George Robinson¹⁹⁴

All songs are a part of Him, who wears a form of sound.

Vishnu Purana¹⁹⁵

Music expresses the harmony of the universe, while rituals express the order of the universe. Through harmony all things are influenced, and through order all things have a proper place. Music rises from heaven, while rituals are patterned on the earth. To go beyond these patterns would result in violence and disorder. In order to have the proper rituals and music, we must understand the principles of Heaven and Earth.

Confucius¹⁹⁶

Silence is the language of God: it is also the language of the heart.

Swami Sivananda¹⁹⁷

The being of man...is the noblest being of all made things.

The Epistle of Privy Counsel¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Ibid., 234.

¹⁹³ "Why are we Sikhs?" Summer 2002, on line at: www.sikhnet.org.

¹⁹⁴ George Robinson, *Essential Judaism, A Complete Guide To Beliefs, Customs, And Rituals* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 2000), 84.

¹⁹⁵ A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1948), 112.

¹⁹⁶ Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, 259.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Andrieu and Jean Herbert, *La Pratique de la Meditation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1950), 360.

¹⁹⁸ Dom Justin McCann, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing, and Other Treatises* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1943), III.,122.

He thought within himself that this world was far better than Paradise had men eyes to see its glory, and their advantages. For the very miseries and sins and offenses that are in it are the materials of his joy and triumph and glory.

Thomas Traherne¹⁹⁹

Hear, Goddess queen, diffusing silver light,
Bull-horn'd, and wand'ring thro' the gloom of Night.
With stars surrounded, and with circuit wide
Night's torch extending, through the heav'ns you ride;
Female and male, with silv'ry rays you shine,
And now full-orb'd, now tending to decline.
Mother of ages, fruit-producing Moon,
Whose amber orb makes Night's reflected moon:
Lover of horses, splendid queen of night,
All-seeing pow'r, bedeck'd with starry light,
Lover of vigilance, the foe of strife,
In peace rejoicing, and a prudent life:
Fair lamp of Night, its ornament and friend,
Who giv'st to Nature's works their destin'd end.
Queen of the stars, all-wise Diana, hail!
Deck'd with a graceful robe and ample veil.
Come, blessed Goddess, prudent, starry, bright,
Come, moony-lamp, with chaste and splendid light,
Shine on these sacred rites with prosp'rous rays,
And pleas'd accept thy suppliants' mystic praise.

Orpheus: Hymn to the Moon²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Bertram Dobell, ed., *Centuries of Meditations IV* (London: P.J. and A.E. Dobell, 1958), 21.

²⁰⁰ Onomacritus, *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Bertram Dobell and Reeves & Turner, 1896), 24 ff.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andrieu, C. and J. Herbert. *La Pratique de la Meditation*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1950.
- Aristotle. "Poetics." In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vol. 2. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Aune, B. *Knowledge, Mind and Nature*. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Austin, J.L. "The Meaning of a Word." *Philosophical Papers*. Edited by J.O. Urmson, et. al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Baldick, J. "Mazdaism." In *The Religions of Asia*. Edited by F. Hardy. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Beardsley, M. *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*. Edited by M. Wreen and D.M. Callen. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- _____. "Metaphor." Vol. 5. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan, 1967.
- _____. "The Metaphorical Twist." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22 (1962).
- Beattie, J.H.M. *Other Cultures*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Bell, C. *Art*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1914.
- Bennett, J. "Kant, Malcolm, and the Ontological Argument." *A Philosophical Companion to First-Order Logic*. Edited by R. I. G. Hughes. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993.
- Black, M. *Models and Metaphors*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962.
- Blofed, John, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*. London: Rider, 1958.
- Boyce, M. "Zoroastrianism." In *A New Handbook of Living Religions*. Edited by J. Hinnells. London: Penguin, 1998.
- Braithwaite, R. B. *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955.

- Bree, Witch a.k.a. Brenda Knight. *Witch's Brew: Good Spells For Healing*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2001.
- Brenneman, W.L., S.O. Yarian, and A.M. Olson. *The Seeing Eye*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982.
- Brentano, F. *Descriptive Psychology*. Translated and edited by Benito Muller. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Brown, C. *Understanding International Relations*. London: Palgrave, 2001.
- Brown, F.B. *Religious Aesthetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Brown, J. E., recorder and ed. *The Sacred Pipe, Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1953.
- Buber, M. *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988.
- _____. *Ecstatic Confession*. Syracuse University Press Edition, 1996.
- _____. *Hasidism and Modern Man*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988.
- _____. *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Collier Books, 1987.
- _____. *The Knowledge of Man*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1997.
- _____. "With a Monist." In *Pointing the Way*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1990.
- Burnell, A. C., trans. *The Ordinances of Manu*. London: Trubner, 1884.
- Calkins, R.G. *Monuments of Medieval Art*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979.
- Ceaser, J.W. "A genealogy of anti-Americanism." Summer 2003. Online at www.thepublicinterest.com.
- Chisholm, R. *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*. Chapter I. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961.
- Clack, B. R. *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999.
- Collingwood, R.G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Coomaraswamy, A.K. *The Dance of Shiva*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1948.

