PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION.

Philosophical phenomenology is one of the major twentiethcentury philosophies, and the phenomenology of religion is one of the major approaches within religious studies. Although the phenomenology of religion emerges as both a major field of study and an extremely influential approach to religion, formulating an essay on this subject poses serious difficulties. The term has become very popular and is used by numerous scholars who share little if anything in common.

USES OF THE TERM.

For the sake of organization, it is possible to differentiate four major groups of scholars who use the
term *phenomenology of religion*. First, there are works in which *phenomenology of religion* is used in the vaguest, broadest,and most uncritical of ways. Often the term seems to mean nothing more than an investigation of the phenomena of religion. Second, from the Dutch scholar P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920) to such contemporary scholars as the Scandinavian historians of religions Geo Widengren (1907–1996) and A˚ ke Hultkrantz (b. 1920), *phenomenology of religion* means the comparative study and the classification of different types of religious phenomena. There is little if
any regard for specific phenomenological concepts, methods, or procedures of verification. Third, numerous scholars, such as W. Brede Kristensen (1867–1953), Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950), Joachim Wach (1898–1955), C. Jouco Bleeker (1898–1983),

Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), and Jacques Waardenburg (b. 1935), identify the phenomenology of religion as a specific branch, discipline, or method within *Religionswissenschaft*. This is where the most significant contributions of the phenomenology of religion to the study of religion have been
made. Fourth, there are scholars whose phenomenology of religion is influenced by philosophical phenomenology. A few scholars, such as Max Scheler (1874–1928) and Paul Ricoeur (b. 1913), explicitly identify much of their work with philosophical phenomenology. Others, such as Rudolf Otto
(1869–1937), van der Leeuw, and Eliade, use a phenomenological method and are influenced, at least partially, by phenomenological philosophy. There are also influential theological approaches, as seen in the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Paul Tillich

(1886–1965), Edward Farley (b. 1929), and Jean-Luc Marion (b. 1946), that utilize phenomenology of religion as a stage in the formulation of theology.

The terms *phenomenon* and *phenomenology* are derived from the Greek word *phainomenon* (that which shows itself, *or* that which appears). As Herbert Spiegelberg (1904–1990) establishes in the first volume of *The Phenomenological Movement:A Historical Introduction* (1982), the term *phenomenology* has both philosophical and nonphilosophical roots. One encounters nonphilosophical phenomenologies in the natural sciences, especially in the field of physics. With the term *phenomenology*, scientists usually want to emphasize the descriptive, as contrasted with the explanatory, conception of their science. (In the phenomenology of religion, a similar emphasis will be seen, as phenomenologists submit that their approach describes, but does not explain, the nature
of religious phenomena.) A second nonphilosophical use of phenomenology appears in the descriptive, systematic, comparative study of religions in which scholars assemble groups of religious phenomena in order to disclose their major aspects and to formulate their typologies. This phenomenology-as comparative-religion has roots independent of philosophical phenomenology.

The first documented philosophical use of the term *phenomenology* is by the German philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777) in his *Neues Organon* (1764). In a use unrelated to later philosophical phenomenology and to the phenomenology of religion, Lambert defines the term as "the
theory of illusion." In the late eighteenth century, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) devoted considerable analysis to "phenomena" as the data of experience, things that appear to and are constructed by human minds. Such phenomena, which Kant distinguishes from "noumena," or "things-inthemselves" independent of our knowing minds, can be studied rationally, scientifically, and objectively. A similar distinction between religious phenomena as appearances and religious reality-in-itself, which is beyond phenomenology, is found in the "descriptive phenomenologies" of many phenomenologists of religion.

Of all the uses of *phenomenology* by philosophers before the twentieth-century phenomenological movement, the term is most frequently identified with the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and especially with his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Hegel is determined to overcome
Kant's phenomena-noumena bifurcation. Phenomena are actual stages of knowledge—manifestations in the development of Spirit—evolving from undeveloped consciousness of

mere sense experience and culminating in forms of absolute knowledge. Phenomenology is the science by which the mind becomes aware of the development of Spirit and comes to know its essence—that is, Spirit as it is in itself—through a study of its appearances and manifestations. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of philosophers used *phenomenology* to indicate a merely descriptive study of a subject matter. Thus William Hamilton (1788–1856), in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*
(1858), used phenomenology to refer to a descriptive phase of empirical psychology; Eduard von Hartmann (1842– 1906) formulated several phenomenologies, including a descriptive "phenomenology of moral consciousness"; and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) used phenomenology to refer to a descriptive study of whatever appears before the mind, whether real or illusory. As Richard Schmitt points out in his entry on "Phenomenology" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), the philosophical background led to two distinct senses of *phenomenology*. There is the older, wider sense of the term as any descriptive study of a given subject matter or as a discipline describing observable phenomena. There is also a narrower twentieth-century sense of the term as a philosophical approach utilizing a phenomenological method. It is to the latter
sense that this entry now turns.

PHILOSOPHICAL PHENOMENOLOGY.

As one of the major schools, movements, or approaches in modern philosophy, phenomenology takes many forms. One can distinguish, for example, the "transcendental phenomenology" of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the "existential phenomenology" of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), and the "hermeneutic phenomenology" of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Paul Ricoeur. Since phenomenology is so complex and diverse, every phenomenologist does not accept all that follows.

The phenomenological movement.

The primary aim of philosophical phenomenology is to investigate and become directly aware of phenomena that appear in immediate experience, and thereby to allow the phenomenologist to describe the essential structures of these phenomena. In doing so, phenomenology attempts to free itself from unexamined presuppositions, to avoid causal and other explanations, to

utilize a method that allows it to describe that which appears, and to intuit or decipher essential meanings.

An early formulation of the phenomenological movement appears as a statement in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, published from 1913 to 1930 with Edmund Husserl as editor in chief. Coeditors included leading phenomenologists Moritz Geiger (1880–1937), Alexander Pfänder (1870–1941), Adolf Reinach (1883–1917), Max Scheler, and, later, Martin Heidegger and Oskar Becker (1889–1964). Husserl is usually identified as the founder and most influential philosopher of the phenomenological movement.The earliest phenomenologists worked at several German universities, especially at Göttingen and Munich. Outside of Husserl's predominant influence on phenomenology, the most significant phenomenologists are Scheler, an independent and creative thinker in his own right, and Heidegger, who emerged as one of the major twentieth-century philosophers. The initial flourishing of the phenomenological movement is identified with the "Göttingen Circle" and the "Munich Circle" during the period leading up to World War I, and phenomenology remained an overwhelmingly German philosophy until the 1930s when the center of the movement
begins to shift to France. Through the works of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), Ricoeur, and others, French phenomenology established itself as the leading development in phenomenological philosophy, beginning in the 1930s and continuing at least until the 1960s. Particularly noteworthy was the French attempt to integrate the concerns and insights of phenomenology with those of existentialism.

Characteristics of philosophical phenomenology.

One may delineate five characteristics of philosophical phenomenology that have particular relevance for the phenomenology for religion.

Descriptive nature.

Phenomenology aims to be a rigorous, descriptive science, discipline, or approach. The phenomenological slogan "Zu den Sachen!" ("To the things themselves!") expresses the determination to turn away from philosophical theories and concepts toward the direct intuition and description of phenomena as they appear in immediate experience. Phenomenology attempts to describe the

nature of phenomena, the way appearances manifest themselves, and the essential structures at the foundation of human experience. As contrasted with most schools of philosophy, which have assumed that the rational alone is real and which have a philosophical preoccupation with the rational faculties and with conceptual analysis, **phenomenology focuses on accurately describing the totality of phenomenal manifestations in human experience**. A descriptive phenomenology, attempting to avoid reductionism and often insisting on the phenomenological *epoché* (see below), describes the diversity, complexity, and richness of experience.

Antireductionism.

Phenomenological antireductionism is concerned with freeing people from uncritical preconceptions
that prevent them from becoming aware of the specificity and diversity of phenomena, thus allowing them to broaden and deepen immediate experience and provide more accurate descriptions of this experience. Husserl attacked various forms of reductionism, such as "psychologism," which attempts to derive the laws of logic from psychological laws and, more broadly, to reduce all phenomena to psychological phenomena. In opposing the oversimplifications of traditional empiricism and other forms of reductionism, phenomenologists aim to deal faithfully with phenomena as phenomena and to become aware of what phenomena reveal in their full intentionality.

