MCR-C 302

Research Methodology in Comparative Religion

Unit II

- Man Centric Approach to Religions
- Society Centric Approaches to Religions: Durkheim and Max Weber
- Spiritual and Psychological Phenomenon: Freud and Jung
- Religious Experience of William James and Numinous of Otto

Course Title: Research Methodology in Comparative Religion
Course Code: MCR-C 302
Department: Religious Studies
Year: 2016

Contributor’s Name: Aamir Habib
Email: aamirhabbullah@gmail.com
Contact: Department of Religious Studies, CUK, Srinagar, Nowgam, Campus II. Cell: +918491023566
Designation: Assistant Professor
Friedrich Max Muller, (1823–1900), German-born philologist and Vedic scholar, professor at Oxford University and celebrated public lecturer in the comparative study of language, mythology, and religion, editor of the *Rig-Veda Samhita* (6 vols.), and Editor of *The Sacred Books of the East* (50 vols.).

Friedrich Max Muller was born on December 6, 1823, in Dessau, in the small German Duchy of Anhalt-Dessau. His father, Wilhelm Muller (1794–1827), had been a distinguished young Romantic poet known to many as the “Byron of Germany” for his *Griechen Lieder*, written in support of Greek nationalism. Before Wilhelm’s death, Franz Schubert had composed a pair of song cycles—*Winterreise* and *Die Schone Mullerin*—that immortalized two of Wilhelm’s best sets of poems. Max Muller’s mother, Adelheide Muller (c. 1799–1883), had been the eldest daughter of Ludwig von Basedow, a chief minister of Anhalt-Dessau. Max Muller was educated in nearby Leipzig, at the Nicolai-Schule where Leibniz also had been a student, and then at the University of Leipzig, where his father’s memory opened doors for Muller into the city’s artistic circles. Muller at first considered a career as a poet and musician before settling upon the life of a scholar. Although he studied philosophy with Christian Weisse and M. W. Drobisch, Muller proved to be an especially gifted student of languages, mastering Greek and Latin as well as Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, the latter of which he had taken under Hermann Brockhaus.

After completing a Ph.D. in philosophy in 1843, Muller continued his studies in Sanskrit and comparative philology at Berlin under Franz Bopp, who had been famous for examining the linguistic links among the so-called Aryan family of languages, and Friedrich Schelling, under whose influence Muller himself began to see striking parallels between the history of language and the history of religion. In early 1845, Muller travelled to Paris to study Sanskrit under Eugene Burnouf. Although Muller’s brief stay in Berlin saw the publication of his first book, a German translation of ancient Indian fables known as the *Hitopadesa*, it was in Paris where Muller received the research direction he needed. At Burnouf’s urging, and with the diplomatic support of Baron Christian von Bunsen, Muller was commissioned by the East India Company and Oxford University Press to edit a critical edition of the *Rg-Veda*, a project that would take him twenty-four years to complete and would culminate in the six-volume *Rig-Veda Samhita*, with Sanaya’s commentary. In 1846, Muller travelled to London, where a complete set of the Vedas was archived. Bunsen also helped Muller secure his first teaching and research positions at Oxford. Except for brief excursions to the Continent, Muller
worked and resided at Oxford for the remainder of his life.

In 1856, Muller achieved broad public recognition when he published his book-length essay “Comparative Mythology.” In this essay, Muller applied current linguistic analysis to the study of mythology in order to account in a more intelligible manner for the creation of myths. According to Muller, the sun in its various phenomenal modes was the chief source of ancient mythology. In myths Muller saw not simply the personification of the sun, the dawn, the twilight, and so on, but a metaphysical correspondence that human thought and human language drew between the perception of nature and the analogies that the ancient Indo-Europeans had used when communicating what they perceived. The names that people gave to these phenomena, the *nomen* (sing. *nomen*), were later mistaken for divine beings, or *numina* (sing. *numen*), and myths began to develop around these names to account for their existence. Thus, for Muller, mythology represented an earlier “mythopoeic” period or strata in the evolution of human thought and, as such, was viewed by him as a vestige of the past that still impressed itself on the thought and language of the present. Though Muller appears to have borrowed this and other ideas from Burnouf, including his assertion that mythology is a “disease” or weakness of language, the solar thesis that Muller had advanced as a young scholar came in time to overshadow much of his later, more original, thought. Beginning in the 1870s, critics, such as Andrew Lang, savagely attacked Muller’s views on mythology. Indeed, it was Lang’s relentless barrage against Muller that seemed to have had the most deleterious effect on the respect and influence that Muller’s views on mythology had earlier enjoyed.

In 1858 Muller was elected fellow of All Souls College, which, along with his stipend as deputy Taylorian professor of modern European languages, provided a sufficient income for him to marry and raise a family. In 1859, he published his most scholarly work to that point, *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*. Although in 1860 Muller had lost a bitter election bid to fill Oxford’s Boden Chair in Sanskrit, in 1861 and again in 1863 he presented a series of celebrated lectures on the study of language that were published in two volumes as *Lectures on the Science of Language*. By now Muller had become a leading voice in his field and, in recognition of his achievements, Oxford University created for him a chair in comparative philology, which he occupied from 1868 until his retirement in 1875.

In his lifetime Max Muller achieved renown not only for his work in comparative philology and mythology, but also as a champion for the comparative study of religion as a “science” apart from theology. But, despite his best efforts, Muller’s work would never gain the lasting success for which he had hoped. After his death in 1900, a *Times* of London obituary mourned his loss, acclaiming him “one of the most brilliant and prolific writers of our time; one whose voice has charmed several generations of Englishmen; who was a great scholar . . . possessing . . . a power of breathing human interest into dry bones, a curiously sympathetic intelligence and a rare mixture of the talents of the poet and the savant”. But others were much less effusive, such as Louis Henry Jordan, who called Muller’s work in comparative religion “incomplete and strangely defective.” Jordan believed that Muller had “attempted to be an investigator in far too many departments” and thus “was able to devote only such fragmentary leisure as he could manage to command. It was for this reason that he never really found time to apply himself, with resolute and persistent purpose, to the promotion of Comparative Religion”.

Although Muller could not resist the temptation to open every door that invited his curiosity, he had
in fact outlined for himself a specific research program that focused on questions concerning the origins and development of religion, mythology, and philosophy (or rather, cognitive thought) through a “scientific,” that is, comparative and historical, examination of language. It was near the end of his life, in his *Contributions to the Science of Mythology* (1897), that Muller laid out for his readers the logic behind the four sciences to which he had devoted much of his fifty-year career at Oxford. Following the method of analyzing and clarifying concepts that he adopted from the German philosophers Johann Herbart and Friedrich Schelling, Muller’s aim was to trace the Indo-European (or Aryan) languages back to their common word roots, layer by layer, in order to uncover and comprehend “the whole sphere of activity of the human mind from the earliest period within the reach of our knowledge to the present day”. As he explained further:

There is nothing more ancient in the world than language. The history of man begins, not with rude flints, rock temples or pyramids, but with language. The second stage is represented by myths as the first attempts at translating the phenomena of nature into thought. The third stage is that of religion or the recognition of moral powers, and in the end of One Moral Power behind and above all nature. The fourth and last is philosophy, or a critique of the powers of reason in their legitimate working on the data of experience.

