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D. Z. Phillips

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Leading philosopher of religion D. Z. Phillips argues that intellectuals need not see their task as being for or against religion, but as one of understanding it. What stand in the way of this task are certain methodological assumptions about what enquiry into religion must be. Beginning with Bernard Williams on Greek gods, Phillips goes on to examine these assumptions in the work of Hume, Feuerbach, Marx, Frazer, Tylor, Marett, Freud, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Berger and Winch. The result exposes confusion, but also gives logical space to religious belief without advocating personal acceptance of that belief, and shows how the academic study of religion may return to the contemplative task of doing conceptual justice to the world.

Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation extends in important ways D. Z. Phillips' seminal 1976 book *Religion Without Explanation*. It will be of interest to scholars and students of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, religious studies and theology.

D. Z. Phillips is Danforth Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, California and Rush Rhees Research Professor in the University of Wales at Swansea. His many books include *The Concept of Prayer* (1965, re-issued 1981), *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (1970), *Religion Without Explanation* (1976), *Faith After Foundationalism* (1988) *Wittgenstein and Religion* (1993), *Introducing Philosophy* (1996), and *Recovering Religious Concepts* (2000). He has also edited works by the late Rush Rhees including *On Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge 1997) and *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (Cambridge 1998).

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RELIGION AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF CONTEMPLATION

D. Z. PHILLIPS

*Claremont Graduate University
and*

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*In memory of
Peter Winch*

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Religion Without Explanation was published in 1976. It had grown out of lectures given at Swansea over the previous six years, lectures which were meant to discuss issues concerning religion which would be of interest to students in the social sciences as well as to students in the humanities. The structure of the book corresponds to that aim, with four of its chapters discussing Tylor and Frazer, Marett, Freud and Durkheim, with the remaining seven chapters, including the introduction and a discussion of Hume's legacy, being devoted to more traditional topics in the philosophy of religion.

For some time I had toyed with the idea of revising the book with a view to a second edition, but when I finally gave myself to the task in the summer and autumn of 1998 I found that revision soon became rewriting, since I now decided to address larger issues. I was also dissatisfied with various aspects of my original work. As a result, six chapters of the original work disappeared in writing this book, although use is made, now and again, of some material in them. More importantly, eight new chapters appear in the present work and important revisions are made in my previous discussions of the thinkers already mentioned.

In my first chapter on 'Hermeneutics and the philosophical future of religious studies' I attempt to distinguish philosophy's contemplative task from the critiques of religion found in the hermeneutics of suspicion, and from the apologetic concerns of the hermeneutics of recollection. In these discussions I was stimulated by the works of Daniel L. Pals and J. Samuel Preus with respect to the nature of religious studies, and by the work of Van A. Harvey with respect to the hermeneutics of suspicion. In the course of the chapter I also meet Wayne Proudfoot's charge that in *Religion Without Explanation* I had failed to distinguish between descriptive

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reductionism and explanatory reductionism. I also comment again on the unscholarly charge of fideism.

It is often said that in modernity we have good reason to question assumptions about the gods that we find in the ancient world. I, on the contrary, think that our own philosophical assumptions about what we take those assumptions to be need to be questioned, especially as they have an abiding influence on the philosophical discussion of religion. This is my reason for the second chapter on 'The gods and us' in which I conduct a critical discussion of Bernard Williams' arguments in *Shame and Necessity*.

There is no denying that contemporary philosophy of religion, whether through disagreement or agreement, is an inheritor of Hume's legacy. Once Hume is thought to have shown the logically problematic character of arguments from the world to God, the task for anthropology, sociology and psychoanalysis becomes one of explaining why, despite that fact, people continue to believe in God. The new third chapter on 'Hume's Legacy' in the present book contains important revisions. In my previous study I had not given sufficient weight to the extent to which Hume, in his attenuated deism, is still in the grip of conceptions of 'the world' which, elsewhere, he himself criticises. This means that Hume failed to press home the logical implications of some of his best criticisms. Had he done so, his attack on certain ways of philosophising about religion would have been even more devastating. In the new chapter I also give more attention to Hume's *Natural History*, arguing that in it we see crucial assumptions about concept-formation in religion which need to be examined.

My fourth chapter on 'Feuerbach: religion's secret?' repairs a serious omission in *Religion Without Explanation* in which my remarks on Feuerbach are cursory and misleading. They do not show the power of Feuerbach's challenge, or how much, even through disagreement, there is to learn from him. The need for a more substantial treatment of his work was brought home to me through discussions with Van A. Harvey and, even more, from studying his *Feuerbach*.