Intentionality.

A subject always "intends" an object, and intentionality refers to the property of all consciousness as
consciousness of something. All acts of consciousness are directed toward the experience of something, the intentional object. For Husserl, who took the term from his teacher Franz Brentano (1838–1917), intentionality was a way of describing how consciousness constitutes phenomena. In
order to identify, describe, and interpret the meaning of phenomena, phenomenologists must be attentive to the intentional structures of their data; to the intentional structures of consciousness with their intended referents and meanings.

Bracketing.

For many phenomenologists, the antireductionist insistence on the irreducibility of the intentional immediate experience entails the adoption of a "phenomenological *epoché*." This Greek term literally means "abstention" or "suspension of judgment" and is often defined as a method of "bracketing." It is only by bracketing the uncritically accepted "natural world," by suspending beliefs and judgments
based on an unexamined "natural standpoint," that the phenomenologist can become aware of the phenomena of immediate experience and can gain insight into their essential structures. Sometimes the *epoché* is formulated in terms of the goal of a completely presuppositionless science or philosophy, but most phenomenologists have interpreted such bracketing as the goal of freeing the phenomenologist from unexamined presuppositions, or of rendering explicit and clarifying such presuppositions, rather than completely denying their existence. The phenomenological *epoché*,
whether as the technical Husserlian "transcendental reduction" or in its other variations, is not simply "performed" by phenomenologists; it must involve some method of selfcriticism and intersubjective testing allowing insight into structures and meanings.

Eidetic vision.

The intuition of essences, often described as "eidetic vision" or "eidetic reduction," is related to the
Greek term *eidos*, which Husserl adopted from its Platonic meaning to designate "universal essences." Such essences express the "whatness" of things, the necessary and invariant features of phenomena that allow us to recognize phenomena as phenomena of a certain kind. For all of their differences, the overwhelming majority of phenomenologists have upheld a descriptive phenomenology that is antireductionist, involves phenomenological bracketing, focuses on intentionality, and aims at insight into essential structures and meanings. The following is a brief
formulation of a general phenomenological procedure for gaining insight into such essential structures and meanings with application to the phenomena of religious experience. In the "intuition of essences" (*Wesensschau*), the phenomenologist attempts to disengage essential structures embodied in particular phenomena. One begins with particular data: specific phenomena as expressions of intentional experiences. The central aim of the phenomenological method is to disclose the essential structure embodied in the particular data. One gains insight into meaning by the method of "free variation." After assembling a

variety of particular phenomena, the phenomenologist searches for the invariant core that constitutes the essential meaning of the phenomena. The phenomena, subjected to a process of free variation, assume certain forms that are considered to be accidental or inessential in the sense that the phenomenologist can go beyond the limits imposed by such forms without destroying the basic character or intentionality of one's data. For example, the variation of a great variety of religious phenomena may disclose that the unique structures of monotheism do not constitute the essential core or universal structure of all religious experience. The phenomenologist gradually sees that phenomena assume forms that are regarded as essential in the sense that one cannot go beyond or remove such structures without destroying the basic "whatness" or intentionality of the data. For example, free variation might reveal that certain intentional structures of "transcendence" constitute an invariant core of religious experience. When the universal essence is grasped, the phenomenologist achieves the eidetic intuition or the fulfilled *Wesensschau*. Husserl proposed that all phenomena are constituted by consciousness and that, in the intuition of essences, we can eliminate the particular, actual given datum and move on to the plane of "pure possibility." Most phenomenologists who have used a method of *Wesensschau* have proposed that historical phenomena have a kind of priority, that one must substitute for Husserl's imaginary variation an actual variation of historical data, and that the particular phenomena are not constituted by an individual but are the source of one's constitution and judgment. Though relatively few philosophical phenomenologists had much interest in religious phenomena during most of the twentieth century, some of the vocabulary of philosophical
phenomenology and, in several cases, some of its methodology have influenced the phenomenology of religion.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION AS PART OF HISTORY OF RELIGIONS (RELIGIOUS STUDIES).

The modern scholarly study of religion probably had its beginnings in the late eighteenth century, largely as a product of the rational and scientific attitude of the Enlightenment, but the first major figure
in this discipline was F. Max Müller (1823–1900). Müller intended *Religionswissenschaft* to be a descriptive, objective science free from the normative nature of theological and philosophical studies of religion. The German term *Religionswissenschaft* has been given no adequate English equivalent, although the International Association for the History of

Religions has adopted the term *history of religions* as synonymous with the term *general science of religions*. Thus *history of religions* is intended to designate a field of studies with many specialized disciplines utilizing different approaches. P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye is sometimes considered the founder of phenomenology of religion as a special discipline of classification. Phenomenology of religion occupied an intermediary position for him between history and philosophy and is a descriptive, comparative approach involving
"the collecting and grouping of various religious phenomena." One of the founders of *Religionswissenschaft*, the Dutch historian C. P. Tiele (1830–1902), considered phenomenology to be the first stage of the philosophical part of the science of religion. Scholars of religion point to the phenomenology of religion's sense of generality, with its approach invariably characterized as systematic. For Widengren, the phenomenology of religion aims at "a coherent account of all the various phenomena of religion, and is thus the systematic complement of the history of religion" (1945, p. 9). The historical approach provides a historical analysis of the development of separate religions; phenomenology provides "the systematic synthesis." The Italian historian of religions Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883–1959) attempted to formulate the diverse methodological tendencies and tensions, defining *Religionswissenschaft* in terms of these two complementary aspects: the historical and the phenomenological. On the one hand, the history of religions attempts to uncover "precisely what happened and how the facts came to be," but it does not provide the deeper understanding of the meaning of what happened, nor "the sense of the religious": these come from phenomenology. On the other hand, phenomenology cannot do without ethnology, philology, and other historical disciplines.
Therefore, according to Pettazzoni, phenomenology and history are two complementary aspects of the integral science of religion.

MAJOR PHENOMENOLOGISTS OF RELIGION.

What follows are brief formulations of the approaches and contributions of eight influential phenomenologists of religion: Max Scheler, W. Brede Kristensen, Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Friedrich Heiler, C. Jouco Bleeker, Mircea Eliade, and Ninian Smart. Included are criticisms of perhaps the three most influential phenomenologists of religion within religious studies: Otto, van der Leeuw, and Eliade. **Max Scheler.** Of the major philosophers who founded and developed philosophical phenomenology, Max Scheler had the greatest focus on religion. After Husserl, he may have been the most influential philosophical phenomenologist

during the 1920s. In many ways, he can be considered the most significant early phenomenologist of religion. Influenced by Brentano, Husserl, Kant, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson, among others, Scheler developed his own original
phenomenological approach. Among his books, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (1921, translated as *On the Eternal in Man*, 1960) and *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (2 vols., 1913–1916, translated as *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 1973) bring out his phenomenological method, his description and analysis of sympathy, love, and other values, and key characteristics of his phenomenology of religion. Although Scheler's detailed epistemology, ethics and axiology, metaphysics, and philosophical anthropology are very complex and his phenomenology of religion goes through several radical changes, it is possible to delineate a few influential
characteristics of his phenomenological approach to religion. Reminiscent of Schleiermacher and Otto, Scheler focused on a phenomenological description and analysis of human experience: the unique religious human mode of experience and feeling; the being of the human being for whom structures and essences of religious values are presented to consciousness. Within the phenomenology of religion, phenomenological disclosure, focusing on what is "given" to consciousness as the Absolute, the Divine Person, or God, is not achieved through reason but only through the love of God as orienting one toward experiential realization of the Holy. Philosophical phenomenologists of religion are greatly indebted to Scheler, although it is not clear the extent to which scholars within religious studies have been influenced by him, even if some of their approaches can be related to his phenomenological analysis. The turn to religion in some of philosophical phenomenology and other forms of continental philosophy at the end of the twentieth century often exhibited characteristics similar to Scheler's phenomenological orientation.