Muller believed that in the ancient Vedic scriptures, especially in its mythology, he had found the roots of human thought and the earliest form of religion. As he had proclaimed in his *Autobiography*:

All knowledge, whether individual or possessed by mankind at large, must have begun with what the senses can perceive, before it could rise to signify something unperceived by the senses. Only after the blue aether had been perceived and named, was it possible to conceive and speak of the sky as active, as an agent, as a god. The step from the visible to the invisible, from the perceived to the conceived, from nature to nature’s gods, and from nature’s god to a more sublime unseen and spiritual power. All this seemed to pass before our very eyes in the Veda, and then to be reflected in Homer and Pindar.

Over three decades earlier, in the preface to his multi-volume collection of essays, *Chips from a German Workshop* (1867), Muller had already arrived at the interconnection among language, mythology, religion, and thought and the need for scholars to examine these connections historically and comparatively. As he wrote: “There is to my mind no subject more absorbing than tracing the origin and first growth of human thought—not theoretically, but historically”. At times he likened his linguistic work to that of an archaeologist and at other times to a geologist, digging down through the rock and shale to find the bottom layer of human conscious perception upon which the whole history of the evolution of human thought, mythology, and religion had been founded. “Language,” he continued, “still bears the impress of the earliest thoughts of man . . . buried under new thoughts, yet here and there still recoverable in their sharp original outline. . . . By continuing our researches backward from the most modern to the most ancient strata, the very elements and roots of human speech have been reached, and with them the elements and roots of human thought”. As with the roots of language, so with the roots of religion: “The elements and roots of religion were there as far back as we can trace the history of man; and the history of religion, like the history of language, shows us throughout a succession of new combinations of the same radical [or root] elements”. For
Muller, that foundation was the first conscious perception of the Infinite, this “One Moral Power behind and above all nature” mentioned earlier. Muller was convinced that it was from this perception of the Infinite that the root elements of all religions emerged, which included “a sense of human weakness and dependence, a belief in a Divine government of the world, a distinction between good and evil, and a hope of a better life”.

During his long career, Muller was engaged in nearly every intellectual debate that stirred up controversy, the most important of which was the debate over Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859). In his Lectures on the Science of Language, Muller argued forcefully that the distinction between human- and animal-kind was the possession of language by the former. So strong was Muller’s position that when his younger Oxonian colleague Edward Tylor defended Darwin’s position, Muller took it as a breach of their otherwise friendly rivalry. Then, when Darwin’s book The Descent of Man appeared in 1871, Muller responded in 1873 with his Lectures on Mr. Darwin’s Philosophy of Language, aimed largely to counter Darwin’s supporters. Muller reiterated his views more systematically in The Science of Thought (1887), and once more in his Three Lectures on the Science of Language (1889). It should be noted that in all these works, Muller’s main concern had been over the threat that Darwin’s ideas posed, not to religion, but to natural science. Muller, for his part, had already accepted the idea of an evolutionary development of religion, rejecting special revelation or any religious faculty or instinct in humankind as the source of religion or religious ideas. As Muller saw it, unless apes could speak and hence reason, Darwin was flatly wrong. And Muller declared that “language forms an impassable barrier between man and beast”.

Finally, in addition to his public stand against Darwinism, Muller also began to present to the English public his ideas on the comparative study of religion. Although Muller had been recognized chiefly for his work in comparative philology and mythology, it was his lectures in the “science” of religion that would prove to be his most provocative, earning him praise in some circles, but denunciation in others as being little more than an atheist in academic disguise. For instance, one clergyman condemned Muller’s 1888 Gifford Lectures as “nothing less than a crusade against Divine revelation, against Jesus Christ, and against Christianity.”

Muller’s first lecture series on religion, which he titled “Lectures on the Science of Religion,” were given in 1870 and published in 1872 with a later dedication to Ralph Waldo Emerson. His second series of lectures, published in 1878 as Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religions of India, was presented at Westminster Abbey as the inaugural Hibbert Lectures. During this same period, Muller began work as editor of the monumental series The Sacred Books of the East, the highly acclaimed fifty volume collection of sacred scriptures. For this collection, Muller offered several of his own translations, notably of the Upanisads (2 vols., 1879–1884) and of the Dhammapada (1881), both of which remain in print.

During the last decade of his life, Muller returned once more to his views on the natural, or evolutionary, development of religion in four sets of Gifford Lectures, presented in Glasgow between 1888 and 1892. He published these lectures under the titles Natural Religion (1889), Physical Religion (1891), Anthropological Religion (1892), and Theosophy or Psychological Religion (1893). As Muller explained anew, religion began with humanity’s first perception of the Infinite in and beyond nature and natural phenomena. The Infinite has always existed but remained unnoticed until human consciousness rose above that of a brute animal. This awareness came, not by a divine revelation,
but through human reflection upon the Infinite in nature, in humanity, and in the self. In essence, this is what Muller meant by natural, not nature, religion.

Though almost wholly ignored by most modern critics of Muller’s work, these four series of lectures encapsulate Muller’s most complete and developed views, which had originated a half-century earlier. And though Muller believed that in his Science of Religion he was moving beyond theology to history, in the end his views were perhaps too heavily imbued with the language of theology—European as well as non-European—to enable him to work out a truly comparative science of religion.

- Society Centric Approach to Religion: Durkheim and Max Weber

The sociology of religion emerged from the philosophy of the Enlightenment on the one hand and its Romantic critique on the other. Although it attempts to make religion the object of scientific study, sociology has inherited certain presuppositions from the philosophical discourse that have shaped its perspectives on religion in different ways. In order to better understand the development of the sociology of religion, one has to consider how social scientific understandings of religion are informed by basic assumptions about Western modernity, the course of history, and the place of human beings in this world. Three classical paradigms had the strongest impact on the discipline: the approaches of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Here we will study the approaches of later two only.

**EMILE DURKHEIM**

Emile Durkheim, (1858–1917), known generally as France’s first sociologist, was far more than that. David Emile Durkheim was also a historian and theorist of pedagogy, moral education, and morals; a student of traditional societies, ritual life, and the world’s religions; an active agent of social reform and religious change in his own milieu. In terms of his own strategic intellectual goals and his reputation among his contemporaries, Durkheim sought to infuse a sociological apperception into all areas of human life, especially religion. As an academic, he raised this awareness of the social dimension first by systematically challenging the identities of the two leading humanistic disciplines of his day—history and philosophy. In doing so, he sought to radically reorient their practice. To Durkheim, the historians of his day were dull describers and documenters; Durkheim sought instead to explain events by revealing their underlying sociological causes. He likewise thought that philosophy had stagnated by remaining speculative and locked into psychological introspection. Durkheim argued that philosophy could solve its perennial problems only by seeking the empirical social causes to the conditions it considered. Exemplifying this attempt to surpass both history and philosophy by seeking the underlying, collective, empirical causes of human action was one of Durkheim’s earliest books, *Suicide* (1897). In this book, he tried to show that while suicide seemed at first like a lonely, deeply internal, even metaphysical matter, it was to be explained by the conditions of membership in social groups, such as religious communities, to which individuals taking their own lives belonged. Durkheim’s mature sociological approach to religion emerged a decade or so later, but it retained many of the same methodological priorities established in *Suicide*.

