The View of the Invisible World:
Ninian Smart's Analysis of the Dimensions of Religion and of Religious Experience

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1. Introduction

Ninian Smart's work on religion has been mainly descriptive. In fact he has been critical of such writers as Mircea Eliade and R. C. Zaehner for *not* being descriptive (1994b: 901). In recent work, however, Smart has focused more on the theoretical aspect of his understanding of religion. His analysis of religion as a "six dimensional organism" is familiar to readers since *The Religious Experience of Mankind* in 1969 (although the precise number of these dimensions has varied since). In this essay I wish to reconsider some of the implications of this analysis.

Before I begin, allow me to say that re-reading *The Religious Experience of Mankind* has convinced me that it remains an enlightened and highly informative piece of work. Smart's sensitivity to the problematic nature of terms such as "world religions" (given in scare quotes: 14), his consistent awareness of the reciprocal and complex relations of the various aspects of religion, his insightful emphasis on religions of the ancient Mediterranean world—too often neglected in histories of the major traditions—his inclusion of philosophers representative of "the Humanist Experience," and his religious analysis of secular ideologies have all been important contributions to our contemporary understanding of religion. Moreover, his extensive descriptive account of the history of religions is useful and impressive. My purpose here is to focus on some unexamined assumptions and implications of his position and to move towards a coherent understanding of religion by suggesting solutions to some of the problems Smart left unexplored as he concentrated on his descriptive accounts.

2. The Dimensions

The concept of religion as possessed of various "dimensions" first appeared in what Smart described as "a general account of religion," *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969: 31). Here Smart describes six dimensions: the Ritual, Mythological, Doctrinal, Ethical, Social, and Experiential (1969: 15-25). Ritual is meant "in the sense of some form of outer behavior (such as

closing one's eyes in prayer) coordinated to an inner intention to make contact with, or to participate in, the invisible world" (16). "Myths are stories, and they bring out something concerning the invisible world" (29). "The collection of myths, images, and stories through which the invisible world is symbolized can suitably be called the *mythological* dimension of religion" (18).

Furthermore, "it is convenient to use the term [myth] to include not merely stories about God .., about the gods .., etc., but also the historical events of religious significance in a tradition" (18). Doctrine is "an attempt to give system, clarity, and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythological and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual" and "the world religions owe some of their living power to their success in presenting a total picture of reality, through a coherent system of doctrines" (19). Of the ethical dimension Smart states that "to some extent, the code of ethics of the dominant religion controls the community" (19). However, "we must distinguish between the ethical teachings of a faith, which we shall discuss as the *ethical* dimension of a religion, and the actual sociological effects and circumstances of a religion" (20). Similarly, "it is important to distinguish between the ethical dimension of religion and the *social* dimension. The latter is the mode in which the religion in question is institutionalized, whereby, through its institutions and teachings, it affects the community in which it finds itself" (21). Finally, "[t]he dimensions we have so far discussed would indeed be hard to account for if it were not for the dimension with which this book is centrally concerned: that of experience, the *experiential* dimension. Although men may hope to have contact with and participate in, the invisible world through ritual, personal religion normally involves the hope of, or realization of, experience of that world" (21, 22).

3. The Invisible World

It is apparent that the concept of an "invisible world" is crucial to Smart's analysis. In an introductory chapter of 31 pages, Smart refers to this invisible world 16 times, and also uses equivalents such as "the divine world" (18) and "the sacred world" (61). There appears to be a clear, if implicit, definition of religion as requiring some reference to an invisible world. What makes an ideology secular, apparently, is its refusal to countenance such an invisible world. "If ... we look at [Marxism's] rejection of the supernatural, its lack of concern with the invisible world, its repudiation of revelation and mystical experience, then we shall be inclined to say that it is not a religion" (15). "[I]t is unreasonable to treat Marxism as a religion" precisely because "it denies the possibility of an experience of the invisible world" (22). Yet Smart avoids any explicit statement of such a definition. In fact, he explains the problem of disputed inclusion in the category of

religion as attendant upon the problem of definition, which in turn "arises because there are different aspects, or as I shall call them, dimensions of religion. Whether we include Marxism as a religion depends on which dimension we regard as crucial for our definition" (15). So the dimension of religion is specifically introduced as an alternative to such a categorical definition of religion. The dimensional model allows for differences of emphasis. As he later says, "there are religious movements or manifestations where one or other of the dimensions is so weak as to be virtually absent." Thus "[i]f our seven-dimensional portrait of religions is adequate, then we do not need to worry greatly about further definition of religion" (1989: 21).