W. Brede Kristensen. From Chantepie de la Saussaye and Tiele, through van der Leeuw and the Norwegian expatriate Kristensen, and up to the writings of Bleeker and others, much of the field has been dominated by a Dutch tradition of phenomenology of religion. Sometimes this is broadened to encompass a Dutch-Scandinavian tradition in order to include phenomenologists such as Nathan Soderblom (1866–1931). W. Brede Kristensen, a specialist in Egyptian and ancient historical religions, illustrates an extreme formulation of the descriptive approach within phenomenology. As a subdivision of the general science of religion, phenomenology is, according to Kristensen, a systematic and comparative approach that is descriptive and not normative. In opposing the widespread positivist and evolutionist approaches to religion, Kristensen attempted to integrate historical knowledge of the facts

with phenomenological "empathy" and "feeling" for the data in order to grasp the "inner meaning" and religious values in various texts. The phenomenologist must accept the faith of the believers as the sole "religious reality." In order to achieve phenomenological understanding, scholars must avoid imposing their own value judgments on the experiences of believers and must assume that the believers are completely right. In other words, the primary focus of phenomenology is the description
of how believers understand their own faith. One must respect the absolute value that believers ascribe to their faith. An understanding of this religious reality is always approximate or relative, since one can never experience the religion of others exactly as the believers experience it. After describing
the "belief of the believers," the scholar may classify the phenomena according to essential types and make comparative evaluations. But all investigations into the essence and evaluations of phenomena entail value judgments by the interpreter and are beyond the limits of a descriptive phenomenology.

Rudolf Otto. Two interdependent methodological contributions made by Rudolf Otto deserve emphasis: his experiential approach, which involves the phenomenological description of the universal, essential structure of religious experience, and his antireductionism, which respects the
unique, irreducible, "numinous" quality of all religious experience. In *Das Heilige* (1917, translated as *The Idea of the Holy*, 1923), Otto presents what is probably the best-known phenomenological
account of religious experience. In attempting to uncover the essential structure and meaning of all 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. With such an emphasis on this nonmoral, nonrational aspect of religion, he attempts to isolate the "overplus of meaning," beyond the rational and conceptual, which constitutes the universal essence of the religious experience. Since such a unique nonrational experience cannot be defined or conceptualized, the 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, that is, our capacity for this a priori knowledge of the holy. 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" (*ganz Andere*), which is qualitatively unique and transcendent.

This insistence on the unique a priori quality of the 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 phenomenological approach that is commensurate with interpreting the meaning of the irreducibly religious phenomena, is generally accepted by major phenomenologists of religion. Various interpreters have criticized Otto's phenomenological approach for being too narrowly conceived. According to these critics, Otto's approach focuses on nonrational aspects of certain mystical and other "extreme" experiences,
but it is not sufficiently comprehensive to interpret the diversity and complexity of religious data, nor is it sufficiently concerned with the specific historical and cultural forms of religious phenomena. Critics also object to the a priori nature of Otto's project and influences of personal, Christian, theological, and apologetic intentions on his phenomenology. Van der Leeuw, while agreeing with Otto's antireductionism, attempts to broaden his phenomenology by investigating and systematizing a tremendous diversity of religious phenomena.

Gerardus van der Leeuw.

In his *Comparative Religion*, Eric J. Sharpe writes that "between 1925 and 1950, the phenomenology
of religion was associated almost exclusively with the name of the Dutch scholar Gerardus van der Leeuw, and with his book *Phanomenologie der Religion*" (1986, pp. 229–230). Especially notable among the many influences on his phenomenology acknowledged by van der Leeuw are the writings of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) on hermeneutics and the concept of "understanding" (*Verstehen*). In several writings, especially the epilogue of *Phanomenologie der Religion* (1933, translated as *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 2d ed., 1963), which contains the chapters "Phenomenon and Phenomenology"

and "The Phenomenology of Religion," van der Leeuw defines the assumptions, concepts, and stages of his phenomenological approach. According to van der Leeuw, the phenomenologist must respect the specific intentionality of religious phenomena and simply describe the phenomenon as "what appears into view." The phenomenon is given in the mutual relations between subject and object; that is, its "entire essence" is given in its appearance to someone. Van der Leeuw proposed a subtle and complex phenomenological method with which the phenomenologist goes far beyond a descriptive phenomenology. His method involves
systematic introspection—"the interpolation of the phenomenon into our lives"—as necessary for understanding religious phenomena. In the first volume of his *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1973–1974), Jacques Waardenburg describes this phenomenological-psychological
method as "an 'experiential' method to guide intuition and to arrive at immediate understanding" and as the "classification of religious phenomena by means of ideal types which are constituted by a psychological technique of re-experiencing religious meanings" (p. 57). According to van der Leeuw, phenomenology must be combined with historical research, which precedes phenomenological
understanding and provides the phenomenologist with sufficient data. Phenomenology must be open to "perpetual correction by the most conscientious philological and archaeological research," and "it becomes pure art or empty fancy" (van der Leeuw, 1963, vol. 2, p. 677) when it removes itself from such historical control. Special note may be taken of van der Leeuw's emphasis on the religious aspect of "power" as the basis of every religious form and as defining that which is religious. "Phenomenology describes how man conducts himself in his relation to Power" (1963, vol. 1, p. 191). The terms *holy*, *sanctus*, *taboo*, and so on, taken together, describe what occurs in all religious experience: "a strange, 'Wholly Other,' Power obtrudes into life" (1963, vol. 2, p. 681). Influences from van der Leeuw's own Christian point of view are often central to his analysis of the phenomenological
method for gaining understanding of religious structures and meanings. For example, he claims that "faith and intellectual suspense (the *epoche*) do not exclude each other," and "all understanding rests upon self-surrendering love" (1963, vol. 2, pp. 683–684). Indeed, van der Leeuw above all considered
himself a theologian, positing that phenomenology of religion leads to both anthropology and theology. Numerous scholars have concluded that much of his phenomenology of religion must be interpreted in theological terms. Critics, while often expressing admiration for

Religion in Essence and Manifestation as an extraordinary collection of religious data, offer many objections to van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion: his phenomenological approach is based on numerous theological and metaphysical assumptions and value judgments; it is often too subjective and highly speculative; and it neglects the historical and cultural context of religious phenomena and is of little value for empirically based research.

Friedrich Heiler.

Born in Munich, Friedrich Heiler (1892–1967) is known for his studies on prayer, great religious
personalities, ecumenism, the unity of all religion, and a kind of global phenomenology of religion.

According to Heiler, the phenomenological method proceeds from the externals to the essence of religion. Although every approach has presuppositions, the phenomenology of religion must avoid every philosophical a priori and utilize only those presuppositions that are consistent with an inductive method. Heiler's phenomenology of religion, which is theologically oriented, emphasizes the indispensable value of "empathy": the phenomenologist must exercise respect, tolerance, and sympathetic understanding for all religious experience and the religious truth expressed in the data. Indeed, the phenomenologist's personal religious experience is a precondition for an empathic understanding of the totality of religious phenomena.

C. Jouco Bleeker.

Bleeker distinguished three types of phenomenology of religion: the descriptive phenomenology that restricts itself to the systematization of religious phenomena, the typological phenomenology that formulates the different types of religion, and the specific sense of phenomenology that investigates the essential structures and meanings of religious phenomena. In terms of this more specific sense,
phenomenology of religion has a double meaning: it is an independent science that creates monographs and handbooks, such as van der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* and Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958), but it is also a scholarly method that utilizes such principles as the phenomenological *epoche* and eidetic vision. Although Bleeker frequently used such technical terms in gaining insight into religious structures and acknowledged that these terms were borrowed from the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl and his school, he claimed that they were used by the phenomenology of religion in

only a figurative sense. According to Bleeker, the phenomenology of religion combines a critical attitude and concern for accurate descriptions with a sense of empathy for the phenomena. It is an empirical science without philosophical aspirations, and it should distinguish its activities from those of philosophical phenomenology and of anthropology. He warned that historians and phenomenologists of religion should not dabble in philosophical speculations on matters of method, stating that "phenomenology of religion is not a philosophical discipline, but a systematization of historical fact with the intent to understand their religious meaning" (Bleeker, in Bianchi et al., 1972, pp. 39–41, 51). Probably the best-known formulation in Bleeker's reflections on phenomenology is his analysis of the task of phenomenology of religion as an inquiry into three dimensions of religious phenomena: *theoria*, *logos*, and *entelecheia*. The *theoria* of phenomena "discloses the essence and significance of the facts." It has an empirical basis and leads
to an understanding of the implications of various aspects of religion. The Logos of phenomena "penetrates into the structure of different forms of religious life." This provides a sense of objectivity by showing that hidden structures "are built up according to strict inner laws," and that religion "always
possesses a certain structure with an inner logic" (Bleeker, 1963, pp. 14, 17). Most original is Bleeker's position that the *entelecheia* of phenomena "reveals itself in the dynamics, the development which is visible in the religious life of mankind," or in "the course of events in which the essence is realized by its manifestations." Phenomenology, it is frequently stated, abstracts from historical change and presents a rather static view of essential structures and meanings. By the *entelecheia*, Bleeker wants to stress that religion is not static but is "an invincible, creative and self-regenerating force." The phenomenologist of religion must work closely with the historian of religions in studying the dynamics of phenomena and the development of religions (Bleeker, 1963, pp. 14, 16–24).

