

RITUAL METAPHYSICS

Kevin Schilbrack
Wesleyan College

Abstract

In this paper, I seek to show the fruitfulness of connecting the study of ritual activities to the ritualists' metaphysics, which is to say, to their understanding of the necessary conditions of life. I suggest that some rituals may be seen as inscribing bodies with messages that are, properly speaking, metaphysical in this sense, and that some rituals may be seen as embodied inquiries into the metaphysical nature of things. By so doing, I hope to provide conceptual tools for those who see rituals as having a cosmic dimension, and thereby to improve the generally weak relationship between the study of rituals and philosophy.

I Introduction

Clifford Geertz famously defines religion as a system of symbols that functions to unite a certain way of life or ethos with a certain world view or metaphysics (1973: 87-141). In his view, religion by definition involves metaphysics, its understanding of the structure of reality. Moreover, of the different features in any religion, Geertz says that it is primarily ritual that instills in religious people how their recommended way of life is connected to the way things are. "It is in some sort of ceremonial form -- even if that form be hardly more than the recitation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave -- that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in [people] and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for [people] meet and reinforce one another. In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world" (1973: 112).

I find Geertz's metaphysical interpretation of rituals valuable as a starting place for thinking about a philosophy of ritual because it explicitly ties ritual not merely to a people's understanding of their social environment, but also to its understanding of an even more inclusive environment, reality itself (1). "Metaphysics" is a term that is often used in divergent or even incompatible ways, and some deny that any form of metaphysics is intelligible. But if one takes metaphysics in the roughly Aristotelian sense, as Geertz and I do, as inquiry into the generic or necessary features of human existence, then one has a definition of metaphysics that is, I contend, both defensible and fruitful (2). Studies of religious rituals, however, do not always give attention to metaphysics. The real subject matter of ritual, it is often said, is not reality as such but one's social or political categorization. This turn from metaphysics is a widespread trend with deep philosophical roots. I am persuaded by the recent text by Nancy Frankenberry and Hans Penner who argue that twentieth century studies of religion operate under the legacy of positivism (Frankenberry and Penner 1999). They argue that though the positivists' identification of meaningfulness with verifiability and their rejection of metaphysics have been discredited in principle, they continue to be presupposed by those theories of religion (and I would add by those theories of ritual) that envision no way in which religious metaphysical views about the nature of things might be meaningful. Many accounts of ritual therefore proceed as if a religion's metaphysics is not relevant to what people are up to in their rituals. In this context, it is worth noting that in his own analyses of religious rituals (as opposed to his definition), Geertz himself largely ignores metaphysics. As Henry Munson has shown, Geertz in his analyses of cases tends to reduce religion to the overt appearance of behavior and personality traits -- that is, to a culture's style or ethos -- and to give inadequate attention to how practices are informed by a worldview (Munson 1986). So perhaps even Geertz hesitates to speak of religious metaphysics in this era of what Jürgen Habermas calls postmetaphysical thinking. The question that inspires this paper, then, is this: if one were to pursue an

interpretation of ritual that included metaphysics, what would it look like?

Pursuing this question reflects my view that the discipline of the philosophy of religion ought to include philosophical reflection not only on religious beliefs, its traditional focus, but also on the other features of religion as it is lived. Such growth will require philosophers to develop the tools for reflection on religious storytelling, sacrifice, pilgrimage, spiritual discipline, rites of passage, and other religious practices. This paper seeks to contribute to this project by tracing two lines of development in recent conversations regarding the body and suggesting how philosophers of religion might contribute to them and thereby to the study of rituals. My proposal consequently has two complementary parts, which I have subtitled “ritual bodies as philosophical objects” and “ritual bodies as philosophical subjects.” I close with a discussion of what it means to speak of metaphysics as embodied, so that those interested in this dimension of ritual action do not assume that speculative thinking is limited to what goes on in texts or in minds.

II Ritual Bodies as Philosophical Objects

The study of religion, like the study of culture generally, has for the most part ignored the body and has treated religious meanings as the product of minds. When the body was present at all, it has usually been as a natural body, a body without history or culture. Nevertheless, there is a tradition in social theory and philosophy, increasingly sophisticated over the twentieth century, and pouring forth like water from a fire hose in the last generation, which sees the body as a social construction and therefore as an important medium of expression (for overviews, see Shilling 1993: ch. 4, Turner 1996).

The different approaches that have been labeled social constructionist – for example, those of Marcel Mauss, Mary Douglas, Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault – espouse a variety of positions on the relation of the body to its social meanings. Douglas, for example, interprets the body as a vehicle for social symbolism, whereas Foucault argues more radically that the body is an effect of discourse. But if one may generalize, the social constructionist tradition rejects the idea that anatomy is destiny and provides tools for understanding the meanings of body parts, sensations, and activities as the products of specific social forces. Here bodies are systems of signs that stand for or express social relations. Consequently, engagement with this tradition gives one the possibility of seeing a religious ritual as an act of social inscription, as writing on bodies.

Where does metaphysics fit in this approach? Sometimes, it doesn't. Sometimes, the social constructionist view seems to be that if the body itself is a social construction, culturally and historically variant, then all bodily knowledge is local knowledge, and there is no place left for metaphysical claims that allege to be true “always and everywhere.” But such an argument is flimsy. Just because the speaker comes from a particular cultural and linguistic context, it does not follow that what she is talking about is also local. Thus, given the value of the work that social constructionists have done to show the ways in which bodies are culturally inscribed, here is an important but rarely asked question which one might ask: what can these cultural inscriptions be *about*? In other words, if the body is a text, what is the subject matter of that text? When one asks this question, one sees that the overwhelming tendency has been to study how bodies are inscribed with social or political categories. As Edmund Leach says in a classical statement of this view, “rituals are to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order” (1954:62). Roy Rappaport summarizes: “one of the important functionalist theories of ritual is based upon ... an assumption of empirical independence between ritual and the world external to the congregation” (Rappaport 1984: 2). Such approaches tend to study, above all, the means by which race, gender, and class are socially constructed and inscribed on people's bodies (3). As a consequence, when social constructionist approaches have focused on religious rituals and practices, the focus has primarily been on how religion legitimates social categories, and rarely on the religion's metaphysical speculations. Relatively little attention has been given to how bodies are inscribed with a religion's “most comprehensive ideas.”

