

Reviews

The Spiritual Nature of Man. By ALISTER HARDY. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979. 162 pages. \$19.95

This book is a report on research in progress. It tells the story, presents some of the results, and offers some preliminary interpretations of the Religious Experience Research Unit established by Sir Alister Hardy at Manchester College in 1969.

In establishing this project it was Hardy's hope to carry on the great tradition of the study of religious experience begun at the turn of the century by William James and E. D. Starbuck. But Hardy and his team differ from James and Starbuck in that, although very much interested in the subjective and experimental dimensions of religion, their concerns are not primarily psychological, at least not at this time. Members of Hardy's group see themselves approaching their research very much like biologists and ecologists, who first need to ground their work in a large number of naturalistic observations which will yield a significant fund of raw data that later can be analyzed, classified, and interpreted.

To accomplish this, the research unit invited the general public to send in written accounts of their religious or spiritual experiences. The characterization of the kinds of experiences wanted was left open and general: the experience could be religious, more generally spiritual, or artistic; it did not need to be unusual, ecstatic, or mystical as such. The researchers were very much interested in those more ordinary spiritual experiences which many people take for granted as a natural part of their lives.

Hardy wanted to accumulate thousands of such reports, and indeed, after a somewhat slow start, he collected several thousand written descriptions, although this book is based on the first three thousand. In addition, at a later stage, these written reports were supplemented by survey research and interviews based on questionnaires. But to date, it is clearly the written reports of people's first-hand spiritual experiences which interest Hardy the most. He sincerely believes that, if he and his team have enough of them and study them carefully, they will be as potent for generating sound hypotheses as have been the plethora of naturalistic field observations of animals that have generated the disciplines of zoology and ecology—the fields in which Hardy first earned scientific prominence.

As a true zoologist Hardy feels that after observation, classification is the next step to take. A good portion of this report deals with illustrating with case material the classificatory system he and his coworkers have evolved. But whereas the early zoologists attended to the details of externally observable bodily morphology and function, the Religious Experience Research Unit has concentrated largely on more or less discrete elements of subjective experience reports such as sensory, auditory, and visual elements; cognitive and affective elements; reported behavioral changes; reported developmental

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and dynamic patterns; perceived antecedents; and reported consequences. All in all, Hardy and his staff have developed nearly 100 different categories by which these 3,000 reports are classified.

Hardy's first objective is to amass data, and this he is clearly quite successfully accomplishing. But data must be interpreted in order to be meaningful. In fact, data, systems of classification, and theory must necessarily feed each other and be mutually corrective if they are to engender meaningful knowledge. Hardy does develop an interpretation of his data although not an elaborate one. But the interpretation seems strangely remote from both the data and his system of classification. The problem is not that the data and classification fail to inform his interpretation, for clearly in some rather general sense he endeavors to make this the case. Rather, we do not know, and Hardy does not tell us, just how he derived his classificatory categories. In addition, it is clear from the beginning to the end of the book that Hardy has a theory about religious experience—a theory strongly influenced by the evolutionary, Darwinian models used in his earlier work as a biologist. But we do not know quite how this theory relates to his choice of rubrics for classification and, in turn, only a very tentative relation is drawn to show how his classifications suggest his preferred interpretative theory.

To me, the more interesting parts of the book are his first and last chapters where he elaborates his theoretical position. Although a Darwinist, he admits that at the cultural level evolution follows more of a Lamarckian pattern. Tradition and ideas help establish patterns of adaptation and then natural selection selects those traits, physical and psychological, which support the maneuvers that creative ideas suggest. These ideas are then preserved and passed on to future generations by tradition. It is clear that Hardy believes religious experience is a source of the ideas and subjective experiences that are of fundamental importance for evolutionary strength.

One can only admire the tenacity with which Hardy and his team hold to the conviction that religious experience can be studied in ways analogous to naturalistic studies in zoology. There is doubtless something important about this and eventually the labors of this dedicated group will pay handsome dividends. But there are problems. When the zoologist studies animals in their natural setting he does not pay attention to their subjective experiences; these experiences are in no way available to the scientific observer and probably in no meaningful way available to the animals themselves. Instead, he studies the form and functions of their bodies in their natural environments, often over time. However, Hardy is not studying his subjects in their natural settings. He is not observing their religious behavior or even the way their subjective religious experience relates to their observable handling of life. In many ways, Hardy's concern with isolated, written, subjective spiritual experiences takes him at the very first, far away from the methods of the ecologist, ethologist, and zoologist.