Following an innovative pattern, the teenage Durkheim abandoned Jewish religious practice. He thus passed up the professional calling prepared for him as the eldest son in a family with a long history of rabbinic service. He left his home in Epinal, Lorraine, for a new life in Paris, where he attended
one of the classical colleges to prepare for entry into the exclusive Ecole Normale Superieure, the elite institution for educating the influential instituteurs who staffed the nationwide system of rigorously secular state run lycées. After teaching philosophy for several years at provincial lycées, interrupted by a short study tour of German universities (1885–1886) in 1887, Durkheim joined the faculty of the University of Bordeaux in a position created for him in social science and pedagogy, where he remained for fifteen years. There, he produced his first trademark books—The Division of Labor in Society (1893), The Rules of Sociological Method (1895), and Suicide—and many germinal articles. In Bordeaux, Durkheim also began to develop an interest in ethnological topics, such as totemism, and also religion.

Durkheim lived the final fifteen years of his life in Paris, where he succeeded Ferdinand Buisson in the chair of the Science of Education at the Sorbonne. He likewise continued the work he had already begun in Bordeaux, organizing the annual review Lannée sociologique, and pursuing his work on pedagogy, religion, and social science. In the capital, he produced the work for which he is justly most famous, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912). This masterpiece in the study of religion, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, explored so-called primitive ritual and religion and dealt with such topics as the sacred, totem, taboo, sacrifice, ordeals, myth, and symbolism—all set among the aboriginal folk of Australia. He died on the eve of the end of World War I, considerably wounded in spirit by the death of his son, Andre, on the field of battle, but writing what he considered would be his masterpiece, a book to have been entitled La Morale.

In terms of his study of religion, one can perceive the same socializing efforts that Durkheim had employed in regards to the fields of history and philosophy. At the time, the study of religion was dominated by various combinations of philosophy, psychology and Christian theologies. Bringing a social dimension to the study of religion meant that more attention would be accorded the collective, group, or institutional functions and contexts of religion. Durkheim thus spurred the study of religious communities like monastic groups, charismatics, local cults, “world” religions, ritual associations, ethnic and national religions, and such institutions as the church, synagogue, and so on. Further, insofar as his work concerned philosophical, psychological, or theological matters in religion, Durkheim wished to cast a social light upon them in order to show how they were dependent upon their social location for much of their form and content. How, for example, might the early Christian belief in the visitations of the Holy Spirit be related to the effervescent vitality of the young community and its avid ritual life? How and why was the notion and experience of the “sacred” so widely deployed in the religions of the world, and why was it so often linked with the identities of religious communities?

In this respect, the fruitfulness of the research fostered by this articulation of the social dimension of religion for modern religious studies far overshadows that upon which far too much attention has been focused by students of religion—the so-called sociological reduction of religion. Commonly regarded as the most important feature of Durkheim’s thought about religion—doubtless because of the apologetic anxieties it stirs—this “reduction” takes the form of claiming that all talk of God can be reduced to talk about society. As a formula, this is to assert that society and God are identical. There is indeed ample warrant for the view that Durkheim believed that all talk of God was really about and derived from social experience. The religious experience of “spirit” is explainable in terms of the dynamics of crowd induced enthusiasms in rituals. Those who followed the Durkheimian approach did not believe an experience of God or spirit was possible because gods or spirits either
did not exist or were beyond the cognitive abilities of humans to experience. Ritual, on the other hand, was religion in tangible form.

On the other hand, the Durkheimian identity of society and God was also intended to be read as arguing that all social forms contained a spiritual or normative aspect to them. Materialists therefore attacked the Durkheimians for insisting upon the place of norms, values, consensus, beliefs, and other intangibles—“spiritual” factors—in the makeup of human reality. So, on this reading of the God-society identity, the Durkheimians were asserting the “godly” quality of social reality. Societies, whether families, tribes, nations, and so on, were not therefore just agglomerations of particulars, but units of humanity linked together by the common values that at once constitute them and that they hold to be sacred. It is this side of the God-society identity that fits with the deeply held Durkheimian views of the importance of religion and of its primacy in time and agency among other social institutions.

Max Weber

Max Weber (1864–1920), German sociologist, was the most influential (and in many respects the most profound) of twentieth-century social scientists. Educated as a legal historian, Max Weber made original contributions to the study of modern social structure, to the analysis of the economy and the law, to the comparative analysis of civilizations, and to the methodology of the social sciences. Engaged in the politics of his place and time, he brought to his inquiries into authority and power an acute sense of reality. What gave significance and unity to his entire work, however, were his dark reflections on the problem of meaning in human culture. He was acutely aware of the conflict between what he called the metaphysical needs of the human spirit and the constraints of social existence, with the limits of human historical autonomy. It was in this context that his studies of religion acquired a depth and a pathos unmatched to this day.

Weber was the son of a prominent Berlin lawyer typical of the educated bourgeoisie of the German empire under Wilhelm I, immobilized between his abstract attachment to liberal values and his actual predilection for national power. His mother was a devout Lutheran given to charitable works. The view that the dualism that permeated his life and work, between a sublime sensitivity to ethics and a no less pronounced regard for the iron demands of power, came from the conflict of values in his family is no doubt too simple. The dualism, however, was there, and another aspect of it was expressed in his own marriage to the strikingly independent feminist, Marianne Weber. The politicians and scholars of late nineteenth-century Berlin were familiar figures in the household of the Weber’s father. Max himself eventually became a leading, if not the leading, figure of the cultural and political elite of early twentieth-century Germany. Ernst Troeltsch was his colleague and friend at Heidelberg, and the great figure of modern German social Protestantism, Friedrich Naumann, was a close associate. The young Georg Lukács, the revolutionary Ernst Toller, and the poet Stefan George frequented his home. Holding chairs successively at Freiburg, Heidelberg, and Munich, Weber quickly rose to fame as both scholar and publicist. He was an editor of the most distinguished social scientific journal of the time, the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik. He did some of his own most important writing for the encyclopaedic project that he planned with Joseph Schumpeter, Werner Sombart, and others, the Grundriss der Sozialökonomik, 14 vols. (1914–1928). His political activity included work with Naumann’s Evangelischer Sozialkongress and with the “Socialists of the Chair” (a group of university professors advocating social reforms, using the Verein
fur Sozialpolitik as their main instrument of collective research). He frequently contributed articles and editorials to the press. A member of the German delegation to the Versailles peace conference (he abjured the treaty), Weber died before he could participate in the tormented politics of the Weimar republic—or the Third Reich. This bare sketch of his career suggests the complexities with which he struggled. His work is best understood as a desperate effort to effect a precarious synthesis between the contradictory ideas and warring impulses that threaten to sunder modern culture.