If one is interested in seeing how ritual practices are informed by a metaphysical ideology, then one ought to make a distinction between two kinds of markings that rituals and other cultural practices might seek to inscribe on the body. First, rituals can seek to inscribe the marks of *contingent* characteristics.

Contingent characteristics are those that one may or may not exhibit, characteristics that permit of an alternative. For example, some rituals may aim explicitly to mark their participants as adult and no longer children, dead and no longer among the living, or married and no longer single. And such rituals may at the same time aim tacitly to mark the participants with other contingent characteristics of identity and social location: as masculine (as opposed to feminine), heterosexual (as opposed to homosexual), African American (as opposed to Caucasian), Catholic, American, healthy, bourgeois, or sexy, and so on, as opposed to their alternatives. All these inscriptions mark one as a member of one class rather than another and so by definition these inscriptions refer to contingent characteristics. Yet it is also possible that a ritual might seek to inscribe marks or inculcate attributes that represent what are taken to be *necessary* characteristics. Necessary characteristics would be characteristics that a person cannot fail to exhibit, characteristics that apply to human existence as such and which therefore do not permit of an alternative (4). To present or to acknowledge such bodily characteristics through a ritual would be to present or acknowledge features that those inscribed share in some way with every other human being, or every other sentient being, or perhaps even everything else that exists. Insofar as a ritual seeks to inscribe this kind of mark, it makes sense to speak of the inscription of ritual metaphysics (5).

Making this distinction between contingent and necessary marks permits one to see rituals as a process through which a religion makes its most abstract teachings concrete, giving facticity to its ideology. It is true that if a characteristic really is a necessary feature of the human condition, then an individual is always already characterized by it; one would be characterized by it, that is, even before inscription. For this reason, one can expect that such rituals will not present themselves as *making* people X nor training them to *become* X, but will present themselves rather as training people to “realize” or “acknowledge” that they are X. Ritual leaders may assert that though one falsely believes or appears to be Y, one’s “true self” is X. But the goal in any case is to provide visible, tactile instantiation to teachings that might otherwise seem merely conceptual. The goal is to have the ritual participants perceive metaphysical truths “in the flesh.” Such metaphysical knowledge, inscribed on bodies through ritual, is also practical knowledge. This ritual knowledge of reality is used to shape conduct, to get people to act “properly,” as “we” act, as “true humans” act, or as the Gods act. In this way, ritual metaphysics is used to alienate a range of possible behaviors as not in accord with ultimate reality, and thereby to fabricate *authentic* human beings, authentic in the sense that their behavior is authorized by the very nature of things.

Consider an example. In the *Satipathāna Sutta*, the Buddha recommends the practice of cremation ground meditation or contemplation of foulness (*asubhāvanā*). In order to develop mindfulness of the repulsiveness of the body, the monk might visit cremation grounds and contemplate the corpses decomposing there. The Buddha advises that the monk who engages in this form of meditation should explicitly think to himself that his own body has the same nature as that dead body, that it will become the same as that dead body. One is studying one’s own inescapable end. In *The Path of Purification*, his encyclopedic commentary on the Theravāda path, Buddhaghosa provides a detailed discussion of how to prepare for and carry out this method of meditation (Buddhaghosa 1976: 185-203). The monk should first find a teacher who can explain the method: how to approach the cremation grounds, how to be attentive to what surrounds the corpse, and how to apprehend and absorb what one sees. The monk should inform a senior elder of the Community, but then should go to the cemetery alone. Buddhaghosa describes in some detail the different kinds of bodies: lucky the monk who finds a bloated corpse, he writes, but there are also corpses that are livid and discolored, festering and oozing pus, cut up, gnawed by animals, scattered, hacked up, bleeding, worm- and maggot-infested, and merely skeletal. The monk should avoid contemplating the corpse of someone of the opposite sex. One meditative device is to reconstruct the separated parts of a corpse (for example, of an executed criminal or the victim of an animal attack), but one who does this should do it with a walking stick or a staff so that he does not become so familiar with the bodies that they lose their repulsiveness. In all these cases, Buddhaghosa presents the bodies precisely as text-like, sign-bearing objects:

The meditator should apprehend the sign [of foulness] thoroughly in that body... . He should advert to it in well-established mindfulness. He should see that it is properly remembered, properly defined, by doing that again and again. Standing in a place not too far from and not too near to the body, he should open his eyes, look and apprehend the sign. He should open his eyes and look a hundred times, a thousand times, [thinking],

'Repulsiveness of the bloated, repulsiveness of the bloated', and he should close his eyes and advert to it (192).

The aim is to transform how one perceives living bodies. The lesson to be learned is that "a living body is just as a dead one, only the characteristic of foulness is not evident in a living body, being hidden by adventitious embellishments" (201). This brand of meditation is practiced less often today, since cremation grounds are lacking, but Mathieu Boisvert reports that some contemporary monks in Sri Lanka pursue this form of meditation by visiting autopsy rooms (Boisvert 1996).

How should one understand this practice? Certainly, it can be interpreted in terms of the psychic transformation it pursues. Aiming at the restraint and eventual elimination of sexual desire, this practice, though not common, forms part of the ascetic dimension of Theravāda discipline. Buddhaghosa clearly praises cremation ground meditation for its ability to help one overcome lust and achieve tranquility of mind (Buddhaghosa 196) (6). But on a metaphysical interpretation of this practice, the elimination of lust should not be divorced from a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of persons and the nature of reality. In Buddhism, a characteristic that is often alleged to be necessary in the sense of being shared by everything that exists is that of "being impermanent." Out of attachment to their lives, human beings may want to see themselves as eternal, as having some part of themselves which is not transient, but impermanence is nevertheless (along with suffering and the lack of selfhood) one of the unavoidable "marks of existence." Attention to the metaphysical dimension of Buddhist rituals, then, looks to see whether Buddhist rituals seek to inscribe on bodies this kind of attribute. From this perspective, the contemplation of foulness may be a psychological technique, but it gets its sense from a more inclusive vision: one should eliminate one's lustful attachment to bodies because bodies, like all other compound things, are impermanent.

