

Foundational Methodology of Religious Studies

1. The question put to me was:

"How, from the viewpoint of the lecturer, does philosophy view the religious phenomenon, in terms of the validity or the viability of that phenomenon?"

I took "religious phenomenon" to refer, not to this or that religion or group of religions, but to all religions, to religions generally.

I inferred that only the whole of religious studies could be equal to the task.

As I could not condense religious studies within a single lecture, I decided to approach the issue from the angle of method.

No doubt, other interretations are possible, but fortunately other lecturers have been invited to this symposium

2. Foundational Methodology

a) as such

is transcendental method, the method that conditions the possibility of the methods in specific disciplines, the method that exhibits the core which other methods particularize
treats the basic philosophic questions (cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics)

also treats deliberating, evaluating, deciding, doing, and thereby puts philosophic issues into a context of methodical considerations

for method regards doing, and so is practical; it is collaborative, working with others, and so has an interpersonal dimension; it may call for conversion, and so is existential.

b) as applied

the immediate application is to the several disciplines or modes of knowing: mathematics, natural science, common sense, scholarship, human science, religious studies

the mediate application is through the disciplines and to their objects

c) hence, foundational methodology regards the viability and validity of religious studies and, only in so far as religious studies are carried out properly, has it a bearing on the viability and validity of the religious phenomenon itself.

3. An Open-ended Methodology

a) It proceeds from a moving viewpoint

it deals not with the objects but with the operations involved in mathematics, natural science, common sense, scholarship, human science, religious studies

it deals primarily not with adaptations and modifications of these operations demanded by the diverse objects of the diverse disciplines but with the common core that rests on the nature of the inquiring subject

hence, question of formal object irrelevant here; and irrelevant later, for then the ^{appropriate} method will be the ratio sub qua obiectum materiale attingitur.

b) It is guided by empirical criteria

in the first instance it is concerned with what religions have been and are, and so it begins from the phenomena, the data, in all their diversity

so it is not misled by a priori notions to ignore differences, to dictate what religions must be, should be, cannot be

c) it is the opposite of reductionist positions

whether philosophical: only what is given, only what is necessary, only what is ideal,...

or methodological: behaviorism, only what is common to animals and men; analysts, talk only about talk...

d) it is philosophy in etymological sense, love of wisdom

wisdom: AHC, OT, Paul (Feuillet), Mt (Suggs), Justin M., Clem. Al., Augustine (de magistro)

natural desire to know God: scholastics up to Cajetan

Aquinas: structure of CG; what we cannot do by ourselves, we can do by our friends (Indices S Thom p 371)

4. A Methodological and not a Deductivist Ideal

a) The deductivist ideal goes back to Aristotle's Prior Analytics (analysis of syllogisms) and Posterior Analytics (analysis of syllogistic science: syllogismos epistēmōnikos, epistēmē apodeiktikē)

b) Its basic assumption is the necessity of premisses that are true, first, immediate, better known, prior, and causes of the conclusion (Post Anal I, 2, 71b 20-22). Its account of our knowledge of such premisses occurs in Post Anal II 19, an account that fits the discovery not of true premisses but of possible hypotheses.

c) This deductivist ideal is connected historically with the primacy of speculative intellect, pure reason. Its results seem to have been scepticism in the XIVth century, rationalism in the XVIIth and XVIIIth, absolute idealism in the XIXth.

(Aristotelian)

d) Speculative intellect with logic as its tool yields only a science of objects, of what the syllogisms or other logical procedures establish.

e) Its first science will be the science on which all other sciences depend. But obviously the less general is dependent on the more general, and the more general is not dependent on the less. And the most general object is being, on hēi on, so that metaphysics is the first science, and it supplies all other sciences with their basic terms and most basic premisses. In particular, psychology will be cast in metaphysical terms, so that psychology has to be a faculty psychology, a psychology of potencies, forms, and acts.

f) Associated with the priority of speculative intellect over practical intellect, there is the priority of intellect over will. Without that priority will would be not a rational but an arbitrary appetite. Hence nihil amatum nisi praecognitum, and similar axioms.

5. The Methodological Ideal

a) The deductivist ideal conceives science as a specialization which aims mediately at the good and immediately at the true; its goal accordingly is a deductivist system which, because true, is permanently valid.

The methodological ideal aims mediately at the good and the true; its immediate aim is a more accurate and fuller understanding of data; its proximate achievement is the best available opinion at ~~each~~^{any} given time. Because its proximate achievement is only probable, it lays no claim to establishing ^{an} permanently valid systems.

b) The methodological ideal may be unpacked by stating four principles: an empirical principle; an intellectual principle; a verification principle; and a social principle.

c) The empirical principle is that true statements about proportionate being (i. e., the world of possible human experience) are conditioned directly or indirectly by the givenness of relevant data.

The distinction between analytic propositions and analytic principles shows that analyticity involves no exception to the empirical principle (cf. Insight, pp. 304-309).

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d) The intellectual principle regards the advance of human knowledge. It places this advance in a circular process in which ^{inadequately} unexplained but noticed data give rise to inquiry, inquiry eventually yields insight, insight modifies existing formulations, the testing of formulations either increases the range of explained data, or reveals data to be unexplained, or does a bit of both, whence the circular process begins another round.

Aristotle's account of the discovery of first principles in Post Anal II, 19 is psychologically accurate; however, it describes not the origin of the first principles as formulated in Post Anal I, 2, but the origin of hypotheses, of what may or may not prove to be true.

In metaphysical terms, finite essences are contingent; they may or may not exist. But what is grasped in insight is finite essence or finite nature; and knowledge of its actual existence is settled not by the occurrence of the insight but by further and distinct procedures.