My fifth chapter 'Marx and Engels: religion, alienation and compensation' is new and, again, rectifies an omission in *Religion Without Explanation*. The treatment here is briefer than that of Feuerbach, since Marx and Engels build on many of his basic assumptions concerning religious belief, despite their important disagreements.

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In the sixth chapter, ‘Tylor and Frazer: are religious beliefs mistaken hypotheses?’ I have given the thinkers separate treatment in a way in which I did not in *Religion Without Explanation*. I have given far more attention to the ways in which confusions may appear in rituals, confusions which are linked to a deep mythology in our language. My use of this latter notion is confused and unclear in my original chapter. I also give far more attention to the issue of explanation in religion in the light of Wittgenstein’s ‘Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*’ and Rush Rhees’ and Frank Cioffi’s discussions of this issue. I have also been helped by John Skorupski’s discussions of the intellectualist tradition in the social sciences in my critique of that conception. In this chapter I make use of papers written subsequent to *Religion Without Explanation*. I have in mind ‘Wittgenstein’s Full Stop’, first published in *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Irving Block, Oxford: Blackwell 1981, and reprinted in my *Wittgenstein and Religion*, London: Macmillan 1993, and ‘Primitive Reactions and the Reactions of Primitives’, the 1983 Marett Lecture, first published by Exeter College, Oxford, and also reprinted in *Wittgenstein and Religion*. I am grateful for permission to use the material here.

The seventh chapter on ‘Marett: primitive reactions’ has also been revised. I have incorporated the emphases found in my original chapter with the different emphases found in ‘Primitive Reactions and the Reactions of Primitives’. In developing the connections between primitive reactions and concept-formation I have made use of some of the observations in ‘In the Beginning, was the Proposition – In the Beginning was the Choice – In the Beginning was the Dance’, first published in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 21, 1995/6, and reprinted in my *Recovering Religious Concepts*, London: Macmillan 2000. I am grateful for permission to use the material here.

In my eighth chapter on ‘Freud: the battle for “earliest” things’ I have made more explicit distinctions between the different conceptual issues being discussed by the division of the chapter into its sections.

The same is true of my ninth chapter, ‘Durkheim: religion as a social construct’ in which I have given far more attention to what I have called logical inversions in Durkheim’s arguments.

My tenth chapter, ‘Lévy-Bruhl: primitive logic’, is a new chapter. Discussed in my Swansea lectures, it is now a mystery to me why he was not accorded a chapter in *Religion Without Explanation*. I was

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helped to understand the complexities of Lévy-Bruhl's thought by the stimulating discussions of E. E. Evans-Pritchard.

My eleventh chapter, 'Berger: the avoidance of discourse' is a new chapter, thought necessary because of the continuing influence of this way of discussing religion in the social sciences. The chapter is a reorganisation of the two chapters on Berger in *Faith After Foundationalism*, London: Routledge 1988; Westview Press 1995. These chapters made use of my symposium with A. R. Manser, 'The Sociologizing of Meaning', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 53, 1979. I am grateful for permission to use the material here.

My twelfth chapter, 'Winch: trying to understand' is a new chapter and discusses the implications of Winch's views on understanding a primitive society and how these are affected by later developments in his work. In particular it discusses the indeterminacy in the notion of understanding and the artificiality of making a distinction between our culture and alien cultures in this respect.

In my thirteenth and final chapter, I discuss the tensions between the indeterminacy in the notion of understanding discussed in the last chapter, and the tasks of the hermeneutics of contemplation.

It is fitting that in its last two chapters this book should end with a discussion of Winch's work, since he is an excellent example of a philosopher who gave things the kind of attention called for by a contemplative conception of philosophy. This conception of philosophy showed itself in the way he discussed with others and himself. I hope this book bears some mark of the influence of one who was my teacher and friend, and who is deeply missed.

I am grateful to Mrs Helen Baldwin, Secretary to the Department of Philosophy at Swansea, for preparing the typescript for publication from my handwritten version, and to my colleague, Mario von der Ruhr, for help with the proof-reading. I am also grateful to Kevin Taylor of Cambridge University Press for having faith in my manuscript and for the generous comments and criticisms of four anonymous readers, as a result of which I rewrote the final chapter of the book.