There are some who wish to distinguish a religion's "metapraxis," its justification of its practices, from its metaphysics, its justification of its beliefs (Kasulis 1992). Such a distinction may have its uses. But in this example at least, the Theravāda practice seems to find its justification precisely in Theravāda metaphysics. If this idea that religious rituals are typically couched in metaphysical systems is right, this returns us to Geertz, who theorizes that religious practices and religious metaphysics mutually support each other in a circular relationship (1973: 141). "Religious belief and ritual confront each other and mutually confirm one another; the ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world view describes, and the world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression" (1973: 127). To interpret this activity apart from Buddhist metaphysics is possible, and for some purposes it may be valuable, but one should keep in mind that one is abstracting the actions from the context that provides their justification as wisdom. In other words, recognizing that rituals can involve themselves in this kind of concern therefore resists putting a wall between the concepts of orthopraxy and orthodoxy.

On a metaphysical interpretation, then, rituals like cremation grounds meditation can be described as the "social construction" of the body; they do inscribe bodies as texts. But the point being made here is that these are metaphysical texts. A proper Buddhist body is a metaphysically informed body. Thus the point of the ritual is to represent the body in the light of a Buddhist metaphysics of impermanence, and thereby to train those who undergo the ritual in a Buddhist discipline of detachment and the restraint of desire. The ritual construction of Buddhist bodies is at the same time the construction of a metaphysically informed understanding of subjectivity. One can put this process in a Foucaultian way. For Foucault, as one shapes the way that one perceives bodies, one also polices oneself and shapes oneself as a subject. As Steven Collins suggests:

the *Vinaya* rules, the meditations on the body, and the effort to eradicate desire for material and sexual existence, serve to create in the body of the Buddhist monastic practitioner the space for an individualized or 'subjectivized' analysis. In so far as salvation is conceived as a spiritual state manifested in both mind and body, the attempt wholly to inhibit (or perhaps, exorcise) all sexual drives and thoughts, and not merely to prevent overt sexual activity, necessarily induces psychic conflict, a conflict which opens up the interior terrain for which texts and doctrines provide the map. In this private zone of operations the de-sexualized and thus in one sense the de-socialized individual can embody in imagination the immateriality posited in the doctrines of Buddhism, and in this way "touch the deathless with the body" (Collins 2000: 200-1).

The bodies of monks and nuns “embody in time and matter the eternal and immaterial Truth -- they actualize, we might say, the ideology” (Collins 2000: 188).

To be sure, what is taken as a necessary characteristic of reality may differ from one religion to the next. For example, those Muslims who undertake the *hajj* traditionally wear the white *ihram* attire that sets them apart as pilgrims. “Pilgrim” is in this respect a contingent characteristic. Some people at some times are pilgrims, but this is not true of all people at all times, let alone all of reality at all times. But one might say that in Islam a characteristic that an individual cannot fail to exhibit, a characteristic that permits no alternative, is the attribute of “being a creation of God.” Islam teaches that whether one knows it or not – indeed, even if out of idolatry one wants to deny it – it is necessarily true that one is a creation of God. This characteristic applies to every thing in every context, and therefore one’s body can be read as a sign with this message on it. This theistic metaphysics serves then to justify the Islamic ethos of submission. The question regarding Islamic rituals like the clothing, gestures, and activities one performs during the *hajj*, then, is whether they inscribe Muslims with this characteristic of creatureliness, and if so, how. Put otherwise, a metaphysical interpretation of Islamic rituals would pursue the hypothesis that, whatever other categories they inscribe, Islamic rituals train bodies to display metaphysical attributes.

This ritual interest in the metaphysical conditions of life is typically not pursued for its own sake. Rather, ritual knowledge of the nature of things typically serves to put the ritualists (back) into accord with that necessary truth, to train their emotions and appetites and comportment according to its patterns, so that they become microcosms of the cosmic order. Thus, according to the Qur’an, in the ritual prostration that symbolizes and constitutes one’s submission, one not only marks oneself as an obedient Muslim (as opposed to a non-Muslim); one also resembles the stars and the trees which, without human recalcitrance, submit to God’s will and worship Him (55.5). In replicating the behavior that the rest of reality does “naturally,” then, observant Muslims are “doers of the truth” (Denny 1994: 113). Similarly, Buddhist meditation on at least some accounts also aims at the actualization of a truth that the rest of reality already embodies. As the Zen teacher Dōgen puts it, it is not correct that all beings exist *in* time but rather that all beings *are* time. The rat and the tiger are times; the pine tree and the bamboo are times. Thus to an audience not of philosophers of religion but practicing monks, Dōgen says, metaphysically, “You must see all the various things of the whole world as so many times” (Dōgen 1985: 77; cf. Schilbrack 2000).

To make this distinction I am recommending between necessary and contingent ritual inscriptions is not to deny that ritual metaphysics have social functions. On the contrary, metaphysical teachings may primarily serve precisely to mark social boundaries, to reinforce political stratification, and to justify cultural hierarchies and differentiation. There is typically an intimate connection between ritual metaphysics and religious authority. The relationship between the sacrifice of Purusha to the varna system (*Rig Veda* 10.90) is an apposite example. In fact, to present contingencies as necessities is perhaps the primary way that religions have this effect, and to embed this metaphysical view in one’s perception of and experience of one’s very body is perhaps the primary way that religious rituals accomplish this. Liz Wilson argues that the cremation ground meditation has had this very effect (Wilson 1996). In post-Aśokan (third century) accounts of Buddhist saints, stories of cremation ground meditation recur as a common theme, but in these stories the one who comes to realize the foulness of bodies is typically a male monk, and the dead, decaying, or disfigured body that represents the impermanence of things is typically the body of a woman. Consequently, these representations of the body privilege the androcentric perspective of the male renouncer. Women are present in the stories not as subjects in their own right, but primarily as nameless and voiceless objects of the male gaze. Women are thus subordinated to men by this very representational practice. Men who reflect on these representations of the woman’s body progress toward liberation through aversion to the feminine body as a trap; but women who reflect on these stories lose their sense of agency.