Mircea Eliade.

According to the Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade, one of the major interpreters of religious symbol
and myth, religion "refers to the experience of the sacred." The phenomenologist works with historical documents expressing *hierophanies*, or manifestations of the sacred, and attempts to decipher the existential situation and religious meaning expressed through the data. The sacred and the profane express "two modes of being in the world," and religion always entails the attempt of *homo religiosus* to transcend the relative, historical-temporal, profane world by

experiencing a "superhuman" sacred world of transcendent values. In Bleeker's first sense of phenomenology of religion as an independent discipline that creates monographs that describe and classify essential structures and meanings, one may note Eliade's many morphological studies of different kinds of religious symbolism; his interpretations of the structure and function of myth, with the cosmogonic myth and other creation myths functioning as exemplary models; his treatment of rituals, such as those of initiation, as reenacting sacred mythic models; his structural analysis of sacred space, sacred time, and sacred history; and his studies of different types of religious experience, such as yoga, shamanism, alchemy,

and other "archaic" phenomena. In Bleeker's second sense of phenomenology of religion as a specific method, there are three key methodological principles underlying Eliade's approach: his assumption of the "irreducibility of the sacred," his emphasis on the "dialectic of the sacred" as the universal structure of sacralization, and his uncovering of the structural systems of religious symbols that constitute the hermeneutical framework in terms of which he interprets religious meaning. The assumption of the irreducibility of the religious is a form of phenomen logical *epoche*. In attempting to understand and describe the meaning of religious phenomena, the phenomenologist must utilize an antireductionist method commensurate with the nature of the data. Only a religious frame of reference or "scale" of interpretation does not distort the specific, irreducible religious intentionality expressed in the data.

The universal structure of the dialectic of the sacred provides Eliade with essential criteria for distinguishing religious from nonreligious phenomena. There is always a sacredprofane dichotomy and the separation of the hierophanic object, such as a particular mountain or tree or person, since this is the medium through which the sacred is manifested; the sacred, which expresses transcendent structures and meanings, paradoxically limits itself by incarnating itself in something ordinarily finite, temporal, historical, and pro- fane;the sacred, in its dialectical movement of disclosure and revelation, always conceals and camouflages itself; and the religious person, in resolving existential crises, evaluates and chooses the sacred as powerful, ultimate, normative, and meaningful. The central position of symbolism, with the focus on coherent systems of symbolic structures, establishes the phenomenological grounds for Eliade's structural hermeneutics. Among the characteristics of symbols are: (1) their "logic," which allows various symbols to fit together to form coherent symbolic systems; (2) their "multivalence," through which they express simultaneously a number of structurally coherent meanings not evident on the level of immediate experience; and (3) their "function of unification," by which they integrate heterogeneous phenomena into a whole or a system. These autonomous, universal, coherent systems of symbols usually provide the

phenomenological framework for Eliade's interpretation of religious meaning. For example, he interprets the meaning of a religious phenomenon associated with the sun or moon by reintegrating it within its solar or lunar structural system of symbolic associations. Although Eliade was extremely influential, many scholars ignore or are hostile to his history and phenomenology of religion. The most frequent criticism is that Eliade is methodologically uncritical, often presenting sweeping, arbitrary, subjective generalizations not based upon specific historical and empirical data. Critics also charge that his approach is influenced by various normative judgments and an assumed ontological position that is partial to a religious, antihistorical mode of being and to certain Eastern and archaic phenomena.

Ninian Smart.

Smart (1927–2001), who was born in Cambridge, England, to Scottish parents, had a major impact on the field of religious studies. He was committed to phenomenology as the best way to study religion. His phenomenology of religion avoids what were two dominant approaches to religion: (1) ethnocentric, normative, especially Christian, theological approaches in the study of religion; and (2) normative philosophical approaches with their exclusive focus on belief and conceptual analysis to the exclusion of other dimensions of religious phenomena. Smart was capable of technical scholarly analysis, as seen in his *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (1964), but he is probably better known as a popularizer in his study of religion, as seen in *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969). He believed that profound insights can be presented in simple understandable language and ordinary phenomenological categories. Smart emphasized many points that became easily recognizable and widely accepted in the phenomenology of religion and other approaches to religious phenomena during the last decades of the twentieth century. He emphasized suspension of one's own value judgments and the need for phenomenological empathy in understanding and describing the religious phenomena of others. He endorsed a liberal humanistic approach that upholds the value of pluralism and diversity. In Smart's phenomenological approach, one recognizes that religion expresses many dimensions of human experience. Such an approach is "polymethodic," multiperspectival, comparative, and cross-cultural. The phenomenologist of religion needs to take seriously the contextual nature of diverse religious phenomena; to ask questions, engage in critical dialogue, and maintain an open-ended investigation of

religion; and to recognize that religions express complex, multidimensional, interconnected worldviews. This focus on religions in terms of worldview analysis leads to the contemporary interest in the globalization of religion and global pluralism.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION.

The following features, some of which have already been mentioned, are characteristic of much of the phenomenology of religion: its identification as a comparative, systematic, empirical, historical, descriptive discipline and approach; its antireductionist claims and its autonomous nature; its adoption of philosophical phenomenological notions of intentionality and *epoche;* its insistence on the value of empathy, sympathetic understanding, and religious commitment; and its claim to provide insight into essential structures and meanings. Several of these characteristics are associated primarily with the phenomenology of religion; others, while accepted by most phenomenologists of religion, are shared by other historians of religions.

Comparative and systematic approach.

As previously noted, there is widespread agreement that the phenomenology of religion is a very general approach concerned with classifying and systematizing religious phenomena. There is also widespread agreement that this discipline uses a comparative approach. Various phenomenologists simply define their phenomenology of religion as equivalent to comparative religion. But even those scholars who reject such a simple identification maintain that phenomenologists are able to gain insight into essential structures and meanings only after comparing a large number of documents expressing a great diversity of religious phenomena.

Empirical approach.

Bleeker, Eliade, and most phenomenologists of religion insist that they use an empirical approach that is free from a priori assumptions and judgments. Such an empirical approach, which is often described

as "scientific" and "objective," begins by collecting religious documents and then goes on to decipher the religious phenomena by describing just what the empirical data reveal. Phenomenologists usually maintain that their discoveries of essential typologies and universal structures are based on empirical,
inductive generalizations. One of the most frequent attacks on the phenomenology of religion is that it is not empirically based and that it is therefore arbitrary, subjective, and unscientific. Critics charge that the universal structures and meanings are not found in the empirical data and that the phenomenological discoveries are not subject to empirical tests of verification.

Historical approach.

Phenomenologists of religion usually maintain not only that their approach must cooperate with and complement historical research but also that phenomenology of religion is profoundly historical. All religious data are historical; no phenomena may be understood outside their history. The phenomenologist must be aware of the specific historical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts
within which religious phenomena appear. Critics, however, charge that not only is the phenomenology of religion not historical, it is even antihistorical, both in terms of a phenomenological method that neglects the specific historical and cultural context and with regard to the primacy—methodologically and even ontologically—it grants to nonhistorical and nontemporal universal structures.

Descriptive approach.

Unlike Muller, who intends the modern scholarly study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) to be a descriptive science attaining the autonomy and objectivity of the descriptive natural sciences, and Kristensen, who conceives of phenomenology of religion as "purely descriptive," almost all phenomenologists of religion today do not restrict themselves to mere description of religious phenomena. While cognizant of Kristensen's concerns about the subjective nature of much past scholarship in which interpreters filtered data through their own assumptions and value judgments,
phenomenologists go far beyond the severe methodological restrictions of his descriptive phenomenology. And yet these same phenomenologists invariably classify their discipline and

approach as a descriptive phenomenology of religion; at the minimum, it is "essentially descriptive,"
and sometimes it is presented as "purely descriptive." They claim to utilize a descriptive approach and see their classifications, typologies, and structures as descriptive. Sometimes phenomenologists of religion distinguish the collection and description of religious data, which is objective and scientific,
from the interpretation of meaning, which is at least partially subjective and normative.