- Craig, W. L. "Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to *Creatio ex Nihilo*." In *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*. Edited by R. Douglas Geivett, et. al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Dermot, M. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Derrida, J. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated and edited by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- _____. *Positions*. Translated and edited by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Dobell, B., ed. *Centuries of Meditations*. London: P.J. and A.E. Dobell, 1958.
- Eastman, C. A. *The Soul of the Indian*. Boston & New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1911.
- Eliade, M., ed. *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1967.
- _____. *A New Humanism in The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. Edited by Russell T. McCutcheon. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- _____. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. New York: Meridian Books, 1963.
- _____. *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Ellis, A. *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*. New York: Kensington Publishers, 1994.
- French, R. M., trans. *The Way of a Pilgrim*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1941.
- Firth, R. "An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Religion." In *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. Edited by Russell T. McCutcheon. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Forman, R. K. C., ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- _____. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice - Selected Essays and Interviews*. Translated by Donald F. Bouchard, et. al. Edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

- _____. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture - Interviews and Other Writings*.
Translated by Alan Sheridan, et. al. Edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. New
York: Routledge, 1988.
- _____. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*.
Translated and edited by Colin Gordon, et. al. New York: Pantheon Books,
1980.
- Frazer, J.G. *The Golden Bough*. London: Macmillan, 1922.
- Friedman, M., ed. *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*. Atlantic
Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1996.
- Gadamer, H. G. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Translated by
Nicholas Walker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Gardner, S. "Aesthetics." In *Philosophy 1: A Guide Through the Subject*. Edited by
A.C. Grayling. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Geach, P.T. and M. Black, eds. "Assertion." *Philosophical Review*, 74, 1965.
- _____. *Mental Acts*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.
- _____. *Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.
- Geivett, R. D., et. al., eds. *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Gellner, E. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London and New York:
Routledge, 1992.
- Gethin, R. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Gombrich, E. H. *Art and Illusion*. London: Phaidon, 1977.
- Goodman, N. *Languages of Art*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976.
- Grand, R. and D. Tracy. *A Short Interpretation of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress
Press, 1984.
- Grayling, A. C., ed. *Philosophy 1: A Guide Through the Subject*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2001.
- Grice, H.P. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,
1989.
- Hanslick, E. *On the Musically Beautiful*. Translated by Geoffrey Payzant.
Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.
- Hare, R. M. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

- Hinnels, J., ed. *A New Handbook of Living Religions*. London: Penguin, 1998.
- Hobhouse, S., ed. *Selected Mystical Writings of William Law*. London: Rockliff, 1949.
- Hughes, G.J. *The Nature of God*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Hughes, R. I. G., ed. *A Philosophical Companion to First-Order Logic*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993.
- Hume, D. "Of the Standard of Taste." In *"Of the Standard of Taste" and Other Essays*. Edited by John W. Lenz. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.
- Husserl, E. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952.
- Huxley, A. *The Doors of Perception*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963.
- Irving, W. *Life of Mahomet*. London & New York: Everyman's Library, 1944.
- Ishiguro, H. "Imagination." In *British Analytical Philosophy*. Edited by Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Jacobi, H., trans. *Jaina Sutras*. New York: Dover Publications, 1962, II.
- James, M. R. trans. *The Apocryphal New Testament*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953.
- James, W. *The Will To Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. (New York: Dover, 1959.
- Jordan, J., ed. *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager*. Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1994.
- Kant, I. *The Critique of Judgement*. Translated by James Creed Meredith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Katz, S. T., ed. *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Kepnes, S. *The Text as Thou*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling and Sickness unto Death*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1954.
- Kristensen, W.B. *The Meaning of Religion*. Translated by J.B. Carman. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960.