Nevertheless, to assume that because bodily codes locate one sociologically they therefore must always be *about* one’s social location is to confuse the function of inscriptions with their content. The question of religious metaphysics and its role in socialization may not be separable, but they are distinguishable -- as distinguishable, in fact, as metaphysics and sociology are generally. In other

words, ritual activities, gestures, and clothes provide the emblems that create and express religious identity. It is undeniable that such emblems, whether metaphysical or nonmetaphysical, have a social dimension. Nevertheless, it is a valuable interpretive strategy to ask whether a given ritual reflects an interest in metaphysics, in my judgment, because this strategy protects the study of rituals against divorcing these practices from the extra-social reality as it is perceived by the participants. In fact, this strategy connects ritual participation to a reality that, from the perspective of the participants, does not perish. A metaphysical reality by definition exists necessarily and under all conditions and therefore it can have the power to save or redeem or liberate.

III Ritual Bodies as Philosophical Subjects

In the previous section, I recommended that those who study rituals as the social construction of bodies should appreciate the distinction between metaphysical and nonmetaphysical inscriptions. In turning to part III, however, I want to insist that if the study of bodies as sites for or products of cultural inscription were the entirety of the study of rituals, it would be distortedly one-sided. Religious rituals should be seen not simply as a means for transmitting values and teachings, not simply a set of actions during which religions inscribe certain marks on the bodies of the practitioners. Though it is true that rituals do this, on such an approach the ritual body is solely a passive medium of knowledge gained elsewhere. This is the impoverished sense in which the phrase “ritual knowledge” is often used, but in my judgment, ritual can be seen in some cases at least as a form of inquiry itself, a source of knowledge in its own right. From this perspective, complementary to the first, the ritual body is an active subject of experience (7).

This idea of bodily knowledge is new in philosophy and its application to ritual activities is still largely undeveloped. Those interested in exploring how rituals bodies can be the subjects of experience can profit from philosophical work on the idea of the body-as-subject, especially by existential phenomenologists, and on embodied ways of knowing, especially by cognitive scientists and feminist philosophers (8). Those interested in approaching ritual in this way can draw on this work in order to pursue two more-focused questions: what does it mean to speak of ritual knowledge? And what does it mean to say that there is ritual knowledge that is metaphysical?

To address both of these questions, I want to build upon a seminal article by Theodore Jennings (Jennings 1982). Jennings argues that ritual is not primarily an illustration or dramatization of knowledge gained through other means, such as myth or speculation. Ritual can also be a symbolic structure that performs noetic functions in ways peculiar to itself, a distinctive mode of “coming to know.” As Jennings puts it, “ritual action is not only the product but is also the means of a noetic quest, an exploration which seeks to discover the right action or sequence of actions” (Jennings 1982:114). Ritual knowledge is for Jennings a form of practical wisdom. It is gained not by detached observation or contemplation but through action. When engaged in ritual, Jennings says, “[m]y hand ‘discovers’ the fitting gesture (or my feet the fitting step) which I may then ‘cerebrally’ *re-cognize* as appropriate or right” (Jennings 1982:115) (9).

How, exactly, does a person or a community explore the world and discover knowledge through a ritual? Jennings’s theory works like this: a repeated action, such as cutting with an axe, is an *exploratory* or *knowledge-producing* action, in that through trial and error one discovers what to do and how to do it. In the practice of using the axe, the axe itself wordlessly teaches me through my hands, arms, and shoulders how it is to be used. Analogously, then, ritual involves discovery because it too involves altering one’s environment. Especially in the liminal phase, Jennings says, a ritual provides a structured openness to novelty that is the condition for the possibility of exploration and discovery. Even if the ritual does not engage with wood or tools or anything other than its own ritual objects, “even then we must say that the exploratory ‘doing’ is a doing which alters the ritual complex or its constituent parts in some way” -- for example, one learns the right thing to do with the chalice (Jennings 1982:116). In this way, rituals are truth-pursuing activities: they manipulate objects and, like scientific theories, develop over time in order to test hypotheses. Once a community has learned something through its ritual inquiries, the often-noted repetition of ritual actions is then pedagogically valuable to transmit this

knowledge to future inquirers. "This relatively stable repertoire provides the necessary framework for exploration in much the same way that a mastery of relevant data and theoretical construction is indispensable for 'scientific' exploration and discovery" (Jennings 1982:115).

In my judgment, Jennings is persuasive both that rituals can be a source of knowledge and that the primary object of ritual knowledge is "how to act" or "the fitting action." But Jennings underestimates, I suggest, the extent to which ritual knowledge of action also involves descriptive beliefs. He claims, for example, that "[r]itual knowledge is not so much descriptive as it is prescriptive and ascriptive" because "the object of ritual knowledge is an action or a set of actions (or rhythm of actions) rather than a state or condition" (116, 112; cf. also 120). "Ritual action does not primarily teach us to see differently but to act differently. It does not provide a point of view so much as a pattern of doing" (117). Jennings is right that ritual action may not involve "*detached* observation" (116; emphasis added), but surely acting typically involves seeing; knowing how involves knowing that. An action is not recognized as appropriate or "fitting" simply in itself, as a set of gestures, apart from the beliefs about the world that inform it (10). Thus to interpret ritual knowledge with Jennings as knowledge of what to do should not preclude one from recognizing that rituals can also involve disciplining one's powers of attention. Rituals often involve training ritualists how to see. In fact, if one understands beliefs as habit of conduct, as the pragmatists do, then by shaping one's habits, ritual also shapes one's beliefs; the two tasks are not separate (Raposa 2004 develops this idea). Certainly, providing a point of view is central to meditative practices like visiting meditation grounds. Buddhaghosa is explicit that the purpose of the practice is to gain knowledge (*jnana*) and to achieve nondelusion (Buddhaghosa 1976: 193).

If this idea that ritual activities can be a form of inquiry and so a source of knowledge is plausible, I now turn to the possibility of seeing a ritual specifically as a form of metaphysical inquiry, that is, as a source of knowledge about the most general contexts of human existence. The possibility of metaphysical knowledge is needlessly confused, in my opinion, when metaphysics is identified solely with an investigation of claims about the noumenal or supernatural realities. This paper focuses on metaphysics not as an inquiry into a world beyond human experience, but rather as an inquiry into the character of experienced things in general. Can a ritual lead to this kind of knowledge?