Antireductionism.

Philosophical phenomenology, in defining itself as a radically descriptive philosophy, opposes
various kinds of reductionism. Phenomenologists oppose reductionism, which imposes uncritical preconceptions and unexamined judgments on phenomena, in order to deal with phenomena simply as phenomena and to provide more accurate descriptions of just what the phenomena reveal. More than any other approach within the modern study of religion, phenomenology of religion insists that investigators approach religious data as phenomena that are fundamentally and irreducibly religious. Otto, Eliade, and other phenomenologists of religion often defend their strong antireductionism by criticizing past reductionist approaches. Many of these reductionist interpretations, for example, are
based on "positivist" and "rationalist" norms and force religious data into preconceived unilinear, evolutionary explanatory frameworks. Phenomenologists criticize the reductions of religious data to fit nonreligious perspectives, such as those of sociology, psychology, or economics. Such reductionisms,
it is argued, destroy the specificity, complexity, and irreducible intentionality of religious phenomena. In attempting sympathetically to understand the experience of the other, the phenomenologist must respect the "original" religious intentionality expressed in the data.

Autonomy.

Directly related to the antireductionist claim of the irreducibility of the religious is the identification of phenomenology of religion as an autonomous discipline and approach. If there are certain irreducible modes by which religious phenomena are given, then one must

utilize a specific method of understanding that is commensurate with the religious nature of the subject matter, and one must
provide irreducibly religious interpretations of religious phenomena. The phenomenology of religion is autonomous but not self-sufficient. It depends heavily on historical research and on data supplied by philology, ethnology, psychology, sociology, and other approaches. But it must always integrate the
contributions of other approaches within its own unique phenomenological perspective.

Intentionality.

Phenomenology analyzes acts of consciousness as consciousness of something and claims that meaning is given in the intentionality of the structure. In order to identify, describe, and interpret the meaning of religious phenomena, scholars must be attentive to the intentional structure of their data. For Otto, the a priori structure of religious consciousness is consciousness of its intended "numinous object." Van der Leeuw's phenomenologicalpsychological technique and Eliade's dialectic of the sacred are methods for capturing the intentional characteristics of religious manifestations. The major criticism made by phenomenologists of religion of reductionist approaches involves the latter's negation of the unique intentionality of religious phenomena.

Religious experiences reveal structures of transcendence in which human beings intend a transcendent referent, a supernatural metaempirical sacred meaning. Such intentionality is always historically, culturally, and linguistically situated. Religious language points beyond itself to intended sacred structures and meanings that transcend normal spatial, temporal, historical, and conceptual categories and analysis. That is why religious expressions are highly symbolic, analogical, metaphorical, mythic, and allegorical. Reductive explanations tend to destroy the intentional structure of religious meaning, invariably pointing to the transcendent sacred. At the same time, no intentional referent and meaning is unmediated. For meaningful religious experience and communication, the intended transcendent referent must be mediated and brought into an integral human relation with
our limited spatial, temporal, historical, cultural world with its intended objects and meanings. This is why symbolism, in its complex and diverse structures and functions, is essential for revealing, constituting, and communicating religious intentional meaning. Religious symbolic expressions serve as indispensable mediating bridges. On the one hand, they always point beyond themselves to intended transcendent meanings. On the other hand, by necessarily using symbolic language drawn from the spatial, temporal, natural, historical world of

experience, they mediate the transcendent referent, limit and incarnate the sacred, allow the disclosure of the transcendent as imminent, and render sacred meanings humanly accessible and relevant to particular existential situations. This specific religious intentionality ensures that the structures of religious experience, as well as interpretations and understandings, will remain open-ended with no possible closure. The necessary structural conditions for religious experience, the construction of religious texts, and the formulation of scholarly interpretations ensure that meaningful human understandings necessarily reveal limited intentional perspectives. And such relative, situated, intentional, religious perspectives always point beyond themselves to structures of transcendence; to inexhaustible possibilities for revalorizing symbolic expressions, for bursting open self-imposed perspectival closures, and for new, creative, self-transcending experiences, interpretations, and understandings.

***Epoché*, empathy, and sympathetic understanding.**

Most philosophical phenomenologists present the phenomenological *epoche* as a means of bracketing beliefs and preconceptions normally imposed on phenomena. It is important to clarify that Husserl and other philosophers who formulate a "phenomenological reduction" as *epoche* do not intend a narrowing of perspective and negation of the complexity and specificity of phenomena. The phenomenological reduction is intended to achieve the very opposite of reductionism: by suspending one's unexamined assumptions and ordinary preconceptions and judgments, it allows one to become attentive to a much fuller disclosure of what manifests itself and how it manifests itself in experience; it allows for greater awareness of phenomena experienced on prereflective, emotive, imaginative, nonconceptual levels of intentional experience, thus leading to new insights into the specific intentionality and concrete richness of experience. The phenomenological *epoche*, with an emphasis on empathy and sympathetic understanding, is related to methodological antireductionism. If the phenomenologist is to describe the meaning of religious phenomena as they appear in the lives of religious persons, she or he must suspend all personal preconceptions as to what is "real" and attempt to empathize with and imaginatively reenact these religious appearances. By insisting on the irreducibility of the religious, phenomenologists attempt sympathetically to place themselves within the religious "life-world" of others and to grasp the religious meaning of the experienced phenomena. There are, of course, limitations to this personal participation, since the other always remains to some extent the "other." Phenomenologists insist that empathy, a sympathetic attitude, and personal participation in no way undermine

the need for a critical scholarly approach with rigorous criteria of interpretation. This phenomenological orientation may be contrasted with the ideal of detached, impersonal scientific objectivity that characterizes almost all nineteenthcentury approaches within the scholarly study of religion and that continues to define many approaches today. In assuming a sympathetic attitude, the phenomenologist is not claiming that religious phenomena are not "illusory"
and that the intentional object is "real." (As a matter of fact, many phenomenologists make such theological and metaphysical assumptions and judgments, but these usually violate the self-defined limits of their phenomenological perspectives.) The phenomenological bracketing entails the suspension of all such value judgments regarding whether or not the holy or sacred is actually an experience of ultimate reality. With a few exceptions, it seems that phenomenologists of religion, while generally upholding an *epoche* or similar values, have not subjected such concepts to a rigorous analysis. Often they give little more than vague appeals to abstain from value judgments and to exercise a personal capacity for empathetic participation, but without scholarly criteria for verifying whether such sympathetic understanding has been achieved. Many phenomenologists argue for the necessity of religious commitment, a personal religious faith, or at least personal religious experience in order for a scholar to be capable of empathy, participation, and sympathetic understanding. Other phenomenologists argue that such personal religious commitments generally produce biased descriptions that rarely do justice to the religious experience of others. It seems that a particular faith or theological commitment is not a precondition for accurate phenomenological descriptions. Rather it is a commitment to religious phenomena, manifested in terms of intellectual curiosity, sensitivity, and respect, that is indispensable for participation and understanding. Such a commitment may be shared by believers and nonbelievers alike.

Insight into essential structures and meanings.

No subject matter is more central to philosophical phenomenology than analyses of the eidetic reduction and eidetic vision, the intuition of essences, the method of free variation, and other techniques for gaining insight into the essential structures and meanings of phenomena. By contrast, the phenomenology of religion, even in the specific sense of an approachconcerned with describing essential structures and meanings, tends to avoid such methodological formulations. There are, of course, notable exceptions, as evidenced in the works of Max

Scheler, Paul Ricoeur, and a relatively small number of other philosophers who incorporate phenomenology of religion as part of their philosophical phenomenology. One generally finds, however, that most phenomenologists of religion accept both Bleeker's qualification that such terms as *eidetic vision* are used only in a figurative sense and his warning that phenomenology of religion should avoid philosophical speculations and not meddle in difficult philosophical questions of methodology. The result is that one is frequently presented with phenomenological typologies, "universal structures," and "essential meanings" of religious phenomena that lack a rigorous analysis of just how the phenomenologist arrived at or verified these discoveries. In short, in its claims concerning insight into essential structures and meanings, much of the phenomenology of religion appears to be methodologically uncritical.