In logical terms there is Gödel's theorem to the effect that a deductivist system is either trivial, or incomplete, or inconsistent: trivial if it merely expands tautologies; incomplete if it raises questions that it cannot answer; and inconsistent if it demonstrates both the affirmation and the negation of the same proposition in the same sense.

e) The verification principle is to be understood in its literal sense. It is the condition not of the meaningfulness of propositions (as logical positivists once fancied) but of the truth of propositions.

It means that insights are not enough. The point was made dramatically by the psychiatrist who, after hearing a lecture on insight, remarked: "My patients have lots of insights. The trouble is that they are wrong."

There is a further aspect to the verification principle when applied to general statements. It is that while contrary data can exclude the truth of a general statement, favorable data establish^h no more than the probability of such a statement.

f) The social principle is that the pursuit of the methodological ideal is the work, not of any individual but of a commonsense, or ^a scientific, or ^a scholarly community.

It is the community that provides education; it is education that promotes the ongoing stream of newly born from their connatural primitive mentality to some measure, consonant with their time and place, of commonsense, scientific, and/or scholarly awareness.

As the heritage of the past is transmitted by the community, so too the example of the community inspires some of the new generation to endeavor and perhaps achieve some solution of outstanding problems unsolved in the cultural heritage.

Finally, it is the community's awareness of these problems, its ability to judge how well such problems are solved by the new views, ^{its capacity to estimate} what further solutions are implicit in the proposed solution, that enables the community to be the arbiter on the acceptance or rejection of the new proposal.

6. The Anthropological Turn

a) The term, principle, means traditionally what is first in an ordered set (primum in aliquo ordine).

The two chief applications of this meaning are respectively its logical meaning and its real meaning.

The logical meaning of a first principle is a first premiss; it was in this sense that Aristotle proposed to derive demonstrative science from what is true, first, immediate, etc. (Post Anal I, 2).

The real meaning of a first principle is a man and, specifically, a man as attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.

b) The anthropological turn is the turn from principles in their logical sense to principles in the above real sense.

It is the turn from the logical ideal of a closed, deductivist, permanently valid system to the methodological ideal of an open-ended, ongoing process of increasing understanding mastering ever larger ranges of data.

It is the turn represented in science by the rejection of Aristotle's physics and the inauguration of modern physics, represented in philosophy by the dependence of a metaphysics on an epistemology and, eventually, of epistemology on a cognitional theory, represented in scholarship by nineteenth century developments in hermeneutics and critical history.

c) While there is no serious dispute about the value and validity of the anthropological turn in science and scholarship, there still remain hesitations about it in the field of philosophy. It is true that efforts to establish some one metaphysic as the first science are no more successful in the twentieth century than they were in the fourteenth. But it also seems

true that philosophy since Descartes has exhibited even wider variations than before him. In brief, there is need of some justification of the anthropological turn in philosophy, if only to make clear just what that turn intends and what its motives are.

d) In general, then causa essendi and causa cognoscendi are reciprocal in the sense that if one is known the other can at once be inferred. Thus, from the viewpoint of causa cognoscendi one knows that the moon is sphere because one knows about its phases, then one can conclude that from from the viewpoint of causa essendi the moon has phases because it is a sphere. Inversely, if one is told that the moon has phases because it is a sphere (causa essendi) then one can infer that the phases are sufficient ground for concluding (causa cognoscendi) that the moon is spherical.

Similarly, a fully accurate metaphysics will include, from the viewpoint of causa essendi, an equally accurate account of human knowledge; and a sufficiently accurate and detailed theory of human knowledge will include, from the viewpoint of causa cognoscendi, an account of the grounds of possible human knowledge and so of possible, human, metaphysical knowledge.

However, what gives rise to the anthropological turn is not any doubt about the above reciprocity. It is the simple and obvious fact that there are several claimants to the title of being the one and only true metaphysics; and it is the further simple and obvious fact that none of the claimants has more than vague guesses to offer on the ^{metaphysical} nature of human knowledge.

Accordingly, if anyone feels that metaphysics should be the basic discipline, let him go ahead and establish a metaphysical theory that will include a detailed and satisfactory account of what human knowledge is. And if he succeeds in his endeavor, I have no doubt that cognitional theorists will join in congratulating him on his achievement.

Meanwhile, however, it cannot be claimed that everyone must pin his hopes on the future success of the metaphysical project. It may even be urged that many rightly feel there is little likelihood of a correct metaphysics being worked out as long as there remain profound and unreconciled differences in cognitional theory. After all, if you do not know what you are doing when you are knowing, there is little possibility of your finding out what you know when you do it.

Such is the basis on which the anthropological turn takes its stand. On that stand its proposal is twofold.

The first strand in the proposal is generalized empirical method. The method that is generalized is the method of the natural sciences that proceeds from the data of sense through increasing understanding to the ever fuller and more accurate mastery of of ever larger ranges of data. The generalization of the method is to include along with relevant data of sense the further data of cognitional consciousness. As the sensible expression of mathematical achievement leads to an understanding of that achievement, so advertence both to the sensible expression and/^{to}the corresponding experience of understanding it supplies the data of experiencing mathematical understanding. What is done for experiencing mathematical understanding can be done next for experiencing the understanding

of physicists. What is done for these, can be done in succession for experiencing commonsense understanding, philosophic understanding, hermeneutic understanding, historical understanding, and so on for all the fields in which human understanding develops. When one has familiarized oneself with the experience of understanding in as many of the diverse fields as one can manage, one may go on to experience the activity of passing judgement on the validity of acts of understanding and, of course, to noting variations in the experience of that activity as one passes from one field to another.