To begin to answer this question, it is worth pointing out that, on the noetic view of ritual above, since ritual knowledge is knowledge gained by being engaged in activity, the knowledge it produces is not insulated from the world. For example, in the example above, when one learns to chop wood, one learns not only about oneself (for example, where the limits of one's abilities can be found), but also that this wood is harder to cut than that is, this axe sharper than that one, that one can trust this other worker. As Jennings puts it, participants in a ritual learn not only who they are in the world or what they are capable of, but also "how it is" with the world (Jennings 1982: 113) (11). One can put this point in existential-phenomenological terms, so that ritual knowledge is knowledge of being-in-the-world, or in pragmatist terms, so that ritual knowledge is an activity in which an organism transforms its environment to pursue its purposes.

If one accepts the interpretation of ritual knowledge as world-connected in this way, then ritual can be, in part, an inquiry into the way things are. Ritual knowledge is metaphysical, then, to the extent that the ritualists inquire into the way things are in general or under all circumstances. Rituals provide a structured corporeal engagement with some particular aspect of human life, such as health, dreams, song, house building, dance, childbirth, voice, or eating. Insofar as a ritual induces one to pursue metaphysical knowledge, however, it offers an invitation to understand these particular aspects of life as emblematic of the nature of human experience or things more broadly. The hypothesis of a metaphysical interpretation of rituals is that rituals focus on part of the world as revealing a wider reality. For example, it may be that the Muslim comes to appreciate that it is not just the trip to Mecca that is a pilgrimage; life itself is a pilgrimage. The human condition as such is that of a pilgrim, and all people are in the same situation. In the Buddhist example, the cremation grounds practice shows that the physical objects of sexual desire are impermanent, but the monk may come to understand by extrapolation that his own body is also impermanent -- and that in fact every existing thing is impermanent. Thus rituals give rise to metaphysical thinking when they induce participants to experience features of the ritual as features of the human condition generally.

This focus on the necessary aspects of the human world points to another difference between this approach and that of Jennings. Jennings holds that rituals involve altering the world and, for this reason, “that to which the ritual action corresponds” will not be an “immutable state of affairs” (120). According to Jennings, what a ritual reveals is a “world in act” and “[t]he ritual ... intends to transform this world in act” (120). But on a metaphysical interpretation, that to which the ritual action corresponds may well be an aspect of the world that is immutable, something to which the ritualists have no intention of changing. On the contrary, by seeking to put their actions in accord with this necessary aspect of their world, it is often themselves that ritualists seek to transform by means of ritual. Jennings’s approach to ritual knowledge has received sustained critical reflection on this point from Ron Williams and James Boyd (Williams and Boyd 1994: 59-155). Williams and Boyd agree that ritual can have a noetic function, but they argue that this function arises not from its adaptability, but precisely from its repetitiveness. Like a stable artistic masterpiece whose metaphors lure people to transformation, a ritual teaches not by assuming a stable self who changes the ritual in order to experiment on the world, but by providing a stable ideal which can serve to help transform the practitioner. In their words, precisely because it is repetitive or (for the most part) invariant, ritual serves as “both stabilizing horizon and lure to new insight” (Williams and Boyd 1994: 83). Whereas for Jennings, then, a ritual is like a theory which the investigators will refine so as to better accord with the object of their investigation, for Williams and Boyd, a ritual is an already perfect instrument and if it is to serve its purpose as a noetic tool, it is the practitioner who must change.

Insofar as a ritual seeks this kind of speculative knowledge of the comprehensive context for life, it makes sense to speak of ritual as a metaphysical inquiry. Moreover, insofar as ritual seeks knowledge of the fitting acts – that is, insofar as it seeks *practical* wisdom -- ritual metaphysics includes knowledge of what one should always and everywhere *do*. Ritual metaphysics would thereby identify a general form of acting (detached from impermanent things, perhaps, or submissive to the Creator) that is alleged to be appropriate always and everywhere, under all conditions. The product of such inquiry, then, would be a wisdom that puts one’s bodily activities in accord with the nature of things, a wisdom that is always pragmatic. Jennings himself recognizes this practical value of ritual metaphysics in his notion of “ontological praxis.” Some acts, he says, are more comprehensive in the scope of their object and aim at exhibiting the very action or rhythm of reality as such. Jennings uses the idea of ontological praxis to make the following hypothesis regarding the centrality of ritual metaphysics to the behavior that the religion generally prescribes: “To the extent to which the originative act or ontological rhythm which is known by the ritual performance is comprehensive in character, it may be taken to be paradigmatic for a correspondingly wide variety of behavior by its participants. If this is true we would expect to find a correlation between the ontological radicality [or comprehensiveness] of a ritual and its importance as a model of, or paradigm for, other actions. The expectation of such a correlation would serve as an important heuristic tool in the investigation of ritual” (122). A ritual is a metaphysical inquiry, then, to the extent that it aims at increased knowledge of being in the world authentically, that is, being in the world in the way authorized by the very nature of things.

IV Metaphysics Embodied

There may be some readers who are willing to accept the idea of bodily knowledge, and even the idea that such knowledge can be gained through ritual activity, but who remain skeptical of this paper’s interest in metaphysics. This paper’s agenda may strike some readers as implausible, perhaps because it seeks to connect ritual practices, a cultural product usually seen as everyday and shared in common among the humblest participants, and metaphysical speculations about the nature of reality in general, a cultural product usually seen as reserved to the literate, leisured representative intellectuals of a religious community. The study of a religion’s metaphysics, an objection might run, will be limited to those (few) religions that include a speculative or scholastic tradition, and only of such religions will it make sense to speak of ritual metaphysics.

But this objection requires one to make an invidious distinction between those religions interested in the environment in the most inclusive sense and those that are not, a distinction that does not hold up.

To weaken the plausibility of that distinction, I want to close by spelling out how a religion's metaphysical views need not be explicit at all but can be both explored and taught through the ritual body. To make this case, I use the approach to ritual of Catherine Bell, who develops her account of the ritual body from Pierre Bourdieu (and though she does not cite him, I think also from Peter Berger).