However, it still seems that Marxism would be a religion if one defined, say, the future classless utopia as an invisible world, thus permitting Marxist myth and ritual and all the rest. If one insists that Marxism "denies the possibility of an experience of the invisible world" then it cannot possibly be a religion since by definition it cannot have a mythical or ritual dimension at all. The classification of an ideology as religious or secular seems to involve an a priori determination of its reference or non-reference to an "invisible world" rather than a difference of emphasis on any of the dimensions. In order to rescue such a definition from vicious circularity and unfalsifiability it is necessary that we have a clearer understanding of what constitutes reference to an invisible world.

4. The Expansion of the Dimensions and the Decline of the Invisible World

In *The World's Religions* in 1989 Smart introduced a seventh "material" dimension and expanded the titles of the other dimensions: the Practical and Ritual, the Experiential and Emotional, the Narrative or Mythic, the Doctrinal and Philosophical, the Ethical and Legal, the Social and Institutional, and finally the Material dimension (1989: 12-21, he later uses "artistic" as synonymous with the material dimension: 25). The only vestiges of the invisible world in the introductory chapter to *The World's Religions* occur in connection with this experiential and emotional dimension—"born again" conversion is described as "turning around from worldly to otherworldly existence" (14)—and in the narrative or mythic dimension—myths may be about "that mysterious primordial time when the world was in its timeless dawn ...before history" (15, 16). No more explicit reference to, nor any explanation of, the invisible world is offered.

In later editions of *The Religious Experience of Mankind* updated, revised, and renamed *The Religious Experience* (1996b), the original six dimensions are presented without change, complete with the original references to the invisible world. In *Worldviews* (1995), on the other hand, Smart returns to the original six dimensions but *without* the invisible world. It appears that, for whatever reasons, Smart deemed it prudent to avoid such references. It is in this work that Smart begins to elaborate his theoretical analysis, devoting an entire chapter (averaging 14 pages) to each dimension. The only explicit reference to the invisible world (the only use of these actual words) occurs in the introductory thumbnail sketch Smart gives of the dimensions (1995: 7-9). Of the mythic dimension he says, "'myth' is used technically to refer to stories of the gods or other significant beings who have access to an invisible world beyond ours" (7). In the chapter on the mythical dimension, Smart does not expressly describe myth as referring to or giving access to the invisible world. Rather he describes myth as explanation, exemplar, charter, performative utterance, and even "eternal return" ("events described become present. Then becomes *now*": 80). This last, however, can certainly be seen as an implicit reference to an invisible world. There are other such more-or-less indirect references to the invisible world: "[w]hen a person sees the permanent, the impermanence of the world of objects is seen" (61-2); "we imagine the invisible through the visible" (89), "the otherworldly and this-worldly sides of insight" (120), a sacrificial offering makes a journey "from the seen to the unseen world" (123, 124), but no further exposition of the term.

In *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996a) Smart continues his elaboration. He again devotes a chapter—this time averaging 34 pages—to each dimension. He adds another two dimensions, "the political and economic" (1996a: 10). So he has now added three to his original six: the material/artistic, the political, and the economic. Sadly, these additions are rather ineffectual. The coverage of the material dimension in *Dimensions* is inadequate. Ten of a total of thirteen pages devoted to this dimension are a highly condensed history of sacred architecture followed by a page and a half on sacred books and half a page on paintings and sculptures. The treatment of the newly added political and economic dimensions is almost non-existent. Smart does not treat them separately but devotes one chapter of only ten pages to them both. In fact, since he returns to "A reflection on the experiential dimension" in this chapter, politics and economics finally get only *seven* pages between them. Still, Smart has at least opened the door to consideration of the artistic, political, and economic dimensions of religion and that should be applauded. Throughout all the dimensions explicit references to the invisible world are reduced to only three: 79, 128, 130 and, again, no further explanation is given.