This does not mean that the data he is collecting are not useful. But by itself, without methods to tie the reports back into the total life situation of the reporter, his interest in subjective reports of religious experience may not go far enough to establish a general science of religion analogous to the formative biological disciplines that have inspired Hardy's basic vision.

DON BROWNING

Alexander Campbell Professor of Religion
and Psychological Studies
Divinity School of the University of Chicago

The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism. By DAVID TRACY. New York: Crossroads Books, 1981. xiv + 467 pages. \$24.50.

A dominant motive running through David Tracy's work has been his concern for the twin problems of pluralism in theology and culture and the public nature of theological discourse. These issues are interrelated because the very plurality of contemporary viewpoints requires that each be expressed in a public manner if it is to be understood by the others. The only theological positions, in fact, that Tracy rejects out of hand are those that isolate themselves behind invulnerable walls of dogmatic absolutism or insulate themselves from criticism by speaking a private language. The wide appeal of Tracy's books no doubt has much to do with his enthusiastic openness to the pluralistic present, for he embodies a truly catholic spirit: informed, open to all points of view, and generous in his judgments. But like most of us, his characteristic strength is closely related to his greatest weakness: he is generous to a fault.

Blessed Rage for Order (New York: Crossroads Books, 1975) examined the implications of pluralism for fundamental theology; *The Analogical Imagination* extends the project to systematic theology. After a preliminary discussion of the "three publics"—society, academy, and church—to which the systematic theologian is speaking, Tracy turns to "the heart of the argument" (p. xii), a theory of "the classic," which he then employs to describe the religious classic and its interpretation. He goes on to present a theological interpretation of the specifically Christian classic, which he finds in the "classic event" of Jesus Christ as expressed in the "classic texts" of the New Testament. Only then, late in the book, does he turn explicitly to the task indicated by the title, the delineation of what he calls an "analogical imagination" as the key to systematic theology in a pluralistic world.

The attentive reader does not skip the footnotes in Tracy's books, for like the excursions in Karl Barth's *Dogmatics* they are only apparently peripheral to the main argument. Once resigned to the necessity of continual page-flipping (the notes are printed in the most awkward of places, at the ends of the various chapters), the reader discovers in the notes clues to the real point of the main text, annotated lists of the author's reading over the past several years, and useful bibliographical essays on subjects ranging from the theory of narrative to the distinction between word and sacrament in Christian and Jewish traditions. The sheer volume of Tracy's reading is staggering. Here is one theologian who has done his homework.

The notion of the classic as the conceptual centerpiece for systematic theology is the most original and intriguing theme in the book. "The systematic theologian," Tracy writes with admirable and uncharacteristic succinctness, "is the interpreter of religious classics" (p. 130). The classics are "expressions of the human spirit" that "disclose a compelling truth about our lives" in which we recognize "a reality we cannot but name truth" (p. 108). But instead of developing this promising insight with precision and clarity, Tracy succumbs to the mystification of a hermeneutics of "word-events" and elusive "disclosures." Classics, it turns out, are not always texts but may also be events, images, rituals, symbols, persons, and even doctrines. Rather than distinguishing among these various classic expressions, he flits indiscriminately from one to the other. The Christ event, the person of Jesus, the texts of the New Testament, the images and doctrines of christology—all are treated at

one time or another as the specifically Christian classics, but no clear picture emerges of their interrelations.

The task of the systematic theologian only begins with the classics of his tradition. The broader aim, according to Tracy, is to achieve "mutually critical correlations" between the interpretations of these classics and "the situation." If sharpening the notion of the religious classic seems difficult, making precise use of the concept of "situation" appears impossible. Unwilling to follow Paul Tillich in assigning to philosophy the task of articulating the situational questions to be correlated with theological answers, Tracy casts his net widely, turning "to art, religion, philosophy, ethics and cultural criticism" (p. 343). Sifting all this material, he discovers in "the uncanny" a kind of common denominator in the "sense of our situation" (p. 362). This proposal is interesting, if rather vague, but surely lacks both sufficient empirical evidence and conceptual controls to be widely persuasive among systematic theologians. Tracy, like other advocates of correlation methodologies, seems insufficiently aware of the fundamental dependence of the "situation" on the commitments—*theological and otherwise*—of the analyst. It remains unclear where the theologian is supposed to be standing while he identifies and correlates contemporary situation with revelatory event. Does not the reduction of our "situation" to a single focal experience contradict the very pluralism that Tracy claims to be characteristic of modern culture?