According to Bell, ritual activities aim at generating a socialized agent with a "ritualized body," which is to say that the participation in rituals structures one's senses, including one's very "sense of reality" (1992:80, 221) (12). The ritual generates this sense by bringing the individual body, the community, and "the largest image of reality" into a felt continuity (1992:115). The ritually informed body can then be understood as a microcosm of a more inclusive whole, reflecting both the structure of one's society and also the structure of reality itself (1992:94) (13). On this understanding, ritual metaphysics is a matter not (or not just) of giving participants a mental *image* of a larger world, but of giving them the experience of participating in the very patterns and forces of the cosmos (1992:160 n.206).

How do rituals accomplish this work? Ritual activity produces the ritualized body as the participants come to engage with the structured and structuring environment of the ritual (1992:98). Through the deployment of certain oppositional structures -- such as the opposition between what is divine and what is human, what is masculine and what is feminine, what is above and what is below -- the ritual shapes the understanding and the experience of the participants. As the participants come to master the ritual and internalize these schemes, their bodies come to appropriate that ritual world in their habits, dispositions, and gestures. Ritual participation serves to "impress these schemes upon the bodies of participants" (1992:98-9).

Participation in the ritual structure is thus to discipline oneself by putting one's body structure and actions in accord with the (ritually given) nature of reality. It is experienced as saving or liberating the participants from ways of living that are not authorized by the true nature of things. This is what Bell means by her term "redemptive hegemony" (1992:83-8, 114-7). Ritual is redemptive in that it is experienced as empowering, as putting oneself in congruence with "the ultimate organization of the cosmos" and thereby gaining "the sense of integrated totality and embracing holism" (1992:207). It is hegemonic in that the world displayed in ritual is experienced as natural, as commonsensical, and as without an alternative -- in short, as reality (14). Ritual does not create ritual bodies coercively, like a cookie cutter, but rather gives people a sense of mastery or empowerment by providing them with schemes with which they are capable of re-interpreting reality in such a way as to experience the world as in accord with their own goals. For my purposes, however, the important point is that since this process of internalization is performed through the body, the idea of ritual metaphysics is not restricted to literate traditions. In other words, Bell's account enables one to see ritual activities as embodying metaphysics.

Philosophers may be interested in the question whether the ritual interpretations of reality -- the embodied metaphysics -- are in any sense accurate. Bell does not permit such questions, however, but presupposes that ritual metaphysics are never true. Like Peter Berger, Bell holds that the ritually taught nature of the world is always arbitrary, generated and projected by the ritualists onto the plane of human experience. Though she does not argue for this position, it follows from her theory, and she considers it obvious. "Of course," she says, "the redemptive hegemony of practice does not reflect reality more or less effectively; it creates it more or less effectively" (1992:85). In other words, the world revealed in ritual action is nothing but the creation of the ritualizing itself. Ritualists first construct the ritual world, then objectify it so that they perceive it as if it were not artificial (this is why she calls it "hegemony"), and then they reappropriate it under the mistaken assumption that the values and experiences found in the ritual come from sources outside the ritual (1992:99, 1997:139). On Bell's account, then, if one wishes to speak of ritual "knowledge," it is not knowledge of the real world in any sense, but is a confused perception of the ritualists' own projections. By definition, ritual participants misrecognize their world (1992: 82-3, 108-10, 114-7, 220; 1998: 216) (15).

In the above quote (1992: 85), one can see that Bell is willing to speak of rituals as more or less "effective." And so it may be that her theory means to reject a correspondence theory of truth while retaining some other -- perhaps neo-pragmatist -- understanding of truth. She has written that "I do

consider most [rituals] fairly effective responses to the nature of reality as that reality is experienced by the participants. The ineffective ones fade away rather quickly. No ritual can simply write on the body of the participants without giving them useful resources that work in the larger world” (16). But it remains the case that on Bell’s account, rituals are not more or less effective responses to a world that exists independently of the ritualists. Rituals generate, create, and constitute a world; they do not reflect, respond to, nor interact with a world. (For this reason, her work does not embody a pragmatist sense of truth found in Peirce, James, or Dewey, for whom truth was what helped one deal with a world not of one’s own creation.) For Bell, ritual experiences lack any receptive or passive element, and as a consequence, they are insular. In thinking otherwise, the ritualists are always mistaken.

Bell’s a priori assumption that all ritual senses of reality are arbitrary and confused is problematic, not least in its tacitly Kantian assumptions about seeing the world through schemes. A central problem with this account is that it is one-sided and not fully dialectical, in the sense that it begins with the projection of schemes onto the world, but it does not explain where the projecting agent comes from. In this respect, her approach reveals an unwillingness to be fully naturalistic in that it sees “reality” as a projection of human agency but does not likewise see human agency itself as a product of natural forces. It is because on her account human schemes of reality are completely the product of human agency and are not in any respect a response to the natural world that Bell’s approach does not permit one to ask about the truth of such schemes. I take it that this is why she describes philosophy of religion as “fading,” perhaps to be replaced by approaches to the study of religion that are grounded in science rather than theology (Bell 2000: 9).

Those like me who are attracted to Bell’s account of the creation of ritual bodies need not accept her one-sided view of human agency. To reject that view, one need not deny that ritual metaphysics are the product of the human imagination and reflect the linguistic and cultural context from which they are projected; from the fact that metaphysical knowledge involves imaginative projection it does not follow that no metaphysical understandings of reality are possibly true (a totalizing claim if ever there was one). One solution open to those interested in the possible truth of embodied metaphysics is to join with those who see human involvement with the natural environment as fundamentally circular, and human agency and cognition as always a form of interaction with one’s perceived situation. On such an approach, ritualizing is a process embedded in and emergent from interactions between people and their environments.

If Bell were open to seeing ritualizing in this interactive and world-embedded way, it would create a sizeable number of allies. It would connect her work to that of cognitive scientists like Francisco Varela and his colleagues who contend that all thinking is “enactive” in that it is “not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but ... rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs” (Varela et al. 1991: 9) and to that of philosophers of mind like Mark Johnson who argues that “[cognitive] patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions” (Johnson 1987: 29) (17). It would also connect her to phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty who says that one’s embodied dispositions and senses are acquired through one’s interaction with things and situations, and that these dispositions then in turn determine how things and situations appear to us. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, “The world is inseparable from the subject but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects” (1962: 430). And it would also connect her to pragmatists like John Dewey and G. H. Mead who see human knowledge as a “transaction” between an organism and its environment. For Dewey, since it “is obvious without argument that when [people] inquire they employ their eyes and ears, their hands and their brains ... biological functions and structures prepare the way for deliberate inquiry and ... they foreshadow its pattern” (1938: 23).

