

Pascal's Wager, for Jordan, is sometimes an extended family that includes the Jamesian Wager, but sometimes, more narrowly, it is distinct from the Jamesian Wager. These one or two points aside, however, Jordan's exposition is admirably clear.

To summarize, Jordan argues that it is rational for a subject, S, to subscribe to theism so long as the following conditions are satisfied: (1) S's evidence and reasoning must not weigh too heavily against theism; (2) S must be closed off to infinitely many 'philosopher's fictions', yet open to the kinds of god who reward Pascalian wagering; (3) the expected earthly utility for S's maintaining theism must outweigh that of all available alternatives; and (4) theism is to be understood as religious belief quite generally, not necessarily belief in a being who hears our prayers.

When conditions (1–4) are satisfied, subjects may indeed *think* that it is prudentially rational to maintain theism, and in this respect Jordan's book will succeed in encouraging many who are theists already. However, I question how many agnostic readers will satisfy condition (2), and I wonder how much is accomplished if those agnostics disposed to follow conventional thinking, as represented by satisfaction of (2), drift into diffuse, non-theistic religiosity, which is all that Jordan's Wager calls for. More fundamentally, in order truly to be rational, subjects must have reason to reject 'philosophers' fictions' – simply claiming to know that they are false, and calling them bizarre, does not count as a reason (this general point is pressed by Craig Duncan, 'Do vague probabilities really scotch Pascal's Wager?', *Philosophical Studies*, 112 (2002) 279–290). At the same time, I wonder whether (2) is really necessary if (3) holds. Be that as it may, Jordan's sophisticated treatment of Pascal's Wager is packed with original and provocative contributions to decision theory, evidentialism, and the Jamesian Wager. It is a must-read for everyone in these areas, and it would also make a splendid text for upper-division and graduate-level courses.

PAUL SAKA
University of Houston

Religious Studies 43 (2007) doi:10.1017/S0034412507009225
© 2007 Cambridge University Press

James L. Cox *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates*. (London & New York: Continuum, 2006). Pp. viii + 267. £ 70.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0826452892.

This book has evolved out of a course on phenomenology that James L. Cox, professor of religious studies, gives in the honours programme on methodologies in the study of religions at the University of Edinburgh. It is written in

the conviction that 'religious studies, as a field midway between theology and the social and cultural sciences, suffers from a severe crisis of identity' (vii). The focus on phenomenology of religion is chosen, because it defines according to Cox 'the methodology that is uniquely associated with religious studies as a distinct discipline studying "religion" itself' (3).

Phenomenology is not taken in a narrow sense. The book has chapters on Edmund Husserl, Ritschlian theology (including Wilhelm Herrmann, Rudolf Otto, and A. G. Hogg), ideal types and the social sciences (Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and Carl Gustav Jung), the Dutch contribution (W. Brede Kristensen, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and C. Jouco Bleeker), the British school (Edwin W. Smith, Geoffrey Parrinder, Andrew Walls, and Ninian Smart), North American phenomenology (Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith), and a final, more general chapter on recent debates in the academic study of religions. This enumeration, however, does not quite catch the full range of the 'guide', which also discusses thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Max Müller, C. P. Tiele, and P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye.

On the one hand the book is clearly about phenomenology of religion, but on the other I got the impression that it also has to serve as a more general introduction to the study of religions. A middle course is said to be steered between a comprehensive history (like Eric Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1986)), and a case-study approach as exemplified in George James's *Interpreting Religion* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), in which the author confines himself to an analysis of the work of Chantepie de la Saussaye, Kristensen, and Van der Leeuw as phenomenologists of religion. Cox wants to outline an approach to religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon that is neither theological nor social scientific ('reductive'). He is said to have chosen his key figures, because of their 'significantly formative' contribution and 'because each can be defined within a phenomenological framework' (3).

This does not imply – as Cox notes himself – that they themselves claim to belong to the 'phenomenological' tradition. Other scholars who were indeed influenced by this approach, such as Clifford Geertz, are excluded. It could have been made more clear from the outset what 'a phenomenological framework' exactly is. Now the reader has to rely on dispersed comments in the discussion of various scholars of religion to find out what counts in Cox's view as 'phenomenology'. The missiologist Andrew Walls, for instance, fits in the 'broad phenomenological tradition', because he 'clearly adopted a sympathetic approach to the study of religions that privileged the perspectives of the believers', and 'sought to establish the study of religions within a clear academic context that was distinguishable from theology and that employed a combination of historical and typological methods for understanding religions' (158).