Phenomenologists aim at intuiting, interpreting, and describing the essence of religious phenomena, but there is considerable disagreement as to what constitutes an essential structure. For some phenomenologists, an "essential structure" seems to be the result of an empirical inductive generalization, expressing a property that different phenomena have in common. For others, "essential structures" refer to types of religious phenomena, and there is debate concerning the relationship between historical types and phenomenological types. In the sense closest to philosophical phenomenology, *essence* refers to deep or hidden structures, which are not apparent on the level of immediate experience and must be uncovered and decoded or interpreted through the phenomenological method. These structures express the necessary invariant features allowing us to distinguish religious phenomena and to grasp religious phenomena as phenomena of a certain kind.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES.

The examination of the major phenomenologists of religion and the major characteristics of the

phenomenology of religion has raised many controversial issues. This section elaborates on several of these controversialissues and introduces a few others.

Descriptive versus normative claims.

There are many controversial issues regarding the claim that the phenomenology of religion is a descriptive discipline with a descriptive method, especially since almost all phenomenologists go far
beyond a mere description of the data, offering comparisons and evaluations of phenomena, universal structures, and essential meanings.
Many of these issues arise from the acceptance of a rather traditional descriptive-normative distinction. The adoption by many phenomenologists of religion of a radical, at times absolute, descriptive-normative dichotomy has been consistent with the classical empiricism of such philosophers as David Hume (1711–1776), with the Kantian philosophical framework, and with most nineteenth- and twentiethcentury approaches in the history of religions. Even those phenomenologists of religion who go far beyond Kristensen's descriptive restrictions frequently adopt a clear distinction between the collection and description of religious data, which is seen as objective and scientific, and the interpretation of meaning, which is at least partially subjective and normative. Despite its rejection of earlier models of positivism, it may be that the phenomenology of religion has unintentionally retained some of the positivistic assumptions regarding the investigation and "pure" description of unconstructed, uninterpreted, objective "facts." Much of recent philosophy, however, challenges this absolute dichotomy. What is taken as objective and scientific is historically, culturally, and socially situated, based on presuppositions, and constructed in terms of implicit and explicit value judgments. For example, how does one even begin the investigation? What facts should be collected as religious
facts? One's very principles of selectivity are never completely value-free. Indeed, philosophical phenomenologists have never accepted this sharp dichotomy, since the entire phenomenological project is founded on the possibilities of describing meanings. The challenge to the phenomenology
of religion is to formulate a phenomenological method and framework for interpretation that allows the description of essential structures and meanings with some sense of objectivity.

Understanding versus explanation claims.

Often related to controversies arising from the sharp descriptive-normative dichotomy are controversial issues involving the sharp understanding-explanation dichotomy. Phenomenology often claims that it aims at understanding, which involves describing meanings, and avoids explanation, which involves

uncovering historical, psychological, and other causal relationships. Phenomenologists describe what appears and how it appears, and they interpret the meaning of such phenomena, but they do not provide causal explanations of the phenomena. This “understanding” often has the sense of *Verstehen*
as formulated by Dilthey and others as the method and goal of hermeneutics. Phenomenologists aim at interpreting meaning and understanding the nature of religious and other “human” phenomena—as opposed to scientific, reductionistic approaches that give causal and other explanations and do not grasp the irreducibly human and irreducibly religious dimension of the phenomena they investigate.
Critics challenge such methods and goals as unscholarly and unscientific, and many scholars question whether phenomenological understanding and nonphenomenological explaining can be so completely separated. Explanatory approaches always involve understanding, and understanding is not possible without critical explanatory reflection. For example, even in terms of phenomenological understanding,
the expressions of the religious other are not the final word, absolute and inviolable. The other may have a limited understanding of phenomena shaping her or his religious lifeworld, provide false explanations, talk nonsense, and engage in blatantly unethical behavior. Phenomenology of religion
necessarily involves critical reflection, including contextual awareness and scholarly interpretations, understandings, and explanations that go beyond describing the expressed position of the religious other. This in no way denies the value of phenomenological approaches that are self-critical in rendering explicit one’s own presuppositions, that suspend one’s own value judgments, that empathize and hear the voices of the religious other, and that describe as accurately as possible

the religious phenomena and intended meanings of the religious other. Such phenomenology of religion aims at finding ways to allow other voices to be heard and is informed by a history of dominant, critical, normative approaches and reductionistic explanations that ignore, silence, and misinterpret the religious phenomena of others.

Antireductionist claims.

Many critics attack phenomenology of religion's antireductionism, arguing that it is methodologically
confused and unjustified and that it arises from the theological intention of defending religion against secular analysis. The most general criticism of this antireductionism is based on the argument that all methodological approaches are perspectival, limiting, and necessarily reductionistic. The assumption of the irreducibility of the religious is itself reductionistic, since it limits what phenomena will be investigated, what aspects of the phenomena will be described, and what meanings will be interpreted. Phenomenologists of religion cannot argue that other reductionistic approaches are
necessarily false and that their approach does justice to all dimensions of religious phenomena.
The phenomenology of religion must show that its religious antireductionism is not methodologically confused, does not beg serious scholarly questions, does not simply avoid serious scholarly challenges, and may even be granted a certain methodological primacy on the basis of such key
notions as intentionality and insight into essential structures and meanings. It must show, in terms of a rigorous method with procedures for verification, that its particular perspective is essential in shedding light on such religious structures and meanings.

Empirical and historical claims.

Critics often claim that the phenomenology of religion starts with a priori nonempirical assumptions, utilizes a method that is not empirically based, and detaches religious structures and meanings from their specific historical and cultural contexts. Such critics often assume a clear-cut dichotomy between an empirical, inductive, historical approach and a nonempirical, often rationalist, deductive, antihistorical approach. They identify their approaches with the former and the phenomenology of
religion with versions of the latter. They conclude that the phenomenology of religion cannot meet minimal empirical, historical, inductive criteria for a scientific approach, such as rigorous criteria for verification and falsification. (It may be simply noted that much of recent philosophy has been directed
not only at critiquing classical empiricism but also at undermining this absolute dichotomy.) Much of philosophical phenomenology is conceived in opposition to traditional empiricism. Husserl called for a

"phenomenological reduction" in which the phenomenologist "suspends" the "natural standpoint" and its empirical world in order to become more attentive to phenomena and to intuit the deeper phenomenological essences. Although such a phenomenology has been described as a radical empiricism, it employs a critique of traditional empiricism adopted by most of the history of religions.

Controversies arise from criticisms that phenomenology of religion is highly normative and subjective because it makes nonempirical, nonhistorical, a priori, theological, and other normative assumptions, and because it grants an ontologically privileged status to religious phenomena and to specific kinds of religious experience. Thus, critics charge that Kristensen, Otto, van der Leeuw, Heiler, Eliade, and others have nonempirical and nonhistorical, extraphenomenological, theological, and other normative assumptions, intentions, and goals that define much of their phenomenological projects, taking them beyond the domain of a descriptive phenomenology and any rigorous scientific approach. The status granted to essential religious structures and meanings is also controversial insofar as they exhibit the peculiarity of being empirical—that is, based on investigating a limited sample of historical data—and, at the same time, universal. These structures are therefore empirically contingent and yet also the essential necessary features of religious phenomena. Finally, there is controversy regarding the insistence by many phenomenologists of religion that they proceed by some kind of empirical inductive inference that is not unlike the classical formulations of induction developed by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) and others. Critics charge that they cannot repeat this inductive inference, that the phenomenological structures do not appear in the empirical data, and that phenomenologists read into their data all kinds of essential meanings. One response by phenomenologists, as expressed in

Guilford Dudley's *Religion on Trial* (1977), is to give up their empirical and historical claims and turn to a nonempirical, nonhistorical, rationalist, deductive approach. A different response, as expressed in Douglas Allen's *Structure and Creativity in Religion* (1978), is to formulate a method of "phenomenological induction" different from classical empirical induction, in which essential structures and meaning are based on, but not found fully in, the empirical data. This response involves a process of imaginative construction and idealization by phenomenologists, and the essential structures must then be rigorously tested in terms of the light that they shed on the empirical-historical data.

Questions of verification.