Weber’s methodological work is often portrayed as an attempt to obtain detachment and distance from the flux and passions of history. This is perhaps true, but his methodology is inseparable from his metahistorical vision of the world. In opposition to those whom he dismissed as enthusiasts or sectarians, he espoused a politics of realism. For Weber, social science is a disciplined way to know reality, but its scientific status does not entail the promulgation of articulated general laws of the kind developed in physics. Rather, social science for him is concerned with particular historical complexes and sequences. Their unique status does not preclude, and indeed makes more necessary, empirical analysis of their origins and structure. The manifold nature of social phenomena means that the starting point of empirical analysis is a question or a problem generated by the interests and values of the social scientist and his public. Once a particular set of interests and values generates a problem, however, its elements and terms can be stated with relative objectivity. A probable sequence of causation can be reconstructed, often with the aid of an instrumental abstraction that Weber terms an “ideal type.” Against this model, the complexity and nuance of reality are illuminated.

Weber, then, insists on the distinctiveness of the human and social sciences but rejects a capitulation to total subjectivism or relativizing historicism. Social science relies on understanding of human motive in social contexts; he conceives of motive as the beliefs or values underlying action rather than a system of biological drives. Weber is therefore an exponent of an empirical and systematic hermeneutics that provides the essential elements for his reconstruction of institutions in their historicity. His methodological strictures, however, cannot be understood apart from his own empirical inquiries. These inquiries are a singular amalgam of cultural and social analyses. In them the social organization, politics, and culture of the modern Western world are depicted as results of an irreversible process of rationalization. Behaviour is controlled by explicit and formal norms, the person is legally separated from the function or office, and the relationship of ends to means is subject to continuous examination and revision. Rationalization makes possible an enormous expansion of market relationships and, therewith, the explosive productivity of the capitalist economy. The separation of market from community, household, and state is the work of modern law and lawyers. Bureaucracy, with its rules, is the opposite of a hindrance to economic development; it is its precondition.

In the above arguments Weber is describing many of the processes others have termed secularization. Indeed, much modern analysis of secularization leads back to his work. His unmatched portrayal of the autonomy of modern social structures and his relentless critique of oversimplified notions of social conflict contributed to that systematic reinterpretation of Marxism that is one of the more enduring achievements of twentieth-century thought. Weber insists on the relatively restricted historical focus of Marxism and argues that the modern bureaucratic state (and ideologies like nationalism) has attenuated class conflict where it has not subordinated it to other social processes. The struggle of bureaucrats against citizens, he argues, is often as important as
class conflict proper. Withal, his notion of the nature of social causation is far from linear. His structural approach to the history of institutions is infused with a large component of Social Darwinism. Society is a system of meanings imparted to routine and of legitimations attached to power. It is also the locus of perpetual conflict in which groups and nations struggle for their very existence.

It was in this intellectual framework that, despite his description of himself as “religiously unmusical,” he undertook those studies of religion and society that still read as if they were new. He began with the studies of Protestantism exemplified but hardly terminated in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). It is not his intention, he writes, to oppose a one-sided idealistic interpretation of the rise of capitalism to an equally one-sided materialistic one. In fact, his work on Protestantism employs many of the sociological concepts later expanded in his studies of ancient Judaism, and of Chinese and Indian religions.

The analysis of the social identity of the bearers of Protestantism, the distinctive tasks imposed by its beliefs, and above all, the practical consequences drawn by Protestants from doctrine for the conduct of their lives, anticipates the recurrent elements of his sociology of religion. The idea of inner, worldly asceticism in *The Protestant Ethic* and of the pursuit of sanctification by ceaseless devotion to the world’s work ultimately leads to the exquisitely passionate typology of paths to salvation that crowned his comparative studies.

Weber’s early work on Protestantism places much emphasis on the differences between Calvinism and Lutheranism, the archetypical Protestant sects, and has much to say on Roman Catholicism as well. When Troeltsch, in his *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1912), achieved what was for the time being a definitive sociology of Christianity, Weber sought more distant horizons. He began to study the “universal historical relationship of religion and society.” He dealt with prophets and priests in ancient Judaism, with the alternation and fusion of world rejection and world affirmation in Buddhism and Hinduism, with Mandarin rationality and Daoist pantheism in China, and with much else as well. He contrasted the religions of virtuosi with those of popular strata and explored the world religions’ very different consequences for communal life, economic system, and political structure. He examined their origins in the psychological response to social conflict, considered their compromises with social constraints, and showed how religions generated entire systems of belief and value, indeed, how they gave institutional structure and cultural content to civilizations.

Weber’s studies of the world religions, like his work on Protestantism, reflect his spiritual critique of modern culture. The world religions were theodicies, and in general attempted to answer the implacable questions of human existence. They sometimes affirmed their worlds, sometimes rejected them, and invariably formed them. Some believers thought of themselves as active instruments of the supernatural and others as passive vessels of divinity. All struggled against accident and appearance and sought the essence of things. Religions invariably conflicted with the concrete structures of existence, with family and the state, with economic forces, and with the immediate demands of sexuality. The “disenchantment of the world” effected by Calvinism also banished from the world the metaphysical pathos of religion. Contemporary bureaucratic and capitalist society is calculable and efficient. It is also without poetry and speaks only banal prose. Religious revivals, because inauthentic, are bound to fail. The substitute religions of aesthetics and
sexuality in the modern world cannot perform the moral functions of the historical religions. In any event, they are baubles for the intelligentsia, not doctrines that can move nations. The West’s course of cultural and social development is indeed unique, but it is impossible not to be sceptical about its ultimate value. Contemplation of the world religions can teach one stoicism about his or her own fate and admiration for the deep spirituality of other civilizations. The refusal of artificial spirituality and of nostalgia is the necessary corollary of the political attitude that Weber so favours. His ethic of responsibility is a piece of residual Protestantism, a determination to do the work of the world even when that world is brutal, corrupt, or merely profane.

- **Psychological and Spiritual Phenomenon: Freud, Jung and William James**

The psychology of religion studies the phenomena of religion in so far as they may be understood psychologically. Religions and their denominations differ regarding the extent of the psychologizing that they each embrace, tolerate, and reject. For many religious devotees, psychological understanding is inherently antagonistic to religion because it ascribes to the human mind what those devotees credit to more-than-human agencies. They view the psychology of religion as a program that reduces religion to psychology. Other devotees are instead sympathetic to the psychology of religion. They value critical research as an irreplaceable means for the purification of religion from idolatry of the merely human.

Like psychology in general, the psychology of religion is an umbrella term for the findings of several, mutually exclusive schools of thought, each with its own research agenda and methodology. The major disciplinary affiliations include: the academic study of religion; academic psychology; psychoanalysis; analytic psychology; and transpersonal psychology. To understand psychological approach to religion, we will discuss the two mentioned psychologists in this part.