In short, seeing ritual values as connected to the world does not require one to identify a pre-cultural experience, nor even to endorse a representationalist view of knowledge. It only requires one to see mind and nature as interacting, that is, to have a naturalist view of the subject as always already physically embodied and embedded in the world (see Haugeland 1995).

V Conclusion

This paper aims to sketch one way of seeing ritual activities as forms of thinking, specifically, a form of metaphysical thinking. In so doing, it opposes those who deny that rituals can be world-embedded and truth-pursuing activities. It opposes, in other words, those approaches to the study of ritual that treat rituals as necessarily confused, illusory, or out of touch with reality. It aims in particular to rehabilitate the cosmic dimension of ritual.

The benefits of the idea of ritual metaphysics, as I see it, are double. On the one hand, a recognition of the possibility of speaking of ritual metaphysics should remind those who study rituals that the teachings at work in ritual practices are not limited in their references to the minds of the participants, or even to the society of the participants. There can be a bodily inscription or ritual knowledge -- even though its function may be to socialize -- that is not about the social. Consequently, those who study ritual should not exclude metaphysics as a legitimate tool for the interpretation of ritual. Second, those who study religious philosophy or religious metaphysics should also appreciate the truth that religion, whatever else it is, is a set of embodied practices. Specifically, they should include rituals as legitimate objects of philosophical study. On the one hand, therefore, this approach can be seen as antireductionist, and on the other hand, it is anti-Cartesian (18).

Endnotes

1. This paper therefore forms part of my larger project seeking to defend the cogency of religious metaphysics and its value for the study of religions. Those interested in this project may look to Schilbrack 2000, 2002a, and 2002b.
2. The term "worldview" is also often used loosely -- to refer, for example, to religious views of any matters and not only to generic or non-restrictive statements about what exists. But Geertz clearly uses the term in this stricter sense, as I do, to refer to the "most comprehensive ideas" or "most general contexts of human existence," "the essential conditions in terms of which life must, of necessity, be lived" (1973: 127, 126, 129; for a defense of Geertz's understanding of religious models of reality, see Schilbrack 2004).
3. To give just one example, Elizabeth Grosz writes: "in our culture as much as in others, there is a form of body writing and various techniques of social inscription that bind all subjects, often in quite different ways according to sex, class, race, cultural and age codifications, to social positions and relations" (1994: 141).
4. To be even more precise, one can distinguish between broader and stricter senses of "necessary," namely, between claims about features alleged to be common to human existence as such (call this metaphysics in the broad sense) and claims about features alleged to be necessary in the sense that they characterize not only human existence, but the existence of anything whatsoever or reality as such (call this metaphysics in the strict sense). See Ogden 1975.
5. Of course, whether a "text" is a body or a book, to be able to "read" it presupposes enough knowledge of the native's worldview to make sense of the text. There is no reason to assume that because interpreters have bodies that they have any privileged access to that to which a ritual refers, and this is true even if the referent of the text is metaphysical. Moreover, to speak of the body as a text is to say that it carries a semantic message, but like a written message it can be either understood by those who display it or not. Thus it is possible to come to an interpretation of ritual bodies that says that, as public "documents," the bodies are inscribed with messages about metaphysics, even though these messages are ignored by the ritualists. In other words, those who interpret bodies as texts find themselves in the usual hermeneutic position in which one must always argue that one's interpretation makes the best sense of the text.
6. Buddhaghosa also says that one realizes that "there is no distinction between a king's body and an outcaste's in so far as its impure stinking nauseating repulsiveness is concerned" (202), and so one might interpret the practice in social terms.
7. It may be worthwhile here to note explicitly a critique of what might be called a thoroughgoing social constructionist position. Several have pointed out that to ignore the body as a material and lived phenomenon and to argue (for example, for Foucaultian or deconstructionist reasons) that the body is not only interpreted but is actually *constituted* through discourse leads to problems and paradoxes (see Shilling 1993: esp. 79-81, T. Turner 1994, and McNay 1991). My paper does not explicitly argue for, though it aims to exemplify, the need for a "both/and" approach that sees the body both as the product of culture and as an existential reality in its own right, both as a system of representation and as a lived experience, both as object and as subject. In this I mean to follow the lead of Bryan Turner (1992, 1996) and Thomas Csordas (1994).
8. The locus classicus for the existentialist phenomenological view is Merleau-Ponty 1962, though needlessly slighted is Sartre 1956: 303-59 (and on Sartre's view of the body as subject, see also Wider 1997). For what is in my judgment an important feminist development of Merleau-Ponty, see Young 1990: 141-209; for an important feminist critique, see Sullivan 2001. For a perspective on embodied knowledge from cognitive science, see Lakoff and Johnson 1999; for one feminist approach, see Grosz 1994, 1995.
9. Seeking to avoid dualism, Jennings resists calling this "embodied" knowledge, however, noting that it "is not so much that the mind 'embodies' itself in ritual action but rather that the body 'minds' itself or attends through itself in ritual action" (Jennings

1982: 115).

10. Barry Barnes has a nice discussion of practices that supports this point. Speaking of acupuncture as an example, he says: "The practice should be treated as involving thought and action together, and in so far as this is the case, embodied theory, as it were, is a part of the practice itself" (2001: 20).

11. Contrast this with Rebecca J. Slough who limits ritual knowledge to the human: "Fundamentally, [ritual] knowing leads to knowledge of the self (its character, competencies, and weaknesses), of others, and the relationship between the experience of the self and the experience of the others" (Slough 1996: 184).

12. Bell is explicit that this dialectical process shapes one's perceptions of the very structure of reality: "a focus on the [ritualizing] acts themselves illuminates a critical circularity to the body's interaction with this environment: generating it, it is molded by it in turn. By virtue of this circularity, space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space-time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality on the other" (1992: 99).