As has been repeatedly noted, there are many different criticisms of the phenomenology of religion for being methodologically uncritical. The phenomenology of religion cannot continue to avoid basic
methodological questions raised by philosophical phenomenology and other disciplines if it is to overcome these criticisms. Many of these criticisms involve questions of verification.Phenomenological "intuition" does not free one from the responsibility of ascertaining which interpretation of a given phenomenon is most adequate nor of substantiating why this is so. Fueling this controversy is the observation that different phenomenologists, while investigating the same phenomena and claiming to utilize the phenomenological method, continually present different eidetic intuitions. How does one resolve this contingency introduced into phenomenological insights? How does one verify specific interpretations and decide between different interpretations? Such questions pose specific difficulties for a phenomenological method of *epoche* and intuition of essences. A phenomenological method often suspends the usual criteria of "objectivity" that allow scholars to verify interpretations and choose between alternative accounts. Does this leave the phenomenology of religion with a large number of very personal, extremely subjective, hopelessly fragmented interpretations of universal structures and meanings, each relativistic interpretation determined by the particular temperament, situation, and orientation of the individual phenomenologist? The phenomenologist of religion can argue that past
criteria for verification are inadequate and result in a false sense of objectivity, but phenomenology of religion must also overcome the charges of complete subjectivity and relativism by struggling with questions of verification. It must formulate rigorous procedures for testing its claims of essential
structures and meanings, and these procedures must involve criteria for intersubjective verification.

Response to controversial issues.

Many writers describe the phenomenology of religion as being in a state of crisis. They usually minimize the invaluable contributions made by phenomenology to the study of religion, such as the
impressive systematization of so much religious data and the raising of fundamental questions of meaning often ignored by other approaches. If the phenomenology of religion is to deal adequately

with its controversial issues, the following are several of its future tasks. First, it must become more aware of historical, philological, and other specialized approaches to, and different aspects of, its religious data. Second, it must critique various approaches of its critics, thus showing that its phenomenological method is not obliged to meet such inadequate criteria for objectivity. And most importantly, it must reflect more critically on questions of methodology so that phenomenology of religion can formulate a more rigorous method, allowing for the description of phenomena, the interpretation of their structures and meanings, and the verification of its findings.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION.

Developments within the phenomenology of religion during the last decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century convey a very mixed and confusing picture about the present status and future prospects for the field.

Within religious studies.

Phenomenology of religion continues as a major discipline and approach within the general scholarly study of religion. Phenomenologists of religion are influenced by earlier major phenomenologists, and they share the general phenomenological orientation defined by the major characteristics previously delineated. The phenomenology of religion has also been successful to the extent that many other scholars, who do not consider themselves phenomenologists, adopt a phenomenological approach during early stages of their scholarly investigations because it has great value in allowing them to assemble data and do justice to the religious perspectives of religious persons. At the same time, phenomenology of religion, as has been noted, is sometimes described as being in a state of crisis.

There are no contemporary phenomenologists of religion who enjoy the status and influence once enjoyed by a van der Leeuw or an Eliade. Some scholars, doing phenomenology of religion, are uncomfortable with the term since it carries so much past baggage from Husserlian philosophical
foundations and from Eliadean and other phenomenology of religion they consider outdated. In general, contemporary phenomenologists of religion within religious studies attempt to be more contextually sensitive and more modest in their phenomenological claims.

Recent challenges.

Most of the scholarly challenges to the phenomenology of religion continue the major criticisms
previously described. Robert Segal and other leading scholars of religion, usually identified with social scientific and reductionist approaches, repeatedly criticize the phenomenology of religion for being unscientific, highly subjective, and lacking scholarly rigor. Scholars identifying with reductionistic
cognitive science and claiming that this is the only rigorous method and model for gaining objective knowledge provide a recent illustration of such challenges. There are also a tremendous variety of other challenges to the phenomenology of religion that are often classified as postmodernist and narrativist. In many ways, they offer opposite challenges from the above social scientific reductionist
approaches. They criticize the phenomenology of religion's claim to uncover universal structures and essences as being too reductionistic in denying the diversity and plurality of religious phenomena. Included here are a tremendous variety of approaches often described by such terms as postmodernist, deconstructionist, post-structuralist, narrativist, pragmatist, feminist, and relativist.

For example, in *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (1999), Gavin Flood argues that the inadequate presuppositions, central concepts, and models of philosophical phenomenology, an impact identified almost exclusively with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, have dominated the study of religion. By way of extreme contrast, Flood, influenced primarily by Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical analysis and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical analysis, proposes a dialogical, narrativist, interactional, dynamic model for rethinking the study of religion. This model includes: recognition of signs and language as a starting point; rejection of essentializing hegemonic approaches with their universalizing claims to objectivity; recognition that self or subject is always embodied and embedded, relational and interactive, contextualized, constituted and constituting

subject; recognition of the complex narrativist situatedness of both investigator and subject matter with dialogical, mutually interactive relations between the two perspectives; and affirmation of open-ended, perspectival nature of all knowledge with emphasis on nonclosure of interpretations and explanations.

In response, one can submit that Flood greatly exaggerates the impact that Husserlian transcendental phenomenology has had on the study of religion, and that most of the critiques of phenomenology and the antiphenomenological features he formulates can be found within later developments of philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion.

PHILOSOPHICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION.

The emphasis in this entry has been on phenomenology of religion as a discipline and method within *Religionswissenschaft* (the general history of religions or religious studies). The emphasis has not been on philosophical phenomenology with its limited focus on religion and its limited influence on phenomenology of religion within religious studies. However, there has been a remarkable development, beginning in the last part of the twentieth century: continental philosophy, frequently identified with phenomenology and hermeneutics, has often taken a religious turn. It is not always
clear whether to classify such developments under "the phenomenology of religion." Most of these key philosophers are deeply influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, but they often seem to transgress phenomenology's boundaries and express ambiguous relations to phenomenology. They are sometimes classified under the "new phenomenology" or under postphenomenological variations.
Special mention may be made of several of the most influential European philosophers of the twentieth century. Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), a student of Husserl with deep roots in phenomenology, became one of the dominant continental philosophers in the late twentieth century. With his major focus on ethics, spirituality, and Jewish philosophy, Levinas emphasized radical alterity and the primacy of the "other," thus reversing earlier phenomenological self–other emphasis on the privileged status of the epistemic constituting self or ego. Paul Ricoeur, also with deep roots in Husserl and phenomenology, has made invaluable contributions to our understanding of religious phenomena with his analysis of philosophy as the hermeneutical interpretation of meaning and with his focus on religious language, symbolism, and narrative. Two of the most influential European philosophers are
Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). Heidegger's writings on "phenomenology of religion," based on lectures and courses he gave in 1920 and 1921, were published in German in the 1990s and translated as *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (2004). Derrida, whose early work is on

Husserl, is the major figure of deconstructionist philosophy, which can be viewed as a rejection of philosophical phenomenology and traditional philosophy. Starting in the late 1990s, Derrida increasingly turned his focus to religion. His works may be described as a hermeneutic of the desire for God, deeply shaped by a return to Husserl but more of a postphenomenological critique of presence with an affirmation of the religious other. There are several other influential philosophers who are more easily classified under the renewed interest in the philosophical phenomenology of religion. Special mention may be made of Michel Henry, with such books as *The Essence of Manifestation* (1973), *Incarnation* (2000), and *I Am the Truth* (2003); and Jean-Luc Marion, with deep roots in
Husserl, who is the most influential figure within the recent religious turn in the "new phenomenology," with such books as *God without Being* (1991), *Reduction and Givenness* (1998), and *Being Given* (2002). In the late twentieth century, significant developments in continental philosophy, usually influenced by Husserl and philosophical phenomenology, increasingly focused on religion. It is not yet clear whether such philosophical developments will have a significant influence on the phenomenology of religion within religious studies.

Several recent contributions.

Finally, there are three interrelated contributions to the phenomenology of religion that often contrast with earlier dominant characteristics: the focus on the "other," givenness, and contextualization. From their very beginnings, philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion have emphasized the need to become aware of one's presuppositions, suspend one's value judgments, and accurately describe and interpret the meaning of phenomena as phenomena. Past philosophy, theology, and other normative approaches have been critiqued for ignoring or distorting the intentional structures
and meanings of the religious phenomena of the "other." More recent phenomenologists recognize that earlier phenomenology, with its essentializing projects and universalizing claims, often does not pay sufficient attention to the diverse experiences and meanings of the other. One sometimes learns more about the scholar's phenomenological theory of religion than about the particular religious phenomena of the other. Recent phenomenology has been much more sensitive to providing a methodological and hermeneutical framework for becoming attentive to the tremendous diversity of the religious voices of others. Related to this is the focus on givenness. Philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion emphasize the need to become attentive to what is given in experience.