- Lash, N. *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God*. Britain: SCM Press Ltd, 1988.
- Leeuw, G. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.
- Lyons, J. *Semantics*. Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Macfie, A. L., ed. *Orientalism: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- MacIntyre, A. "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?" *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*. Edited by R.T. McCutcheon. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Magee, B. *Popper*. London: Fontana Press, 1985.
- Malcolm, N. "Anselm's Ontological Arguments." In *The Existence of God*. Edited by John Hick. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1964.
- _____. "The Groundlessness of Belief." In *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*. Edited by R. D. Geivett and B. Sweetman. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- _____. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.
- _____. *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- McCann, D. J., ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing, and Other Treatises*. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1943.
- McClendon, J. Wm. and J. M. Smith. *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*. Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, Pa., 1994.
- McCutcheon, R. T., ed. *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Meager, R. "Aesthetic Concepts." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 10 (1970).
- Moore, G.E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903.
- Moran, D. and T. Mooney, ed. *The Phenomenology Reader*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Neenan, M. "Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy." In *Counselling and Psychotherapy*. Edited by Stephen Palmer, London: SAGE Publications, 2001.
- Nicholson, R., trans. *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*. London: Luzac, 1934.

- Newton-De Molina, David ed. *On Literary Intention*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976.
- Nietzsche, F. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Press, 1966.
- _____. "The Will to Power as Art." In *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, et. al. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- Olson, C. *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Onomacritus. *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*. Translated by Thomas Taylor. London: Bertram Dobell and Reeves & Turner, 1896.
- Otto, R. "The Idea of the Holy." In *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. Edited by Russell T. McCutcheon. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Paden, W. E. *Interpreting the Sacred*. Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1992.
- _____. *Religious Worlds*. Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1994.
- Pals, D. L. *Seven Theories of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Perry, W., ed. *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000.
- Pfeiffer, F. *Meister Eckhar*. Translated by C. de B. Evans. London: John M. Watkins, 1924.
- Phillips, D. Z. *Faith after Foundationalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.
- _____. *Religion Without Explanation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976.
- Piatigorsky, A. *Mythological Deliberations: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Myth*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993.
- Plato. *Republic*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1995.
- Poe, E. A. *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Tales*. New York: Signet Classic, 1998.
- Robinson, G. *Essential Judaism, A Complete Guide To Beliefs, Customs, And Rituals*. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 2000.
- Ruben, D. *Explaining Explanation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

- Russell, B. *A Free Man's Worship and Other Essays*. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1976.
- Ryle, G. *The Concept of Mind*. London: Hutchinson, 1949.
- Said, E. W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Sakanishi, S., trans. *The Spirit of the Brush*. London: John Murray, 1939.
- Sartre, J. *The Psychology of Imagination*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948.
- Scherman, N., ed. *Tanach: The Twenty-Four Books of the Bible*. The Stone Edition. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996.
- Schopenhauer, A. *Parerga and Paralipomena*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Scruton, R. *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture*. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1998.
- _____. *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind*. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1998.
- _____. "Radical Therapy." In *The Politics of Culture and Other Essays*. Great Britain: Cacanet Press, 1981.
- Searle, J.R. *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Sharpe, E. J. *Comparative Religion: A History*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Company, Ltd, 1994.
- _____. *Understanding Religion*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Company, Ltd., 1997.
- Shaw, R. *Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies*. In *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. Edited by Russell T. McCutcheon. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Smart, J.J.C. "The Existence of God." *Church Quarterly Review* 156 (1955).
- Smith, W. C. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- _____. *What is Scripture: A Comparative Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Sowell, T. *Barbarians Inside the Gates And Other Controversial Essays*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999.

- Stiver, D. R. *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 2002.
- Strawson, P. "Imagination and Perception." In *Experience and Theory*. Edited by Lawrence Foster and J.W. Swanson. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970.
- Streng, F. J. *Understanding Religious Life*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1985.
- Suzuki, D.T. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959.
- Tolstoy, L. *What is Art?*. Translated by Almyer Maude. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985.
- Wach, J. *The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions (Religionswissenschaft)*. In *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. Edited by Russell T. McCutcheon. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.
- _____. *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Warnock, M. *Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Weinreich, U. "Explorations in Semantic Theory." In *Theoretical Foundations*. Edited by T.A. Sebeok. The Hague: Mouton, 1966.
- Winkworth, S., trans. *Life and Sermons of Dr. John Tauler*. New York, 1858.
- Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Book*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998.
- _____. *Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- _____. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Compiled from notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor. Edited by Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997.
- _____. *Philosophical Investigation*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998.
- _____. *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. Translated by A.C. Miles. Doncaster: Brynmill Press, 1979.
- _____. *Zettle*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.
- Wmsatt, W.K. and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." In *On Literary Intention*. Edited by David Newton-De Molina. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976.

Wollheim, R. *On Art and the Mind*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974.

_____. *The Mind and its Depths*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.

_____. *Painting as an Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Yandell, K. E. *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Yutang, L. *The Importance of Living*. New York: The John Day Company, Inc., 1937.

_____. *The Wisdom of Confucius*. New York: The Modern Library, 1938.

WEBSITES

www.buddhamaitreya.org

www.cheraglibrary.org

www.hindunet.org

www.shantimayi.com

www.sikhnet.com

www.whatisscientology.org