The most apparent weakness of the book is one that at first seems to be merely stylistic: its cumbersome and jargon-laden prolixity. Too much of the book reads as though it had been poorly translated from the German. Tracy is apparently the kind of writer who cannot bear to discard any of his notes, leaving to the reader the task of editing and condensing. His boyish exuberance to blurt it all out at once is both engaging and exasperating. But I believe that the problem goes deeper than expository prose style; it is rooted in his struggle to be theologically responsible in a pluralistic age. Tracy responds to the bewildering range of theological options not by rigorous selectivity and critical judgment but rather by trying to find a place for everything and everyone. The result is a kind of rhetorical pluralism that declaims the slogans and buzzwords of all the alternatives at once, all the while insisting that they are "necessary dialectical moments" in an "analogical conversation" (p. 447). In short, Tracy is too appreciative for his own good, and the result is a stylistic and conceptual Babel. The closer he gets to the heart of his own argument, the denser and more convoluted his language becomes. His proposal for "a Christian systematic analogical imagination" is concentrated in the following form:

The concrete focal meaning for a Christian systematics is the always-already, not-yet event/gift/grace of Jesus Christ. This focal meaning presupposes, by re-presenting, the always-already event of grace—the event experienced, even if not named, as from and by the power of the whole. The event is an always-already actuality which is yet not-yet: always-already, not-yet in experience and knowledge through a disclosure that is also a concealment; in praxis through its releasement of the pull to a right way of living in and by the power of the whole and its intensification in that very releasement of the counter-thrust of a not-yet transformed human spirit, tempted always to disperse itself away from the whole, or even to stand in defiance against the encompassing whole (p. 423-24).

Much of this passage can be painstakingly decoded by relating each bit of jargon back to a passage where Tracy discusses its context. But it isn't worth the effort. Pluralism will not be mastered by rhetorical tour de force. We require not a blurring of the edges separating the alternatives but a keener discrimination among them.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment of *The Analogical Imagination* stems from the expectations it raises. A theory of the classic, linked to a careful treatment of such theological issues as scriptural authority, the function of the canon, and the relation of theology to Bible and church, could be a very fruitful undertaking. Relating the human imagination with its analogical powers to God's revelation is an especially promising area of theological inquiry. It is therefore all the more disappointing that *The Analogical Imagination* sheds so little light on either analogy or imagination.

GARRETT GREEN
Professor of Religious Studies
Connecticut College

The Texture of Knowledge: An Essay on Religion and Science. By JAMES W. JONES.
Washington: University Press of America, 1981. 97 pages. \$7.00 (paper).

This is a finely and tightly woven essay about the unweaving of hard and fast claims in both science and religion. James W. Jones advocates what he calls an open texture in both fields. In the opening chapter he pleads for epistemic humility, showing how scientific theories are narrower in scope and religious assertions more human in their origins than their makers like to admit. Subsequent chapters are summaries of three leading philosophies of science, with a concluding section applying the results to religion. Michael Polanyi teaches us how scientific knowledge has an inevitable personal coefficient. Stephen Toulmin teaches how it is functional, and Thomas Kuhn discovers the importance of the paradigm shared by a community. The general effect of these chapters is to amplify the subjective element in science and to show that science is more like religion, and religion more like science, than many realize. Genuine objectivity in science is unattainable in principle and in practice; we cannot go beyond intersubjectivity. The prominent philosopher of science missing in these pages is Karl Popper, who would have served as a corrective to some of the emphases here.

In the closing chapters Jones tries to check the relativism into which he has steadily been trending. His solution is what he calls "critical relativism" (p. 68). When faced with competing claims within the sciences, among the religions, or across science and religion, what are we to make of them? Reasons hold best within systems, where argument is embedded in a paradigmatic viewpoint. Rival theories may have a shared context, sometimes more so, sometimes less. But when we try to talk further across our systems, the reasons we give grow looser and weaker. They increasingly fail to convince others, although to some extent there are upper level criteria (coherence, simplicity, scope, elegance) which are transsystemic. Nevertheless, enough discussion is possible to enable us to do some judging between systems.