5. Religious Experience

In *The Religious Experience of Mankind* and in *Worldviews* Smart had made experience the *sine qua non* of personal religion, and in *Dimensions of the Sacred* he structures the dimensions hierarchically with experience dominant. The Experiential and Emotional Dimension is obviously the heart of Smart's analysis. As we have seen, in *The Religious Experience of Mankind* he stated that experience of the invisible world was the hallmark of religion. He specifically denied Marxism the status of a religion on the grounds that "it denies the possibility of an experience of the invisible world" (1969: 22). Now, in *Dimensions of the Sacred* Smart concentrates on the "emotional reactions to the world and to ritual" of the believer, and on specific "visionary and meditative" and "inaugural and inspirational experiences" of religious leaders (1996a: 11, 166). His analysis identifies "two or three major forms of religious experience which help to account for differences in doctrine. One is *dhyana* and the 'empty' experiences of purified consciousness; another is the experience of the numinous Other" (which Smart refers to as *bhakti*, 67).[1] Shamanism is suggested as "the ancestor, so to speak" of both. (68). But what are these experiences *of*?

In *Worldviews*, having described Rudoph Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as one type of religious experience, Smart goes on to say that

[t]here is another kind of religious experience—mystical experience— ... that does not seem to have the qualities Otto ascribes to the numinous. ... the mystical experience that arises in the process of con-

templation or meditation is non-dual, but the numinous experience is very much dual; the mystical is quiet, but the numinous experience is powerful and turbulent; the mystical seems to be empty of images, while the numinous experience is typically clothed in ideas of encounter with a personal God; the mystical does not give rise to worship or reverence, in so far as there is nothing 'other' to worship or revere. (1995: 61)

Here *in nuce* is the later division of religious experience into *dhyana* and *bhakti*. Smart fleshes this out somewhat.

[O]ne model that we can propose about the way religious experience has developed is as follows: There are two developments of shamanism, which we might call the right wing and the left wing. The right wing focuses on the numinous experience of the other, and the experience of the prophet is a special form of this. Institutionally, the successor of the prophet is the preacher, who tries to recapture something of the spirit of prophecy. The left wing focuses on the mystic or yogi, the one who practices the art of contemplation; institutionally the successor of the mystical teachers of the past is the monk or nun. (1995: 64-5)

These experiences (of the invisible world) shape and are also shaped by the mythology and doctrine of religion (1969: 24, 29). The descriptions given tell us something about what these experiences are *like*, but nothing about what they might be descriptions *of*.

6. Experience and Expression

There are clearly some theoretical problems with this analysis. The separation of the prophet from the mystic appears to uncritically accept biblical accounts of prophecy—an uninvited call forced on unwilling individuals—as a direct experience of some transcendent other. This acceptance of biblical narrative as actual experience is a potentially serious flaw in Smart's work. For example, he consistently refers to the Lucan account of Paul's conversion as an example of an actual experience, rather than a religiously motivated text (1969: 12; 1995: 9, 58; 1996a: 11). On the other hand, for example, the Buddha's "going forth" is described as an account "according to the received story" (1995: 62). Such selective use of the sources, accepting certain reports to be of actual experiences and others to be "received stories," is bound to have a prejudicial effect on Smart's conclusions. Smart himself is not unaware of the problem. He asks, "[h]ow do we tell what belongs to the experience itself and what to the interpretation? If I see a rope ... and perceive it to be a snake ... isn't it true to say I experienced a snake?" (1995: 65). However, he neglects its effects on his own judgments and takes what are clearly expressions to be experiences.

We must always ask whether the believer's claim to experience can be treated as an actual experience. Strictly speaking, the experience does not appear to the scholar, and so, phenomenologically, we are obliged to treat the phenomenon for what it actually is; an expression of an assumed or reported experience. This does not necessarily impair the structure of Smart's analysis, however. He could still assert that expressions of religious experience take two main forms, *bhakti* and *dhyana*, and the remainder of his morphology suffers no significant loss. Yet it would certainly be an improvement to the phenomenological approach if our data were accurately treated as expressions and not as *de facto* experiences. The relationship of experience and expression is complex and their distinction is not finally clear.[2] We cannot, however, allow complexity to deter us from an honest attempt to distinguish experience from expression.

Smart's conflation of religious experience with expression can be seen in his insistence that all revelation is, or should be treated as, "non-propositional" (1969: 27). That is to say that revelation is not in the form of statements. Rather the statements of scripture are about revelation. He thus seeks to locate revelation firmly in human experience rather than expression. Of biblical religion he states "God must reveal himself through a man's human experience" (1969: 27), and the same is held to be true of all revelations. They occur in experience—either personal mystical experience or communal historical experience—and "religious experience involves some kind of 'perception' of the invisible world, or involves a perception that some visible person or thing is a manifestation of the invisible world" (1969: 28).