13. Bell sometimes uses Geertzian language of "models of reality that render one's world coherent and viable" (1998: 206). Hence "ritual practices are a type of sociocultural medium that is capable of grounding human attitudes, worldviews, and institutions in a vision of the nature of things in general" (1997: 190).

14. "Ritualization always aligns one within a series of relationship[s] linked to the ultimate sources of power. Whether ritual empowers or disempowers one in some practical sense, it always suggests the ultimate coherence of a cosmos in which one takes a particular place. This cosmos is experienced as a chain of states or an order of existence that places one securely in a field of action and in alignment with the ultimate goals of all action" (1992: 141).

15. Elaine Combs-Schilling, who like Bell draws on Foucault and Bourdieu in her studies of rituals, also treats ritual knowledge of reality as completely constructed and so by definition confused: in rituals, "reality has been constructed in such a way that [people's] own hopes, dreams, and accessible pathways of self-worth are tied to it" (1991: 660). Calling this process "culture's sleight of hand," she says, "Culture can make its elaborations appear true by embedding them within the body's most biological truths," thereby making "cultural inventions [into] ... the best founded of collective illusions" (1991: 678).

16. Email communication, December 12, 2002.

17. Like me, Tamar Frankiel suggests that Bell's approach can be helpfully combined with Johnson's, but like Bell herself (1992: 157-8), Frankiel does not seem to recognize the ways in which statements like the following contradict Bell's post-structuralist assumptions: "Image schemata are not imposed by our minds on some malleable stuff out there, but are, he [Johnson] says, 'definite, recurring patterns in an interaction of an organism with its environment. Thus our experience and our understanding partake of the reality of both our bodily organism and our environment...'" (Frankiel 2001: 82).

18. For helpful criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper, I would like to appreciatively thank Lawrence E. Sullivan, Catherine Bell, and two anonymous readers for the *Journal of Ritual Studies*.

References

Bell, C.

1992 *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

1997 *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press.

1998 "Performance." In M. C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2000 "Pragmatic Theory." In T. Jensen & M. Rothstein (eds), *Secular Theories on Religion: Current Perspectives*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Boisvert, M.

1996 "Death as Meditation Subject in the Theravāda Tradition." *Buddhist Studies Review* 13: 37-54.

Buddhaghosa, B.

1976 *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. 2 vols. Trans. B. Ñānamoli. Boulder: Shambhala.

Clark, A.

1997 *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Collins, S.

2000 "The Body in Theravada Buddhist Monasticism." In S. Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Combs-Schilling, M. E.

1991 "Etching Patriarchal Rule: Ritual Dye, Erotic Potency, and the Moroccan Monarchy." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1: 658-81.

Csordas, T.

1994 "Introduction: The Body as Representation and as Being-in-the-world." In T. Csordas (ed.), *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, 1-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Denny, F. M.

1994 *Introduction to Islam*. 2nd edn, New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, J.

1938 *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. New York: H. Holt.

Dōgen Kigen

1985 *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*. Ed. by K. Tanahashi. San Francisco: North Point Press.

Frankenberry, N. K. & H. H. Penner, eds.

Journal of Ritual Studies 18.1 (2004)

- 1999 *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theory and Method in Religion*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Frankiel, T.
- 2001 "Prospects in Ritual Studies." *Religion* 31: 75-87.
- Geertz, C.
- 1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Grosz, E.
- 1994 *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1995 *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. London: Routledge.
- Haugeland, J.
- 1995 "Mind Embodied and Embedded." In Y.-H. Houg & J.-C. Ho (eds), *Mind and Cognition*. Taipei: Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica.
- Jennings, T. W.
- 1982 "On Ritual Knowledge." *Journal of Religion* 62: 111-127.
- Johnson, M.
- 1987 *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kasulis, T.P.
- 1992 "Philosophy as Metapraxis." In F. Reynolds and D. Tracy (eds), *Discourse and Practice*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M.
- 1999 *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Leach, E.
- 1954 *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. London: Bell and Sons.
- McNay, L.
- 1991 "The Foucaultian Body and the Exclusion of Experience." *Hypatia* 6: 125-39.
- Merleau-Ponty, M.
- 1962 *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Munson, H.
- 1986 "Geertz on Religion: The Theory and the Practice." *Religion* 16: 19-32.
- Ogden, S.
- 1975 "The Criterion of Metaphysical Truth and the Senses of 'Metaphysics'." *Process Studies* 5: 47-48.
- Raposa, M.
- 2004 "Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice." In K. Schilbrack (ed.) *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, London: Routledge.
- Rappaport, R. A.
- 1984 *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People*. New, enlarged edn. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sartre, J.-P.
- 1956 *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. H. E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Schilbrack, K.
- 2000 "Metaphysics in Dōgen." *Philosophy East and West* 50: 34-55.
- 2002a "Myth and Metaphysics." In K. Schilbrack (ed.), *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- 2002b "The Study of Religious Belief after Davidson." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 14: 334-49.
- 2004 "Religion, Models of, and Reality: Are We Through With Geertz?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.
- Shilling, C.
- 1993 *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- Slough, R. J.
- 1996 "'Let Every Tongue, by Art Refined, Mingle its Softest Notes with Mine': An Exploration of Hymn-Singing Events and Dimensions of Knowing." In M. B. Aune & V. DeMarinis (eds), *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Explorations*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sullivan, S.
- 2001 *Living across and through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Turner, B.
- 1992 *Regulating Bodies*. London: Routledge.
- 1996 *The Body and Society*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- Turner, T.
- 1994 "Bodies and Antibodies: Flesh and Fetish in Contemporary Social Theory." In T. Csordas (ed.), *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, 27-47. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Varela, F. J.; Thompson, E.; & Rosch, E.
- 1991 *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Wider, K.
- 1997 *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Williams, R. G. & Boyd, J. W.

Journal of Ritual Studies 18.1 (2004)

1994 *Ritual Art and Knowledge*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press.
Wilson, L.

1996 *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Young, I. M.

1990 *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Biographical Sketch

Kevin Schilbrack is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Wesleyan College in Macon, GA. A graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School, he writes on the philosophical and methodological questions involved in the cross-cultural study of religions. He has edited two volumes on such topics: *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives* (Routledge 2002) and *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives* (Routledge 2004).