Phenomenological reflection involves an active openness and deeper kind of attentiveness to how religious phenomena appear or are given to us in experience. Over the decades, phenomenology
of religion has become much broader, more self-critical, and much more sophisticated in recognizing the complexity, ambiguity, and depth of our diverse modes of givenness. For example, in their very dynamic of givenness, religious phenomena both reveal and conceal structures and meanings; are multidimensional and given meaning through pre-understandings, the pre-reflective, the emotive, and theimaginative, as well as rational and conceptual analysis; are not disclosed as bare givens but as highly complex, inexhaustible, constituted, self-transcending givens; and are given in ways that affirm the open-ended perspectival nature of all knowledge and the nonclosure of descriptions, interpretations, and explanations. Finally, phenomenologists of religion are much more sensitive to the complex, mediated, interactive, contextual situatedness of their phenomenological tasks. Unlike the earlier emphasis on doing justice to experiential givenness and the phenomena of the other, philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion are continually criticized for claiming to uncover nonhistorical, nontemporal, essential structures and meanings largely detached from their specific contexts within which religious phenomena have been expressed. More recent phenomenologists of religion tend to be more sensitive to the perspectival and contextual constraints
of their approach and more modest in their claims. There is value in uncovering religious essences and structures, but as embodied and contextualized, not as fixed, absolute, ahistorical, eternal truths and meanings. In this regard, a more self-critical and modest phenomenology of religion may have much to contribute to the study of religion, including an awareness of its presuppositions, its historical and contextualized situatedness, and its limited perspectival knowledge claims, while also not completely abandoning concerns about the commonality of human beings and the value of unity, as well as differences. Such a selfcritical and modest phenomenology of religion may attempt to formulate essential structures and meanings through rigorous phenomenological methods, including intersubjective confirmation of knowledge claims, while also attempting to formulate new, dynamic, contextually sensitive projects involving creative encounter, contradiction, and synthesis.

SEE ALSO Comparative Religion; Study of Religion, overview
article; World Religions.

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The most comprehensive general introduction to philosophical phenomenology remains Herbert Spiegelberg's *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 2 vols., 3d ed. (The Hague, 1982). Richard Schmitt's "Phenomenology" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967), vol. 5, pp. 133–151, provides another introduction, although it tends to be formulated primarily on the basis of Husserl's approach and often is more of a critical philosophical essay rather than a survey of the field. Of the anthologies of phenomenological
philosophers and their different philosophical approaches, *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, edited by
Robert C. Solomon (Washington, D.C., 1972), is highly recommended. There is no major comprehensive survey of the phenomenology of religion. Jacques Waardenburg's *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1973–1974), provides a general introduction
to scholars identified with the modern study of religion, including selections from the leading phenomenologists of
religion and fairly extensive bibliographies of their works. A number of books have a chapter or section surveying the phenomenology of religion, including Eric J. Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History* (London, 1975; 2d ed. La Salle, Ill., 1986) and John Macquarrie's *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, 4th ed. (London and New York, 1988). See also Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion," in *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by Frank Whaling, 2 vols. (Berlin and New York, 1983–1984), and *Experience of the Sacred: Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion*, edited by Summer
B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser (Hanover, N.H., 1992). The following are selected works by the major phenomenologists of religion considered in this entry. As the first major philosophical phenomenologist with a focus on religion, Max Scheler's important translated works include *On the Eternal in Man*, translated by Bernard Noble (London, 1960), and *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 5th ed., translated by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston, Ill., 1973). William Brede Kristensen's *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, translated by John B. Carman (The Hague, 1960), illustrates a very restricted descriptive phenomenology. Rudolf Otto's *The Idea*

of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational, 2d English ed., translated by John W. Harvey (Oxford, 1950), is the best-known account of religious experience. Gerardus van
der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, 2 vols., 2d ed., translated by J. E. Turner (New York, 1963), is often considered the classic work in phenomenology of religion. Friedrich Heiler's *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (Oxford, 1932), is available in English in a translation by Samuel Mc-Comb, but the complete edition of his *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (Stuttgart, 1961) has not been translated. Of C. Jouco Bleeker's many writings on the phenomenology of religion, one may cite *Problems and Methods of the History of Religions*, edited by Ugo Bianchi, C. Jouco Bleeker,
and Alessandro Bausani (Leiden, 1972), which contains Bleeker's essay, "The Contribution of the Phenomenology of Religion to the Study of the History of Religions." as well as Bleeker's *The Sacred Bridge: Researches into the Nature and Structure of Religion* (Leiden, 1963), which contains the essays "The Phenomenological Method" and "Some Remarks on the 'Entelecheia' of Religious Phenomena." Of more than thirty books by Mircea Eliade available in English, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, translated by Rosemary
Sheed (New York, 1958), is his systematic morphological work that best illustrates his hermeneutical framework of symbolic systems necessary for interpreting religious meaning. *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago, 1969), a collection of Eliade's important essays, provides insight into his phenomenological method and discipline. Of Ninian Smart's many books, *The Phenomenon of Religion* (London, 1973), *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions* (1973), and *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley, 1996) provide a good background on his phenomenological approach. The following are a wide variety of books focusing on the phenomenology of religion. Jacques Waardenburg's *Reflections on the Study of Religion* (The Hague, 1978) includes an essay
on the work of van der Leeuw and two other essays on the phenomenology of religion. *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology*, edited by Lauri Honko (The Hague, 1979), includes essays under the title "The Future of the Phenomenology of Religion." Douglas Allen's *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions* (The Hague, 1978), written from a perspective informed by philosophical phenomenology, surveys approaches in the phenomenology of religion and

argues that Eliade has a sophisticated phenomenological method. Two works, written from perspectives often quite critical of the
phenomenology of religion, are Olof Pettersson and Hans Akerberg's *Interpreting Religious Phenomena: Studies with Reference to the Phenomenology of Religion* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1981) and Antonio Barbosa da Silva's *The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem* (Uppsala, Sweden, 1982). See also Henry Dumery, *Phenomenology and Religion; Structures of the Christian Institution* (Berkeley, 1975), and Thomas Ryba, *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York, 1991). Raffaele Pettazzoni and Geo Widengren write about the complementary nature of the history and phenomenology of religion. See Pettazzoni's "The Supreme Being: Phenomenological
Structure and Historical Development," in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, edited by Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago, 1959) and Widengren's *Religionens varld* (Stockholm, 1945) and German translation: *Religionsphanomenologie* (Berlin, 1969). Numerous works by critics of phenomenology of religion, claiming that it is unscientific, lacks methodological rigor, and is subjective, include important studies by such scholars as Robert Segal, Hans Penner, and Donald Wiebe. See, for example, *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, edited by Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (Leiden, 1994), which includes Segal's essay "In Defense of Reductionism." Other challenges to philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion have been offered by scholars identified with postmodernist, poststructuralist, deconstructionist, feminist, pragmatist, narrativist, and relativist approaches. See, for example, Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London and New York, 1999). Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas are extremely influential continental philosophers, deeply rooted in phenomenology and with a major focus on religion, even if the relation of many of their works to phenomenology is often ambiguous. See, for example, Ricoeur's *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, translated by Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, 1967), and *The Symbolism of Evil*, translated by Emerson Buchanan (New York, 1967); and
Levinas's *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, 1969) and *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Lingis (The Hague, 1981). There has been a turn toward religion in much of continental philosophy. Some of this has been shaped by phenomenology, whether it remains within the phenomenology of religion or goes beyond the boundaries of phenomenology. See *Phenomenology and the*

"Theological Turn": The French Debate (New York, 2000) with essays by Dominique Janicaud, Jean-Francois Courtine, Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Louis Chretien, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michel Henry. Another volume, focusing on Derrida-Marion debates, with some discussion on phenomenology in this religious turn, is *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon
(Bloomington, Ind., 1999). Two influential French scholars deeply influenced by phenomenology are Michel
Henry and Jean-Luc Marion. See Henry's *The Essence of Manifestation*, translated by Girard Etzkorn (The Hague, 1973), and *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, translated by Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif., 2003); and Marion's *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, translated by Thomas Carlson (Evanston, Ill., 1998), and *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey Kosky(Stanford, Calif., 2002).
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