Typological methods do matter, but a sympathetic approach seems to be even more crucial to Cox's understanding of what phenomenology is about. The interest of Joachim Wach, for instance, who uses the term phenomenology to indicate the systematic, not the historical study of phenomena like prayer, priesthood, or sect, is, according to Cox, not limited to this type of research, but was also intent on interpreting religion sympathetically (174). This seems to be the main reason to include Wach in the book. Reductionism has to be avoided at all costs. It is remarkable that Cox devotes almost a whole chapter to a discussion of 'the consistent "hermeneutical" approach that can be traced from Wach through Eliade to J. Z. Smith' (171). Without much further explanation, phenomenology and (this type of) hermeneutics are closely linked to each other. In this context, however, Cox's suggestion that Eliade's approach is to a large extent ahistorical (185) may come as a bit of surprise to those readers who see hermeneutics as a thoroughly historical undertaking. It would have been helpful if Cox had explained more systematically how the various elements of his phenomenology relate to each other.

Cox concludes that the Chicago phenomenologists he discusses have blurred the disciplinary boundaries between phenomenology and other academic approaches to religion, but one is tempted to ask whether such boundaries existed at the time. The reason for including these scholars in his overview is that the themes 'that have been associated with phenomenology' consistently appear in their writings. These 'persistent' themes are: bracketing out prior assumptions, employing a fully empathetic approach, identifying typologies, interpreting the meaning of religious behaviour, and insisting that religion comprises a category in its own right (204–205).

Cox devotes much space to a discussion of typology, types, and ideal types, and one could claim that – to some extent – a whole chapter is devoted to this topic, in which the work of Troeltsch, Weber, and Jung is rather eclectically discussed. First, Cox gives a sketch of the famous typology church-sect-mysticism (on the basis of only one of Troeltsch's essays), which neglects the 'typical' sociological difference between the inclusive *Heilsanstalt* and the exclusive, sectarian association. Second, Cox deals with Max Weber's concept of 'ideal type' in his essay 'Critical studies in the logic of the cultural sciences', and focuses on Weber's idea of 'religious action' in his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Finally, Jung's universal archetypes within the human collective unconsciousness are treated. Some secondary literature is used, but relevant, more recent titles (also in English) are missing.

The subjects treated in this chapter on 'ideal types' seem to be rather heterogeneous and in various places it is hard to fathom what Cox means to say. For example, he claims that Troeltsch used ideal types, in the end, 'to provide evaluative criteria for comparing Christianity with other religions' (97), but as far as the famous typology is concerned Troeltsch was rather sceptical about applying

these types to other religions. The following sentence is even harder to understand: 'At the same time, the ideal type was conceived by Troeltsch as forming a structure of the religious consciousness, which was embedded in all human thought processes, a structure he called the "religious a priori"'. Is the religious a priori in itself an ideal type, or are the ideal types somehow embedded in the religious a priori? Contrary to what is suggested here, ideal types are not part of any a priori structure of the human consciousness, but instruments to understand historical processes.

In the last chapter some of the current debates in religious studies – such as Gavin Flood's critique of phenomenology as a viable method to study religion, the claim that theological assumptions are constitutive of religious studies (Timothy Fitzgerald), and the controversy about the public role of the scholar of religion – are addressed. Cox also explains his own point of view and defends religious studies (in the form of phenomenology of religion) as a distinct field of research. Therefore we need a preliminary definition of religion, which includes, in Cox's view, the essential reference to a 'non-falsifiable postulated alternate reality' (236). Sociologists, economists, political scientists, geographers, and anthropologists may also contribute to 'identifying and describing human behaviours that help interpret how communities, and individuals in communities, relate to what they postulate to be alternative realities' (237), but this is not their primary task. Religious studies is thus not directly concerned with alternate realities (as theology is), but a scientific, testable undertaking. This is a traditional – or, if you wish, even classical – understanding of religious studies, which differs considerably from that of Hans Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad's *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003). They consider religious studies to be a 'meta-discipline', which integrates knowledge and insights from the various disciplines dealing with religion.

Cox has written a book with a broad scope, in which a variety of scholars of religion are discussed who have made significant contributions to what he takes to be 'phenomenology of religion'. An empathic approach which does justice to the perspective of the believers seems to be essential, in his view. I would be a bit hesitant to privilege this perspective to such an extent. In the study of human behaviour the perspective of the performers themselves cannot be decisive – at least not in all cases. The book gives a nice overview of various scholars and their positions, but is less convincing in showing a specific 'phenomenological' approach which would be the best (or at least, a very good) way to study religions.

A. L. MOLENDIJK
University of Groningen