So religious experience is experience *of the invisible world*. Leaving aside for the moment all the problems surrounding appeals to religious experience pointed out by Robert Sharf (1998) and the lack of any explanation of the term "invisible world," there are difficulties with Smart's statement. A perception of an invisible world is a very different thing from "a perception that" some visible person or thing is a manifestation of the invisible world. Indeed, what does it mean to say that one "perceives that" something visible is a manifestation of something invisible? Surely this is a judgment rather than a perception? Although experienced as a stimulus, it contains much in the way of response.

Smart's expansion of the experiential dimension into the experiential and emotional dimension has certain connected implications. Experience would commonly be seen as a datum, an experience of an object or event—call it x. Emotion is different. It is the emotion itself that one experiences. The emotion may be in response to x, certainly. However, the emotion is not simply of x. A clearer—though itself not completely unproblematic—distinction would be that of stimulus and response. The stimulus is an object or event. The response is an internally generated reaction to the stimulus. One may infer that for Smart the experiential dimension is the combination of stimulus and response. However, in his description of the experiential and emotional dimension in *The World's Religions*, Smart describes what would be considered responses rather than stimuli: "awe," "fear," and "feelings aroused by" certain experiences (1989: 13). So an understanding of this dimension as primarily involving response rather than stimuli seems to be justified.

Religious experience (or the expression of such experience) is what many take to be the defining characteristic of mysticism and in his discussion of the mystical dimension in *Dimensions* Smart's theoretical position is more explicit. He takes a firm stance against those theorists, dubbed "particularists," who argue for the exhaustive cultural conditioning of religious experience. Smart's main argument against the exhaustive cultural conditioning of religious experience appears in "What Would Buddhaghosa Have Made of *The Cloud of Unknowing*" (1993), in which Smart argues from similarities in *The Cloud* and the *Visuddhimagga* ("Path of Purification") to a natural basis for mystical experience. The heart of Smart's argument is the claim that "less ramified language is likely to be closer to immediate experience because more ramified language ... suggests a wider epistemological context" (1993: 105). He explains, "[a] highly ramified description is one in which a number of propositions are presupposed as true, lying well outside what could be revealed by the experience itself ... highly ramified language postulates a fairly extensive context of belief and/or action" (118,

119). Using this method he seeks for a non-ramified description applicable to both *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Visuddhimagga*. He finds, for example, that "from the angle of unramified description, there seems to be a congruence between the procedures of the *Cloud* and the *Path*" (107). Each author describes a condition in which he "hopes to lose consciousness of the self, but he does not wish for annihilation" (108). They both express a "systematic effort to blot out sense perception, memories, and imaginings of the world of our sensory environment and of corresponding inner states" (108), and each "contemplative puts away even the sense datum, wiping out in his mind the perception" (108-09).

There are evident problems with such a method. Smart himself says that "[i]n all our experience, we superimpose knowledge gained from elsewhere" (117). He gives the example of the patch of red perceived outside his window. How does he know that it is bougainvillea? "Not simply by looking, but out of my complex learning of the past" (117). If this is true, and cognitive psychology seems to agree that it is, then it is not possible to have, never mind to describe, a completely "non-ramified" *experience*. Yet Smart concludes from his inspection of the "less ramified" that there is a natural, or culturally unconditioned, religious experience behind the works of both writers.

Although Smart insists that "the claim that 'mysticism is often or everywhere the same' must not be taken too literally" (1996a: 169) he also holds that religious experience is "a 'natural' product of humankind" (168) and that "core-type religious experiences are intrinsic to the human psyche in some way" (177). These core-type experiences are, again, *bhakti* and *dhyana*, numinous and contemplative, which he associates with dualism and non-dualism respectively (170, although he warns that he considers all this a "simplified polarity" [188] to which he adds the shamanic and the panenhenic experience [175]). Once again, however, Smart insists on a reciprocating relationship between experience and expression. While the experiential gives rise to the mythic and doctrinal dimensions, "we need to recognize the power of words ... to fashion these feelings" (178) so narrative can reciprocally influence the experience.