**Sigmund Freud**

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was born to a Jewish family in Freiburg, Germany. The Freuds moved to Vienna when he was four. Throughout his school years, he was an outstanding student. He graduated with distinction from gymnasium in 1878 and took his medical degree at the University of Vienna in 1881. In 1885 he won a modest medical scholarship that allowed him to travel to Paris, where he worked under the great Jean Martin Charcot (1825–1893) at the Salpetriere hospital. Freud was fascinated with Charcot’s work on hysteria, which he treated as a disease, and his use of hypnotism to reproduce symptoms of hysteria in his patients. In 1886 Freud began his practice as a physician in Vienna, where his focus was likewise on nervous disorders. Vienna remained his home until 1938, when he was forced to flee Austria for England following the Nazi Anschluss. He died in London.

Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, once privately remarked, ‘Mankind has always known that it possesses spirit: I had to show it that there are also instincts’. A few sentences later, he went on to reject the validity of religion. ‘Religion originates in the helplessness and anxiety of childhood and early manhood. It cannot be otherwise’. The apparent contradiction is to be explained by the special senses in which Freud referred to spirit and religion. For Freud, spirit (in German, Geist) was an objectively existing intellectual power abroad in the cosmos that is responsible for life, consciousness, and telepathy. Religion, by contrast, was defined, in conformance with liberal nineteenth-century Christian and Jewish theologies, as a ‘system of doctrines and promises’
concerning ‘a careful Providence’ that is imagined ‘in the figure of an enormously exalted father’. Freud saw both magic and religion as misunderstandings of the nature of spirit that substituted infantile hopes and wishes for a scientifically valid parapsychology.

Freud wrote very little about spirit, but extensively about magic and religion. His writings regularly addressed the questions: What is religion? And why are people religious? His answer was always that religion was an error, a cultural neurosis that a rational and realistic person ought to abandon.

Freud expressed his basic view of religion in a dense paragraph in ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood’:

> Psycho-analysis has made us familiar with the intimate connection between the father-complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father, and it brings us evidence every day of how young people lose their religious beliefs as soon as their father’s authority breaks down. Thus we recognize that the roots of the need for religion are in the parental complex; the almighty and just God, and kindly Nature, appear to us as grand sublimations of father and mother, or rather as revivals and restorations of the young child’s ideas of them. Biologically speaking, religiousness is to be traced to the small human child’s long-drawn-out helplessness and need of help; and when at a later date he perceives how truly forlorn and weak he is when confronted with the great forces of life, he feels his condition as he did in childhood, and attempts to deny his own despondency by a regressive revival of the forces which protected his infancy.

With very few changes, Freud maintained the same position for the remainder of his life. Religion functions primarily to offer consolation for human helplessness. The consolation is fictional. God is a fantasy that is based on infantile memories of father and mother and motivated by human helplessness.

In an essay entitled ‘Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices’, Freud noted several parallels between personal rites that occur as symptoms of neurosis and the public rites of religions. He suggested that both arise as symbolic substitutes for unconscious guilt. In neurotic rites, the unconscious guilt is sexual; in religious rites, it is a response to egoism.

In Totem and Taboo, Freud expanded his argument to book length. He began by summarizing the anthropological evidence that incest is prohibited in aboriginal Australian cultures. Noting the widespread practice of avoiding mothers-in-law, Freud commented that extreme forms of avoidance had been added in these cases to a core prohibition of incest, in much the same irrational manner that obsessional neurotics multiply inhibitions. Because no one bothers to prohibit anything that is not desired, the two basic taboos of aboriginal Australian religions – not to kill the totem animal and not to marry within the clan – indicate the content of the oldest and most powerful human desires. These desires are to kill the ancestral totem animal and to commit incest. Freud also connected guilt over the desire for patricide with the widespread belief in, fear of, and devotion toward ancestral spirits. Working with the assumption, widely shared at the time, that aboriginal Australian religion was a surviving instance of the most primitive form of religion, Freud located the Oedipus complex – a boy’s unconscious wish to kill his father and have sex with his mother – at the core of the evolution of religion.
Like many of his contemporaries, Freud treated magic and religion as categorically separate phenomena. Freud maintained that magic was to be explained by the ‘omnipotence of thoughts’, a phenomenon that is found in obsessional neurosis in which thoughts are projected onto and substituted for reality. Magic is narcissistic in that it attributes supernatural power to the self, rather than to ancestral ghosts, totem spirits, and so forth. Because magic does not presuppose the existence of personal spirits, as religion does, Freud treated it as an older, pre-Oedipal stage in cultural evolution. In locating spirit outside the self, religion is less incorrect than magic, although still categorically short of a realistic, scientific worldview. Freud considered totem animals to be earlier than anthropomorphic deities, because they are more fantastic. Totem and Taboo continued with a demonstration that the chief features of animism and magic occur normally in childhood; and concluded with a speculative reconstruction of how the Oedipus complex may have evolved in the species.

In subsequent presentations, Freud repeatedly revised his theory of conscience. He discarded his notion of ‘social instincts’, introduced the concept of personally variable ‘ego ideals’, and settled finally on a partly conscious and partly unconscious process that he termed the ‘superego’. In all cases, religion arose through the repression and symbolic displacement of unconscious guilt, where neurosis arose through the repression and symbolic displacement of sexual instincts.

Freud’s next major statement on religion, The Future of an Illusion, was written as an imaginary dialogue with a proponent of religion. To his previous accounts of religion as a consolation, Freud added several new points. Civilization depends on coercion and the renunciation of instinct. Prohibitions are initially external and imposed on the individual, but through the course of a child’s development they are internalized as the superego. The superego houses both personal ideals that can be a source of rivalry and group ideals that are the basis for forming cultural units. Religious ideals play an important role in the promotion of civilization through their internalization in the superego.

The valuable socializing function of religion does not mitigate the fallacies of its contents. Religion has its basis in the anthropomorphizing of nature. Religion asserts that external reality is subject to personal spirits and gods, on whom one may safely depend as in childhood, one depended on one’s parents. The belief that nature is benign and parental is an illusion. The illusion can be neither verified nor falsified; its treatment as true proceeds out of the wish that it were so, rather than through logical necessity. The illusion is maintained at the cost of denying the corresponding reality. Diagnosing religion as ‘the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity’ that intimidates the intelligence in order to maintain its illusions, Freud predicted that religion would everywhere be abandoned in response to the advancement of science. At the same time, he acknowledged that the veneration of nature had historically promoted the close observations that led to the rise of natural science.

In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud repeated his arguments concerning the regulatory function of religion, but placed greater emphasis on its punitive dimension. Where, in 1927, Freud had written of the superego internalizing civilization; in 1930, he stated that the superego turns aggression against the self. It is this diversion of aggression into guilt that makes civilization possible. Art, religion, and other illusions flourish under the protection, as it were, of the superego. Religion compares badly with art, however, ‘since it imposes equally on everyone its own path to the
acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner – which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence’. In keeping with his increased pessimism, Freud now called religion a ‘mass-delusion’ – a malignancy significantly greater than the merely fanciful error of an ‘illusion’.

Freud also acknowledged that religion has a third function, additional to consolation and socialization. Religion permits instinctual wishes to be ‘sublimated’ through their diversion to social valued and refined ends. Freud viewed religion as second only to art in promoting culture through transformations of sexuality and aggression into civilized behaviour. Freud placed little weight on sublimations, however, saying ‘their intensity is mild as compared with that derived from the sating of crude and primary instinctual impulses’. In his private correspondence with Oskar Pfister, Freud nevertheless acknowledged that pastoral psychology makes more efficient use than psychoanalysis of the therapeutic potential of sublimation.