Jones twists and turns to try to give reasoning some power, while recognizing how everyone is caught within his or her own viewpoint. He thinks we can recognize the integrity of the differing systems, so long as each is kept in its own orbit. Both science and religion thus attain a certain integrity. But both are kept relative, not absolute. The reasons we give for beliefs can be good ones, only our conclusions are more contextual and parochial than we want to

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suppose. We see it our way, correctly so if we are critical enough, but this is at best only one true way among many others possible.

It is tempting for the reader to think that critical relativism must be some near equivalent to critical realism, a more usual term in accounts of this sort. The latter is the notion that by criticism of competing theories we can steadily approximate the objective truth. Reality will always be symbolically mediated but it will be represented by better and better symbols. Jones does want his science to be about the world. We are warned not to conclude that "science . . . does not know the world at all" (p. 66). "Critical relativism would not . . . deny that science represents the world" (p. 73). But Jones finds it difficult to promise much here. Good theories "fit the facts" (p. 88). However, each fit is slanted by its social functioning and the ways we employ it, and so theory is only functionally and relatively justified, never more. We are not permitted any checking against the world except in communal goal-oriented contexts. There is no pure science, since any picture we get is true, at best, in some narrowed sense, distorted by our selective cutting. We have no truth for truth's sake, only truths for use's sake.

Jones almost entirely vitiates our power to check theory against the world, even in science, much less in religion. Regardless of his hope for a representational science, when Jones comes to verifying theories, he holds to his functionalism and remains to the end shy of any correspondence of theory with the world. "Why are theories adopted if it is not because they are about the world? . . . Certain conceptions and not others are adopted because they fulfill the goals of the community one is working in. . . . Knowledge is adjudicated not on the basis of its correspondence with the bare world but on how well it does the job the knower and his community want done" (p. 88).

Jones's job is well done, but alas, the banished question—why, if not about the world?—returns for this reviewer, who does not operate with so intense a functionalism. To be sure, following Polanyi, scientific knowledge has a personal coefficient. But what do its main terms measure? They measure the world! To be sure, following Toulmin, scientific theories function in getting jobs done. But why do some function better than others? One good reason, often foremost among others, is that they better represent the world. To be sure, following Kuhn, there are paradigmatic switches and we adjudicate them intersubjectively. But we think by this to map the world better, and we demand critical intersubjectivity because we hope, where raw objectivity is not possible, that critical intersubjectivity will get us nearer to it than anything else. Religion too longs for its creeds to describe the realities it confesses. Whatever the personal coefficient, the functioning, or the community support, what we really hope for is truth about what is ultimately there, however much we also realize this truth is partial and mediated by the eyeglasses we are wearing.

Jones is needlessly overcome with how data are theory laden. "We have no immediate access to 'Data' to compare it with 'Theory.' Any experience, any formulation, any examination of the 'Data' in order to compare with the 'Theory' is in terms of some (other) theory, some gestalt, some prior conceptual apparatus." "In testing theories we are not testing the theory against the data" (pp. 86-87). It is quite true that data are routinely theory laden, that is, we hunt for data armed with certain theories. But it does not follow that data obtained so cannot be compared with the theory. A given theory can imply certain data, which may or may not be observed. Operating within a theory we can get agreeable or disagreeable data. Anomalies, which Jones often mentions, just are data that do not fit the theory. The paradigm creates and

locates the anomaly, but it is also put in question by it. We have ways of protecting the theory, of course, and the bigger the theory the more insulated it is from a local bit of data. "We have no immediate access to data." If Jones loads his term "immediate" enough, he can hold on to the first part of his claim. But the result is not that we are never "testing the theory against the data." More is involved, but this too is involved (as we might have learned from Popper). A theory can be tested against data in significant and telling ways, although not absolutely against raw data. Such checking can be done with or without rival theories on the horizon.

However, the criticisms registered here are an oblique form of praise. This is a thoughtful essay, and readers will find it stimulating.

HOLMES ROLSTON III
Professor of Philosophy
Colorado State University