7. Secular and Religious Worldviews

Smart has consistently included secular ideologies in his analysis on the grounds that they function like religions (1996a: 254, 274). In fact, an inability to clearly distinguish secular from religious worldviews may be seen to be a theoretical problem with his analysis. From *The World's Religions* onwards Smart added nationalism to his religious analysis of secular ideologies previously exemplified by Marxism and humanism. As is well known, he considers the term "worldview analysis" to be an appropriate synonym for his study of religion. He insists, however, that these "secular worldviews" are *not* religion: "[n]ationalism is not quite a religion but it has some of the same characteristics" (1995: 45). "[I]t is not really appropriate to try to call them religions ... For the adherents of Marxism and humanism wish to be demarcated strictly from those who espouse religions—they conceive of themselves, on the whole, as antireligious" (1989: 25, and recall 1969: 22). However, despite these denials of the religious status of secular worldviews, Smart analyzes them as religion. He repeatedly points out that secular worldviews have "a distinctly religious-type function" (1989: 25) and that it is, for example, "reasonable to treat modern nationalism in the same terms as reli-

gion" (1989: 24). He asks, "[d]o we want religion to cover secular symbolic systems or not? [and answers] I consider it highly desirable, from various point of view. ... [T]he washing away of a fundamental distinction between religion and secular worldviews enables us to ask more sensible questions about the functions of systems of belief" (1994a: 604). Finally his refusal of the status of religion to these worldviews appears either inconsistent or purely rhetorical. Try as he might, it seems that Smart cannot effectively maintain a distinction between a religious and a non-religious worldview.[3]

8. Worldviews as Views of the Invisible World

It might be suggested that the visible world of objects comes into our perceptions but—as perceived—is never enough to constitute or to simply give a worldview. Empirical perception alone is not a worldview. Even David Hume—prince of skeptics—pointed out that no "is" implies an "ought" and inductive reasoning is determined by custom rather than by perception. That is to say, the worldview of any moral agent or rational entity is always more than merely empirical perception, it is also a culturally determined interpretation, analysis, or reflection upon the "perceived world" (which would not be a "world" at all if it remained a series of uninterpreted perceptions). Smart says of the author of *The Cloud*, "he projects into the formless 'is' ...," and it can be suggested that every worldview is a "projection into the formless is," constructed with reference to the invisible world of cultural determination. This interpretation is supported by Smart's observation that "the future of this world is as far removed from the present 'this-world' as the transcendent" (1994a: 604). Any worldview with a future (or past) thus refers to an invisible world.

Every worldview thus can be seen as a "view" of the invisible world and thus to be religious to that extent. To say that every worldview *is* religious would no doubt cause misunderstanding and objection. Say, rather, that every worldview is liable to religious analysis or that it fulfills religious functions, which is, after all, what Smart has always said about Marxism, Humanism, and Nationalism. This may appear circular, but as an a priori definition of the processes of worldview construction it may yet prove to be of great utility.

9. Religious Experience or Religious Expression

The acceptance of the reciprocal relationships mentioned above is a difficulty for those inclined to seek out linear causal relations. Another example of such reciprocal processes comes when Smart considers the effects of a disposition to apply "certain root concepts and their attendant feelings" continuously to one's experience (1996a: 178). The example he gives is that of experiencing the natural world as the product of a creator deity.

> [T]he way a person experiences the world may be canalized into a disposition, rather like being in love. On the other hand, there is the point at which a kind of conversion occurs: she begins to see the world as the divine handiwork. ... First, you can have the numinous experience; second, you can have the vision of the divine; third, you can have the continuing disposition to see the divine in the world. (179)

This leads to the recognition of "three forms for the two poles" of religious experience: experience, conversion, disposition (195). We must ask which produces which? Does the experience indeed produce the disposition or is it vice versa as Steven

Katz maintains (1978)? One might complain that Smart insists without warrant on the priority of the ("numinous") experience. "Numinous" indicates the experience of some other, separate from and beyond the self. However, this could be induced rather than given. By consistently thinking of, or describing, the experience in terms of certain root concepts the cognition of the other as *divine* would become automatic. That is, the application of the doctrinal dimension can determine the experiential dimension (as Smart indeed allows), the disposition can determine the experience—consider Pascal's exhortation to apply plenty of holy water to induce faith. However, considering the *reciprocity* of experience and narrative claimed, it might well be that these are just the wrong questions. Both Katz's critique of mystical experience and Smart's own insistence that the less ramified a description the more directly it is a description of experience (1996a: 169) indicate that cultural conditioning precedes any *ramified expression* of experience. This is no doubt true. It must be allowed, however, that experience is co-terminous with all conditioning, so we cannot give either priority. One is required to recognize here a reciprocal relationship between stimulus (experience of the invisible world) and response (religious expression).