Freud’s trivialization of the religious function of sublimation was partly nominalistic. In keeping with his definition of religion as ethical theism, Freud asserted that the ‘oceanic feeling’ of mystical experience was not religious, but was connected with religion only secondarily. Freud’s exclusion of mysticism from his discussions of religion may be contrasted, for example, with the many writers, from William James onward, who place the joys of mystical experience at the very centre of their psychologies of religion.

Unlike Totem and Taboo, which anthropologists regarded as amateurish but stimulating, Freud’s Moses and Monotheism made no useful contribution to modern Biblical criticism. Its rejection by academic scholarship has been unequivocal, and its thesis, that Moses was an Egyptian whose impositions on the Jews induced them to murder him, is perhaps best treated as a fantasy requiring psychoanalysis.

The book’s addition to Freud’s theory of religion consists of its analysis of the Mosaic commandment that prohibits the making of Divine images. Freud took the commandment to imply that Moses conceived of a God who has no form. Proceeding from this premise, Freud suggested that the abstract concept of God is derived from concrete images of God, through a ‘triumph of intellectuality over sensuality or, strictly speaking, an instinctual renunciation’. Freud remarked that ‘all such advances in intellectuality have as their consequence that the individual’s self-esteem is increased’.

Freud’s view of religion exhibits his lifelong method of shaping a piece of theory to explain a piece of data, and gradually accumulating a great many pieces. There was no overall system. Many pieces cohere, but others do not. The total picture suffers, as is often remarked, from Freud’s clinical orientation. He understood religion best in so far as religion resembled phenomena that he encountered among his patients: obsessive ritual behaviour, delusional belief-systems, and the like. Freud partly or wholly neglected other features of religion.
Carl Gustav Jung

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), was the originator of a distinctive variety of depth psychology. Until recently, accounts of the life and work of Carl Gustav Jung had emphasized the strong influence of Sigmund Freud and had portrayed Jung as first an obedient follower of Freud and then a rebellious dissident. Although Jung’s ideas were to a great extent influenced by his contact with Freud, Jung’s originality preceded as well as followed his contact with Freud. Jung’s independence stems partly from his Christian background and is expressed in his mature conviction that depth psychology, his form of which he named analytical psychology, is inseparable from a religious appreciation of the world. Jung has had a greater influence on humanistic religious scholarship than has Freud, whose psychology has been more influential in the social sciences.

Jung was born in the village of Kesswil, Switzerland, the son of a Lutheran minister. When he was four years old the family moved to Basel on Lake Constance, where Jung spent his childhood and youth. He took a medical degree from the University of Basel in 1902. Believing that psychiatry would allow him to combine his scientific with his humanistic interests, Jung joined the staff of the Burgholzli, the psychiatric clinic of the University of Zurich. There he worked under Eugen Bleuler, its highly regarded director. In 1903 he married Emma Rauschenbach and moved to Kusnacht, a small village near Zurich, on the shore of Lake Zurich, where he spent the rest of his life.

In 1900 Freud published what came to be his most famous book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and began to attract a talented following. Among the most gifted was Jung. The two corresponded and, in 1906, met. For the next seven years Jung’s life was shaped almost entirely by his relationship with Freud. The two became intimate friends and corresponded extensively. Jung initially concluded that Freud’s theories of the unconscious, dreams, childhood conflicts, and psychological illnesses (neuroses) were essentially correct, and he adopted them in his own psychiatric work. Freud considered Jung his most promising colleague.

The close collaboration did not last, however. Each man began to misunderstand the other, and heated resentments developed. Freud insisted on the sexual roots of neurosis, whereas Jung advanced a nonsexual approach. Jung maintained that he could discern a religious dimension in psychoanalysis, whereas Freud insisted that the basis of psychoanalysis was entirely scientific. The two broke off their correspondence and in 1913 abandoned all professional collaboration. From that time forward their personal lives, careers, psychological theories, and theories of religion diverged, and their bitterness toward each other never abated.

Freud survived his disappointment with Jung by turning his energies to his other followers and to the worldwide recognition that his ideas were receiving, but Jung had far less on which to fall back. Shaken by the break, he found it necessary to isolate himself. In 1913 he resigned from his teaching post at the University of Zurich and withdrew from the International Psychoanalytic Association. He had left the Burgholzli in 1909. Having made these breaks, Jung entered a period of intense inner stress during which he was beset by disturbing fantasies, visions, and dreams. For the next several years he occupied himself with analyzing the products of his own mind. Later he would look back on that turbulent time as the most creative period in his life. At its close he wrote what have become his two most important works, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* and *Psychological Types*. These books established Jung’s reputation as the founder of his own school of depth psychology.
For the remainder of his life, Jung practiced his approach to psychotherapy, wrote prolifically, and lectured and travelled widely. In addition to psychotherapy, two subjects of special interest to him were Western religion and the moral failures of modern society. His best-known books on these subjects are *Answer to Job* and *The Undiscovered Self*. Near the end of his life Jung dictated an autobiographical memoir, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

**Analytical Psychology and Religion**: The relationship between analytical psychology and religion is part of a broader topic: the relationship between modernity and religion. There are at least four views on this issue. The fundamentalist view pits religion against modernity and opts for religion. It denies modernity, or at least its inescapability. For fundamentalists, religion can continue to exist as it purportedly has done since the days of the apostles. Because fundamentalism ignores rather than confronts modernity, it cannot be taken seriously as a response to modernity.

The rationalist view is similar to the fundamentalist one in that it pits religion against modernity. For both fundamentalists and rationalists, there can be no modern religion, and the term modern religion is self-contradictory. However, rationalism, antithetically to fundamentalism, opts for modernity over religion. To rationalists, modernity itself is inescapable. One is born into the modern world. The question, then, is not, as for fundamentalists, whether modernity is acceptable to religion but whether religion is acceptable to modernity. The rationalist answer is no.

For rationalists, modernity is coextensive with science, and science, both natural and social, dooms religion. The scientific attribution of events in the physical world to impersonal processes is incompatible with the religious attribution of those events to the decisions of gods. Similarly, the social scientific attribution of human behaviour to processes such as socialization and internalization is incompatible with the religious attribution of that behaviour to phenomena such as sin and possession. Because rationalists are by definition scientific and cannot have both religion and science, they must reject religion for science. Rationalists do not limit the function of religion to explanation. They recognize that religion serves many other functions as well, such as prescribing values. However, they insist that the non-explanatory functions rest on the explanatory one. For example, acceptance of Jesus as a preacher of ethics depends on acceptance of Jesus as a resurrected being—a scientific impossibility. Religion can work only when its explanation is accepted, and science precludes the acceptance of that explanation.

