

Anthropological approaches

- The subject began in the nineteenth century as the search for the origins of humankind.
- Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*
- It saw all religion as a kind of fertility magic.
- Human history passed through three stages dominated respectively by magic, religion, and science.

Anthropological approaches

- Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
- He declared that one well made experiment proves the rule and set out to examine in great depth a single example the religion of the aborigines of central Australia, especially the Arunta.
- Fundamentally... there are no religion which are false. All are true after their own fashion: All fulfill given conditions of human existence, though in different ways.
- He assumed that religion was one thing, a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity.

The revolt against evolutionism

- In the USA it was a German, Franz Boas (d. 1942) who insisted that societies must be studied and understood in their own terms.
- In Britain it was a Pole, Bronislaw Malinowski who opened the way to modern fieldwork.
- Malinowski insisted he was a functionalist. Society was to be seen as a functioning whole.
- Malinowski's innovative method, participant observation, became an essential first step in the career of all aspiring anthropologists.
- Holism

Malinowski

- Religion served to provide psychological support in the face of death.
- He admitted that religion also often served to bind a community together.
- Magic provided psychological assurance in the face of the world's general uncertainty.
- All his life Malinowski wrote against the Western stereotype of the irrational savage.

Phenomenological Approaches

- In his influential *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806), Hegel developed the thesis that essence (*Wesen*) is understood through investigating appearances and manifestations.
- Hegel's influence is evident in the title of the first significant publication to outline a phenomenological approach to the study of religion in a coherent way, Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Phenomenologie der Religion* (1933)

Edmund Husserl (d. 1938)

- *Epoche* involves restraint or suspension of judgment. It has also been referred to as ‘bracketing out’.
- Eidetic vision relates to the ability to see what is actually there.
- Van der Leeuw: The life that is being examined should acquire its place in the life of the student himself who should understand it out of his inner self. This necessitated empathy, ... transposing oneself into the object or re-experiencing it.

Rudolph Otto (d. 1937)

- *The Idea of the Holy*: This work gained its importance, because of his taking the holy as an autonomous a priori category, as a category of meaning and value.
- He claimed that the existence of the *numen* (the holy) could be established as a *sui generis* category (to be understood only in its own terms). This argument depended on positing that knowledge comes by virtue of faith.

Two categories of Phenomenologists

- First, there are those concerned to carry out a descriptive study of religion.
- The second position engage the phenomenologist directly with the hermeneutical issues. He will be involved not only in identifying the range of the phenomenon but justifying its significance in terms of its importance to what it means to be human.
- Importance of equal consideration being given to different 'religious cultures'.