10. Anamnesis as the View of the Invisible World

Consider, for example, the experience of "timeless light," the "beam of ghostly light" which pierces the cloud of unknowing, which Smart takes to be "within the bounds of metaphors used in the Buddhist tradition" (1993: 116). Such an experience, which "for the littleness of it, it is indivisible and nearly incomprehensible" (117, quoting from *The Cloud*, ch. 4) appears to be comparable to the phenomenon known as "phi," in which sequential static images are perceived as moving. We are all familiar with the way that movies work by the rapid projection of static images to induce a perception of motion. Similarly, in an experiment where two different colored spots of light were lit for fifteen hundredths of a second each, with a fiftieth of a second between them, "the first spot seemed to begin moving and then change color abruptly *in the middle of its illusory passage towards the second location*" (Dennet: 114). "Even on the first trial (that is, without any chance for conditioning), people experience the phi phenomenon" (120). As Dennet points out in this context, "[s]ometimes we seem to remember, even vividly, experiences that never occurred" (116). There is no *perception* of actual motion, but rather a retrospective experience of *having perceived* something, experienced as motion or, in this case, a timeless light. Similarly, in Smart's example, there is no actual *perception* of "bougainvillea" but an *ex post facto* interpretation of a perception as having been a perception of a certain type of flower. Again, the invisible world is only experienced in retrospect, in memory, in report, in testimony: in short, in *expression* rather than in *experience*.

Smart's analysis of *The Cloud* and the *Visuddhimagga* make it clear that in order to attain what Smart calls "the highest mystical experience" (1993: 120—what I am assuming to be a "view of the invisible world"), one must "suppress thought and feeling about all entities ... suppress even the bare consciousness of self" (107). It requires a "systematic effort to blot out sense perception, memories, and imaginings of the world of our sensory environment and of corresponding inner states" (108) and the "contemplative puts away even the sense datum, wiping out in

his mind the perception" (108-09). In "a state of consciousness that ... has none of its ordinary contents and even transcends the subject-object intentionality that is characteristic of ordinary human states" (109) one can "view the invisible world." Only emptied of all empirical experience can consciousness be said to be of the invisible world. I suggest that the withdrawal of attention from all actual contents of perception, the disciplined refusal to respond to all empirical stimuli, could conceivably provoke an experience, analogous to the phi phenomenon, in which the return to ordinary consciousness is accompanied by a vivid recollection of having *experienced something*. Recollection is clearly more response than stimulus, more expression than experience. This kind of "recollection" might appropriately be called *anamnesis*.

It is even more speculative to suggest that such *anamnesis* could yield some awareness of the conditioning that structures and thus creates a worldview from empirical perceptions—or that such awareness of conditioning might permit manipulation of that conditioning. Yet if individuals could so manipulate the conditioning of their own perceptions they could, for example, undergo the experience of the world as manifesting the presence of the numinous God, or experience samsara as nirvana. Would this not go some way to defining and explaining (without falsifying) religious belief and commitment? The implication is that our response can in some way influence the very stimulus to which we are responding. In normal circumstances this would seem unlikely. However, when the stimulus in question is the invisible world, which is to say the sum total of all conditioning and determining factors acting upon our actions and expressions independently of all immediate empirical stimuli, then it can clearly be seen that our expressions and actions *become part of that stimulus*. Thus, in the context of religious behavior, response can indeed influence stimulus. Expression can condition experience, although this need not be exhaustive.