For rationalists, the impact of science on religion is even more insidious. Science not only competes with religion but also accounts for it. Science explains not only the world but, through social science, religion itself. Religion does not merely cease to explain but becomes the explained. The explanation of religion typically provided transforms the chief function of religion from explanation into something sociological, economic, or psychological. To science is thus ceded not only the explanation provided by religion but also religion as an explanation. Religion remains irreconcilable with modernity because the non-explanatory functions still depend on the explanatory one: if religion can no longer serve to explain the world to its adherents, it cannot exist, in which case it can scarcely serve to do anything else.

The romantic view breaks with both fundamentalism and rationalism in its refusal to oppose religion to modernity. Rather than forcing a choice between the two, it strives to reconcile them. Like fundamentalists, romantics prize religion as an eternal and invaluable possession. Nothing can supersede it. But unlike fundamentalists, romantics do not prize religion as an explanation. Religion
for them serves to do almost anything but explain. It serves to express, to advocate, to comfort, to harmonize, or to give meaning. For rationalists, religion may serve a host of non-explanatory functions alongside its explanatory one; those functions may be more important than the explanatory one; and those functions may overlap with the ones touted by romantics. But religion cannot exist once it stops being an explanation. By contrast, for romantics, religion can still exist and even thrive. In fact, the conflict with science gives religion the opportunity to rid itself of its explanatory baggage and to make explicit for the first time its non-explanatory core. Far from undermining religion, science abets religion by compelling it to show that it has always been something other than an explanation. Romantics turn a necessity into a virtue.

The fourth view of the relationship between religion and modernity is the postmodern one. Like fundamentalists, postmodernists refuse to defer to modernity, but not in the name of religion, which they spurn as fully as rationalists do. In opposing modernity, they appeal not to pre-scientific religion but to post-scientific culture. They reject science as the epitome of modernity, by which they mean above all the belief in objectivity, neutrality, and universal truth. They espouse subjectivity over objectivity, commitment over neutrality, and local truth over universal truth. Like fundamentalists and unlike both rationalists and romantics, postmodernists deny the inescapability of modernity. Indeed, for them the heretofore moderns have already escaped it, for they are now living in postmodern times.

Jung premised analytic psychology on the assumption that the ‘collective unconscious’ or ‘objective psyche’ is universal in compass. The objective psyche is responsible, among other phenomena, for astrology, telepathy, prophecy, and fortuitous physical events – all of which Jung summarized under the term ‘synchronicity’. The objective psyche is cosmic, yet it is simultaneously a component of the personal psyche of each human individual. Dreams manifest materials that originate from both the personal and the collective unconscious. The objective psyche is composed of archetypes. Archetypes exist in the personal psyche as inborn clusters of form and motivation that constitute ‘mentally expressed instincts’. However, the forms and behavioural urges have their source in the objective psyche and not in human genetics alone. Archetypes are personal entities that exist independently of human beings. Jung described them as ‘autonomous animalia gifted with a sort of consciousness and psychic life of their own’.

Jung considered God and the Self to be archetypes. In some passages, he acknowledged that the two were indistinguishable. His concept of Self was adapted from the Hindu atman, which is one with God (Brahman) and equivalent to the mind and substance that are the cosmos. For Jung, the Self was an archetype that represents the unity of consciousness and the unconscious, and individuation was not complete until the Self was realized and psychic integration achieved.

Because Jung insisted that the ‘God within’ was a psychological phenomenon that was not to be confused with an external spiritual being intended by theologians, the case has sometimes been made that Jung psychologized religion and was ultimately concerned only with psychology. If so, Jung psychologized not only God, but the entire process of spiritual emergency. Analytic psychology may alternatively be seen as a psychologically informed practice of religion, whose rejection of theologians’ God in favor of human self-deification is consistent with its roots in Romanticism and Western esotericism.
• Religious Experience of William James and Numinous of Otto

William James

William James (1842–1910), American psychologist and philosopher, was the eldest son of Henry James Sr. (1811–1882), a writer on social and religious subjects esteemed in his day but never famous. William was born in New York City on January 11, 1842. His early education at his father’s hands was supplemented by much travel abroad and some schooling in Boulogne, France, and at the University of Geneva, where his scientific bent developed. Later he attended lectures at the University of Berlin and elsewhere in Germany. James was a voracious reader of philosophy and was particularly concerned with the question of science and materialism. Plagued by illness and “neurasthenic” by temperament, he was long uncertain about a career. He tried his hand at painting with fair success, but after joining the zoologist Louis Agassiz on a fifteen-month expedition to Brazil, James studied chemistry and medicine at Harvard, receiving his medical degree in 1869.

James soon decided against medical practice and began to teach anatomy and physiology at the university. The work of the new German school of physical psychology attracted him, and he prepared to teach the subject, establishing the first psychology laboratory in the United States (and perhaps in the world). After a few years, during which he produced some noted papers, he seized the opportunity in 1878 to add to his teaching a course in philosophy. He spent the rest of his life teaching psychology and philosophy at Harvard and lecturing widely at home and abroad. He died in Chocorua, New Hampshire, on August 26, 1910.

James’s Works: James’s Principles of Psychology, which appeared in two volumes in 1890, was hailed as the summa of current knowledge, much of it based on his own previously published research. When it was reissued in the 1950s, reviewers in journals of psychology called it still able to inspire and instruct. James next published The Will to Believe (1897). Its title essay, first published in 1879, was his first mature statement on the nature of faith, including religious faith. His later volumes, Pragmatism (1907), A Pluralistic Universe and The Meaning of Truth (both 1909), and the posthumous Some Problems of Philosophy (1911) and Essays in Radical Empiricism (1912), rounded out his philosophic vision. Between the Psychology and these works James delivered the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh, published as The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902). Both hailed and criticized, its influence was immediate and lasting. Widely read then and one hundred years later, it stands as a classic in the study of religion.

James framed The Varieties in terms of two questions, the first having to do with the nature and origin of religion and the second with its meaning and significance. The first was, for James, a historical question having to do with function and causation; the second was a question of value. In contrast to many scientists of his era, James maintained that the value of a thing should be assessed not on the basis of its origins but on the basis of its distinctive function.

For the purpose of his lectures, James defined religion in terms of religious experience, that is, “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine”. Although evangelical Protestants traditionally used the term religious experience to refer to the Protestant conversion experience, James imbued the term with a broader, more generic meaning, including under that rubric lectures on religious personality types (the healthy-minded and the sick soul), the divided self,
conversion, saintliness, and mysticism. In keeping with the revival of interest in mysticism at the beginning of the twentieth century, James claimed “personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness”.

James utilized firsthand autobiographical accounts—mostly but not exclusively Christian—as his primary data. He was particularly interested in what he referred to as “‘geniuses’ in the religious line,” persons who were frequently subject to extremes of experience, such as voices, visions, and falling into trance. In contrast to many later psychologists of religion, James was convinced that the more extreme cases would shed the greatest light on religious experience as a whole. He utilized comparison both to explain the origins of such experiences and to identify their unique function. In many instances he adopted a method of “serial study,” in which he arranged phenomena along continua of various sorts to better understand them. The distinction between origins and function allowed James to compare the more extreme forms of religious experience with experiences considered pathological without fear of discrediting religious experience in the process.

