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the microlevel of discrete manifestations and traditions, the phenomenology of religion is most useful at the meso- and macrolevel of transreligious, transcultural phenomena. In sum, the phenomenology of religion is a comparative methodological approach that focuses, in a nonjudgmental and nonreductionist manner, on the religious experiences of adherents in hopes of locating essential structures that ground the religious as such.

It is difficult to assess Sharma's success in defending the phenomenology of religion from its detractors. Those who take an "apologetic" approach, that is, those who engage the study of religion in order to defend a particular tradition, will likely not be convinced by his arguments for insider perspective, or that openness and understanding are more appropriate goals in the study of religion than confirmation of one's own beliefs. Nor will those who take a social scientific approach likely be swayed by his claims that the adherent's own account of his experience offers the best perspective on his or her religion, or that the religious is something *sui generis*, distinct from other socio-cultural phenomena. Social scientists will find Sharma's formulation of the phenomenology of religion, at best, a useful methodological moment within a more critical analysis of religious ideologies.

Those already engaged in or already sympathetic to the phenomenological approach will find the volume refreshing. Sharma is largely successful, in this reader's assessment, in providing some discipline to what often seems a hodgepodge, impressionistic comparativism. He shows that there is some method behind the apparent madness. The essays in the book perform a valuable service for those who seek a more intentional phenomenological approach.

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COTTINGHAM, JOHN. *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xii+186 pp. \$70.00 (cloth); \$27.00 (paper).

It is a shame that some philosophers of religion still need to hear that a religion involves not merely a set of propositions to be affirmed but also a way of life to be followed. Those who participate in a religion typically aim not solely for intellectual enlightenment but also for spiritual growth, with all of the ethical and psychological aspects that attend the process of developing the whole person. Approaches that understand religion as simply a set of beliefs distort it. Against such views, John Cottingham argues that "it is in the very nature of religious understanding that it characteristically stems from practical involvement rather than from intellectual analysis" (6). He calls this view "the primacy of praxis" (5), and in this accessible book he traces the implications of this view for philosophical approaches to religion.

Cottingham holds that, given the primacy of praxis, religions should be understood in the first place as programs for spiritual development, as paths for self-transformation, as *ascesis*. He then argues for what one might call a more holistic philosophical approach to the study of religions. This "humane" approach (ix) allies traditional issues in philosophy of religion (such as the problem of evil, the nature of religious language, and the status of metaphysics) with moral philosophy (in order to trace the way that a religious worldview is integrally bound up with certain ethical commitments) and also, surprisingly, with psychoanalytic approaches (in order to trace the way that spiritual disci-

plines involve exercises in self-understanding and healing). Despite the centrality Cottingham gives to praxis, he does not ignore the cognitive aspects of religion or even the metaphysical aspects, and so he relativizes but does not exclude the traditional interests of analytic philosophers of religion.

Although the concerns, the vocabulary, and the examples in this book are almost exclusively Christian, the focus by a philosopher on religion as a lived practice is welcome. Such a focus opens possibilities for investigating aspects of religion often ignored by traditional philosophers of religion, for example, religious emotions as modes of receptivity or religious disciplines as forms of inquiry. It would be good to see future philosophers of religion follow this lead.

Unfortunately, however, Cottingham limits the usefulness of his approach by treating the object of religious belief as a reality “behind” or “beyond” all space and time, beyond human experience, and even beyond comprehension (e.g., 48, 103–4). Given this understanding of religious belief, there is little that one can do philosophically to critique it or to support it.

In a parallel move, Cottingham argues that since the route to religious belief is practice, not philosophical argument, problems can be resolved by focusing on the practical. But though he is right that religious praxis is temporally, heuristically, psychologically, and morally prior to metaphysical theories (150–51), philosophical reflection on religious practice cannot be replaced by the practice itself. This seems especially clear in Cottingham’s chapter on the problem of religious diversity and conflicting truth claims. Cottingham critiques John Hick’s Kantian approach to religious diversity by appealing to mystical practice: “The closer we draw, in short, to the ineffable reality that is God, the more we abstract from the plethora of potentially conflicting accounts in different traditions” (160). This appeal to the apophatic (which is all the rage in contemporary religious thought, despite Cottingham’s complaint that analytic philosophers dismiss it [159]) raises a host of traditional problems about how an allegedly inconceivable reality can be thought. But these problems can be overcome, Cottingham says, since Christ, as a way of understanding God in human terms, provides a transition between the apophatic and the cataphatic, the mystical and the liturgical, “an intersection point between the vertical and the horizontal . . . symbolized in a unique way by the central image of the Cross” (162). At this point, a program that began as a model for an inclusive form of philosophy of religion seems to take refuge in Christian mysteries. Cottingham denies that he is recommending that theology cloak its confusions in devotion (163 n. 33), but how his proposals differ from that is not clear.

This book covers a great deal of territory quickly, and as a consequence several arguments are merely sketched. But, in short, the book aims for a philosophy of religion that takes embodied aspects seriously even while retaining traditional interest in the cognitive. Though it embraces an unhelpful understanding of metaphysics, it points the way to a balanced or more inclusive form of philosophy of religion.

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RASMUSSEN, JOEL D. S. *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love*. New York: T&T Clark, 2005. 198 pp. \$100.00 (cloth).

Given Søren Kierkegaard’s penchant for signing pseudonyms to his texts—often at the last moment before printing—as well as his love of indirect com-