11. Religion and Magic

Even this integration of *anamnesis* into the analysis seems to leave us with little more than a definition of religion as a multi-dimensional activity undertaken with reference to something other than the contents of immediate empirical perception. Thus we would still be unable to distinguish religion from non-religion. However, we should consider Smart's musings on "The old debate about magic and religion" (1996a: 107). He mentions magic as distinct from religion at least a dozen times through this work but gives us no clearly stated analysis of the relationship. Magic is "formulaic performative procedures undertaken in order directly to influence the world ... to change the world, not through personal relations, but through manipulations" (36). Religious rituals, on the other hand "are used as part of a process of self-control that seeks attainment of higher states of consciousness. Methods analogous to religious ritual which are use to control forces in the world on behalf of human goals are typically referred to as magic" (72). Smart comments on humility (53, 101) as a product of the "attitudinal function" of religion (56) and on the "chief human sin" of pride (156). He accepts that "the contemplative pole of experience ... centrally involves self-control" (181). One can see here a clear distinction between magic and religion. Magic seeks to form the world to the will of the practitioner "on behalf of human goals." Religion seeks, through self-control, to adapt the practitioner to some-

thing perceived as larger and ultimately more powerful. Technology is thus an aspect of magic so understood. "Technology then itself becomes a new kind of magic" (1995: 125)[4] and so is *non-religious*. On the other hand, secular worldviews in which the individual is encouraged towards self-sacrifice for a greater good—Marxism for example, but also nationalisms—function *religiously*. Doubtless we benefit from both our ability to manipulate the outside world and the self.

12. Conclusion

We could in this way begin to construct a common understanding of religious experience as an awareness of the otherwise "invisible world" of the determinants of our actions and expressions. Whether those determinants are characterized as "God," "the laws of physics," or "the unconscious mind" is a ramified expression dependent upon the culturally conditioned worldview of the subject. One implication is that there is nothing identifiable as "religious" experience *per se* (as distinct from "non-religious experience"). This avoids the problems inherent in an appeal to a particular subjective experience as constitutive of religion. *Expressions* of experience may be couched in traditional or institutional terms that are either religious or non-religious. *Reactions* to experience may seek to manipulate the self or the other. Thus, expression and action may be religious or non-religious. Such an analysis is consistent with Smart's treatment of the experiential dimension as involving reaction rather than reception. It is also consistent with his emphasis, in *Worldviews*, on an almost "behavioral" approach to religion. "The modern study of religion is about ... the systems of belief that, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings" (1995: 1). The analysis of religion as the motivator of human actions is evident in Smart's repeated references to J. L. Austin's idea of performative utterance: religion is seen as a performative entity (79, 80),[5] and in his references to Wittgenstein's analysis of language "as having multiple forms and uses, among them the function of depicting the world in ways that helped to mobilize feeling and action—and herein lies the realm of religion" (103). This entails that all rational beings and moral agents possess a worldview which is a view of the invisible world and is thus at base "religious" by the dimensional model proposed here. This would justify Smart's analysis of secular ideologies as functionally equivalent to religions. Of course, it also explains Smart's difficulties in distinguishing religious from non-religious worldviews.

The identification of the view of the invisible world involved in all worldviews as *anamnesis* achieves several things. It provides a cognitive model for experience and its religious expression that could be accurately homologous to its mechanisms. It explains the connection between religious expression and the perceptions apprehended as religious experience. Certainly it also introduces a Platonic element to the analysis of religion to which many modern scholars might object. However, the ontological status or "reality" of the invisible world is not assumed. It is attributed and culturally conditioned *although it is not purely subjective*. Similar to the phi phenomena, religious expressions of experience are a genuine responses to actual stimuli. However, the response itself is conditioned by our physical nature and, when *expressed*, cannot be but culturally conditioned.

The suggested analysis of religion and magic, extrapolated from Smart's unelaborated comments provides a workable de-

vice by which to distinguish non-religious (magical) activities from religious ones. Thus resignation to an inability to distinguish any phenomena whatsoever from religion is avoided. As a ramified theory of religion this might be but a faltering first step, but I feel that it is a step in the right direction.

Notes

1. This binary division of religious experience has a long history, traceable back through Zaehner's "Prophetic" and "Wisdom" classifications and the work of Freidrich Heler and Nathan Söderblom. The application of Sanskrit terms to the distinction is Smart's contribution.

2. This problem is dealt with to some extent in Daniel Dennet's *Consciousness Explained* (1991).

3. "One meaning of 'secular' [he says] is roughly 'nontraditionally religious.'" So secular actually *means* religious in some way!