The central function of religion, in James’s view, consists in the healing of the self through a connection with “the higher powers.” All religions consist of two parts: an uneasiness and its solution. At the moment of salvation, the individual “becomes conscious that this higher part [of oneself] is conterminous with and continuous with a ‘more’ of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him”. James considered the objective truth of “the more” by asking whether it originated in or beyond the self. He offered Frederick Myers’s notion of the subconscious as a means of mediating between the claims of science and religion, while leaving the ultimate explanation of “the more” as a matter of “over-beliefs” informed by metaphysical convictions.

James’s own metaphysical commitments were such that he did believe, as he indicated in his conclusion and postscript, that there were higher powers that might act through the subconscious self. James, however, did not link origins with value. Parallels between the experiences of geniuses, the religiously devout, and the mentally unstable led James to suggest their common subconscious origins and to insist that such experiences must be evaluated not in terms of their origins but in terms of their value for life. In the end, he stressed, the final test of a belief is “not its origin, but the way it works on the whole”.

Rudolf Otto

Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) was a German systematic theologian who contributed especially to the philosophy and history of religion. As a liberal theologian or, more accurately, a Vermittlungstheologe (theologian of mediation), Otto conceived of systematic theology as a science of religion, whose components were the philosophy, psychology, and history of religions. In his view, philosophy identified the source of religion in a qualitatively unique experience for which he coined the term numinous. Descriptive psychology revealed the non-rational dimensions of this experience as a mysterium tremendum et fascinans, dimensions that, Otto said, were conjoined to rational or conceptual elements through a process that, loosely following Immanuel Kant, he called schematization. Otto’s ideas became foundational for much twentieth-century work in the study of religion that claimed to be phenomenological or scientific rather than theological.

Born on September 25, 1869, in Peine in the region of Hanover, Germany, Otto spent his childhood in Peine and Hildesheim, where his father owned malt factories. After graduating from the
Gymnasium Adreanum in Hildesheim, he studied first at the University of Erlangen, a conservative neo-Lutheran institution, then at the University of Gottingen, where liberal theology and the historical-critical study of the Bible prevailed. He initially prepared for a ministerial career, but conservatives in the German church administration found him unsuitable. Instead of taking a German congregation in Paris, he opted for an academic career, where his prospects were only somewhat brighter. He became a Privatdozent at Gottingen in 1898 and something like a visiting associate professor there in 1906, but official opposition to his liberal views and popularizing activities plagued him for years.

In 1904 Otto adopted the philosophy of Jakob Friedrich Fries, helping to establish a neo-Friesian movement along with two Gottingen colleagues, the philosopher Leonard Nelson, who introduced him to Fries’s thought, and the New Testament scholar Wilhelm Bousset, whom he recruited to the cause. In the same year, however, Otto fell into a deep depression and considered abandoning theology altogether. When his health finally recovered in 1907, Otto returned to teaching and writing, to ecclesiastical and liturgical activities with a group known as "The Friends of Die Christliche Welt" (Die Christliche Welt was a semi-popular magazine for liberal theology), and to political activities, at that time in conjunction with a student-oriented group known as the Akademischer Freibund, the Gottingen chapter of which he, along with Nelson and Bousset, led. His most important publication from the period was Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie und ihre Anwendung auf die Theologie (The Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries, 1909).

In 1911 to 1912 Otto undertook a “world tour”—actually a journey from the Canary Islands to China and Japan—financed through the German government by the cosmopolitan French banker, Albert Kahn, for the purpose of preparing an introduction to the history of religions (never written). During a visit to a Moroccan synagogue on this trip he encountered in memorable fashion the trisagion—“Holy, holy, holy...”—an encounter that he and his disciples later considered the moment when he discovered the Holy. Upon his return, Otto pursued the history of religions as part of a broader strategy of German cultural imperialism, commensurate with the ethical imperialism of the theologian and publicist Paul Rohrbach but in sharp contrast to the militaristic colonialism of organizations like the Naval and Pan-German Leagues. As part of this program he promoted the series Quellen der Religionsgeschichte, a German equivalent to the Sacred Books of the East. In 1913, he was elected to represent Gottingen in the Prussian state legislature, where in 1917 he led a faction of the National-Liberal Party in an attempt to abolish Prussia’s notorious three-tier system of weighting votes. In 1915 he finally received a professoriate in systematic theology at the University of Breslau.

Otto wrote his most famous book, Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy, 1917), during World War I. In part due to the attention this book received, he became professor of systematic theology at the University of Marburg in 1917, where he stayed until his death. During the 1920s he wrote two major comparisons of Indian religions and Christianity, West-östliche Mystik (Mysticism East and West, 1926), originally delivered as Haskell Lectures at Oberlin College in Ohio in 1924, and Die Gnadenreligion Indiens und das Christentum (India’s Religion of Grace and Christianity, 1930), originally the Olaus Petri lectures in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1927. At Marburg Otto founded the Religionskundliche Sammlung, a museum of the world’s religions, on behalf of which he made a second lengthy journey to South Asia in 1927 and 1928. He also attracted younger scholars as students and associates, including Heinrich Frick, Theodor Siegfried, Friedrich Heiler, Ernst Benz, and,
more remotely, Gustav Mensching, Joachim Wach, and James Luther Adams. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, he served on the commission to draft a new constitution, and in 1920 he organized a *Religioser Menschheitsbund* (Religious league of humanity), an international nongovernmental organization that he saw as a necessary complement to the League of Nations. His time in Marburg was also marked by vehement antagonism to his thought from neo-orthodox theologians, represented there by the New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann.

In *Das Heilige* (translated as *The Idea of the Holy*), Otto presents what is probably the best-known phenomenological account of religious experience. Otto describes the universal ‘numinous’ element as a unique a priori category of meaning and value. By *numen* and *numinous*, Otto means the concept of ‘the holy’ minus its moral and rational aspects. By emphasizing this non-moral, non-rational aspect of religion, he isolates the ‘overplus of meaning’ beyond the rational and conceptual. This constitutes the universal essence of religious experience. Since such a unique non-rational experience cannot be defined or conceptualized, symbolic and analogical descriptions are meant to evoke within the reader the experience of the holy. The religious experience of the numinous, as an a priori structure of consciousness, can be reawakened or recognized by means of our innate sense of the numinous.

In this regard, Otto formulates a universal phenomenological structure of religious experience in which the phenomenologist can distinguish autonomous religious phenomena by their numinous aspect and can organize and analyze specific religious manifestations. He points to our ‘creature feeling’ of absolute dependence in the experiential presence of the holy. This sui generis religious experience is described as the experience of the ‘wholly other’ that is qualitatively unique and transcendent.

This insistence on the unique a priori quality of religious experience points to Otto’s antireductionism. Otto rejects the one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic bias of most interpretations and the reduction of religious phenomena to the interpretive schema of linguistic analysis, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and various historicist approaches. This emphasis on the autonomy of religion, with the need for a unique, autonomous approach that is commensurate with interpreting the meaning of irreducibly religious phenomena, is generally accepted by major phenomenologists of religion.
Bibliography


