TRANSCENDENTAL ANALYSIS, AND THE OBJECTIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

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INTRODUCTION

About a decade and a half ago, near the end of a detailed survey of recent publications on methodology of the science of religion, the author, Reinhard Pummer, observed, "The literature under review shows the spreading of the awareness of the necessity for a comprehensive philosophy of the science of religion."¹

My aim in this brief essay is to contribute in some way to meeting the need for a comprehensive philosophy not simply of the science of religion but, perhaps more broadly, of the objective or critical study of

religion. Specifically, I intend to elucidate and then suggest an alternative to what I take to be an erroneous epistemological presupposition that frequently skews not just the conclusions propounded in the study of religion but even the issues addressed and the procedures followed. I shall proceed in five main steps.

Lest the detail of these five main steps obscure my basic claim, however, let me state at once just what that claim is. In my judgement, valid human knowing, whether in the study of religion or anywhere else, is not fundamentally an affair of somehow perceiving what supposedly is waiting "out there" or "in here" to be perceived. Rather, it is a matter of intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly asking questions and achieving answers, where the ultimate criteria of intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility are given in the very structure of one's own concrete conscious subjectivity. Careful self-study can reveal that the appropriate model of human cognition is not the ocular—or, more generally, perceptual—model but rather the model that is constituted by one's own successful cognitional performance itself.

Before I undertake my elaboration of this basic contention, however, let me make two further preliminary remarks. First, what I have to say in this essay does not presuppose some very exact definition of religion, and therefore I make no attempt to offer one. Second, I do not feel wedded to any of the technical terms I employ here. In my choice of nouns and adjectives for specifying various aspects of the study of religion, I try to respect what I take to be their more or less standard senses; but I am quite open to considering alternative labels at any point.

THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

It is simply noting the obvious to state that present-day scholars of religion, considered as a group, take at least three different approaches in conducting their studies.

Some of the investigators limit themselves to positive explanation, considering religion only in terms of its exterior and publicly observable features and, in a spirit of personal detachment, attempting to subsume those features under general laws that, at least in principle, enable one both to account for the occurrence of the features and to predict their