4. This brief discussion of magic and religion in *Worldviews* (1995: 125) should also be considered.

5. Austin was Smart's philosophy supervisor at The Queen's College, Oxford.

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A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies

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Ed. Note: The following is a revised version of a resource that the author created for undergraduate students in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. This guide attempts to explain various aspects of essay writing that students need to know but are rarely explicitly taught. The academic format described is best suited to research essays involving the use of secondary literature. Those who find this guide useful are encouraged to make it available to their students; as with all *bulletin* articles, it may not be reprinted in another form without permission of the CSSR. Anyone wishing to obtain additional copies of this guide should contact the CSSR Executive Office.

1. What Is an Academic Essay?

In order to write a good essay it is customary to develop a thesis, which is a particular proposition to be argued. Essays are not general discussions of a topic, like those found in a textbook. Ideally, they are arguments of a particular point that you consider to be correct and worth making. To begin an essay you should do extensive reading on a specific, as yet unresolved (or too facilely resolved) topic, critically assess the positions of the authors you consult, and then integrate their findings and your own insights into a paper that presents your considered opinion on the matter. The first paragraph (or so) briefly outlines the issue your paper addresses then presents a clearly formulated thesis statement representing your understanding of the best solution. The body of the essay attempts to demonstrate the validity of your thesis through a logical progression of arguments. The final paragraphs sum up what you have demonstrated and comment on its relevance.

Essays, then, do not just summarize handbook discussions of a topic, nor do they just repeat the usual arguments of an established view. They are attempts to convince others that your way of conceptualizing a matter is the most adequate alternative available. The mode of presentation for an essay is therefore analytical: the strengths of your thesis and the weaknesses of the competing theories are demonstrated through discussion and analysis of the relevant evidence. The position defended in your paper does not need to be original. It may be an adaptation of one that you encountered in your research. That is, you may be arguing that a theory offered by one scholar or a group of scholars provides a better explanation of the data than the other theories you encountered.

This argumentative approach is the standard format for a research paper. It is the format one comes across most often in articles published in academic journals. The argumentative essay is the best format to showcase your ability to think critically and independently. It is not, however, the only way to write an essay. A variation on this format is what might be called the exploratory essay, which starts with a problem, intensively analyzes the evidence, then reaches a conclusion (i.e., what otherwise would be the thesis) at the end. Some people prefer to write a paper this way because it allows them to review all the evidence systematically, thereby conveying to their readers that their own assessment is not controlling and biasing their analysis, leading them to conceal evidence they cannot explain. While the motive is commendable, this procedure is probably not the best way to write an essay, for it involves an unnecessarily lengthy presentation of the evidence and leaves your reader wondering what all this analysis is leading up to. Having a thesis statement may engender better organization and clearer communication of your thoughts, for the structure of the paper will be determined by whatever would be the most logical progression of the arguments and discussions that substantiate your case.

Also acceptable is the essay that discusses the origin and development of some aspect of a religion, for instance the evolution of the Hindu god Shiva, or of the practice of sati, or of the Christian conception of Satan. Such issues usually do not lend themselves to the formulation of a single thesis statement because many disparate factors may contribute to a sequence of historical changes, and each must be analyzed individually. Because the scope of these essays is broad and the subjects of analysis are not always controversial, essays like these may not provide as good a forum for demonstrating your ability to think for yourself. It might be better to discuss only one stage in the development of some feature of a religion, particularly a stage about which there is some dispute.

Quite inadequate, however, is the descriptive essay that offers standard information about a religion. Do you remember when you were in junior high school and your teacher told you to write a report on some topic, whereupon you went to the library, opened up the encyclopedia, and tried to put the information into your own words? Your intellect has by now surpassed that challenge. A university research essay is not just newly repackaged information. An essay that offers a mere description of "The Shinto Religion" or "Sikh Wedding Rituals" or "What the Buddha Believed" may not receive a passing grade.

In addition to these general kinds of essays, there are special types of essays that rely on the standard, argumentative approach. One might choose to do a comparative essay—that is, an essay that compares two religious traditions with respect to a particular subject. One might compare Buddhist and Christian understandings of the essence of a human. Or one might compare Israel and Pakistan as two religious states. Essays of this sort still require a thesis or at least a "point" to be made. Noting similarities and differences between two religions is a useless endeavor unless something meriting argument can be demonstrated through this comparison. Thus the comparison must have a definite focus, and the analysis of similarities and differences should substantiate some larger insight, which would be the thesis of the paper.

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