

## **Phenomenological Approaches in Religious Studies**

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### **Abstract**

Phenomenology of religion is a development movement in thought and research where researchers try to understand humans and classify phenomena specifically including religious phenomena. The purpose of this study is to study and analyze in depth related to phenomenological approaches in religious studies. This research is a review literature research using descriptive methods. Data collection is carried out by means of record, listen and record techniques. The research steps carried out include collecting data, reducing data, and analyzing data to describe phenomenological approaches in religious studies. The results of this study show that Phenomenology and then Religious Phenomenology is a new approach in conducting studies of religion, although theologically and methodologically religious phenomenology is still a debate among religious scientists, this approach is able to explore the deeper meaning of a religious phenomenology, in addition to being able to be a middle ground for philosophical and theological approaches in revealing religious phenomena. Approaches in religious studies that separate religion from the sacred, transcendent, hefty forces liberate religion from theology, and religious phenomenology has its context in this regard.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Studies, Religion

### **1. Introduction**

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement initiated by Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology tries to refute all assumptions that contaminate human experience, which is why phenomenology is called a radical way of philosophizing. Phenomenology takes the emphasis of the attempt to find "the thing itself" independent of all presuppositions. The step taken is to avoid all assumption constructs that are installed before and simultaneously direct the experience. No matter whether they are constructs of philosophy, religion, science, and culture, they should be avoided as much as possible. All explanations should not be forced before experience explains itself from and within the experience itself (Cuff, 1980).

Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of philosophy breaking away from any historical ties, metaphysical traditions, epistemology, or science. The main thing that phenomenology does is to return philosophy to the everyday life of the subject of knowledge. Return to the concrete, sticky, and passionate richness of human experience. Almost all branches of science get inspiration from phenomenology, phenomenology provides new directions in psychology, anthropology, health, architecture including religion (Phillipson, 1972).

The scientific study of religion in general can be traced to around the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was influenced by the advent of the renaissance. The aim of religious science was originally to provide objective descriptions, especially among western academics, of various aspects of religious life in the world, mostly making comparisons that demonstrated the superiority of Western culture and religion over other parts of the world. Modern scientists insist on freeing their approach and discipline from premodern studies full of subjective and normative assumptions and judgments, dependence on the supernatural, and other external authorities, and losing attention to accurate standards of objective knowledge (Douglas, 2005).

Related to the above, religious phenomenology was born as an attempt to move away from entocentric and normative approaches. Religious phenomenology seeks to describe religious experiences as best as possible,

understanding and doing justice to religious phenomena as they arise and are perceived by the religious experiences of others.

The application of phenomenological methods in various disciplines hardly finds much difficulty, but not so only in religious studies. Various problems arise in the application of phenomenology in religious studies, this is because, among others, because, first, religions have developed so that religion is an object of study that lives and develops distinctively. Second, religion is individual, subjective, inward, and loyalty is a basic requirement in religion. This results in religious studies people often compare religions with their own methods while formulating their religion (Allen, 2005).

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This research uses qualitative research methods with the type of research carried out, namely descriptive qualitative methods. Descriptive qualitative methods implemented in this study. carry out analytical techniques by analyzing and studying phenomenological approaches in religious studies. This qualitative descriptive is applied to answer problems and break down problems presented in complex and actual ways using steps in the form of collecting, starting preparation, clarifying objects, analyzing, and interpreting predetermined research objects (Ratna, 2007). Descriptive is a type of research or method that is carried out on the basis of phenomena and facts carried out by observing from predetermined research data sources, so as to get results in the form of a series of words and sentences, notes or narratives that are explanatory or explanatory (Sugiyono, 2011). In this study, the objects that become research resources are religion and social sciences. The data collection process applied in this study is by applying the Library study as a reference in the process of finding and collecting information and materials needed based on libraries or library sources that are related to the object or data of the research conducted (Faruk, 2012). Then, researchers carry out listening techniques, the process of data collection activities that have been determined and obtained, then carried out from writings based on the classification of the selected research object. The last step in data collection is to explain recording techniques or making conclusions from literature studies and listening results from the data studied. The steps in carrying out the research analysis process are carried out in three stages, namely (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, and (3) data presentation. The data used in this study was obtained from the process of listening and recording techniques that produced data in the form of couplets and lines in poetry containing religiosity which were used as data and used in research. The next stage implemented is reducing data. The data that has been obtained is then reduced based on the type and classification of data that has been predetermined. The last step, after the data has been collected and reduced, then an analysis of each data is carried out, resulting in a description, picture, and also interpretation of phenomenological approaches in religious studies which is used as material or source of research data.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology comes from Greek which means to appear. Phenomenon refers to the visible. Phenomena are facts that are realized, and enter into human consciousness. Thus the object is in relation to consciousness. The phenomenon is not itself as it appears to the naked eye, but rather is in front of consciousness, and is presented with consciousness as well. Thus phenomenology reflects direct human experience, insofar as that experience is intensively related to an object (Munir, 2008). Another understanding states that phenomenology is the science of phenomena that are distinguished from something that has become, or the discipline that explains and classifies phenomena (the study of phenomena), thus phenomenology studies phenomena that appear before us, and how they appear (Basrowi, 2002).

Edmund Husserl was the founder and main figure of the philosophical school of phenomenology. In the early days Husserl sought to develop a radical philosophy, or school of philosophy that explored the roots of knowledge and experience. This problem is driven by distrust of positivism which is considered to fail to make life more meaningful because it is unable to consider issues of value and meaning. Phenomenology was born as a reaction to Auguste Comte's positivistic methodology. The positivistic approach always relies on a set of objective social facts, on visible phenomena so that they tend to see phenomena only from the surface, unable to understand the meaning behind phenomena. Phenomenology departs from the mindset of subjectivism which does not only look at a visible phenomenon but tries to explore the meaning behind each phenomenon. This is why phenomenology is widely used in the social sciences (Kuswarno, 2006).

According to Husserl, phenomenology studies the complexity of consciousness and the phenomena connected with it because phenomena must be considered as intentional objects of subjective conscious action. The deliberate process of consciousness is called noesis while the content of consciousness is called noema. Thus phenomena (objects as they appear) are the norm.

In the case of phenomena, Husserl invites back to the true source or reality. For this it requires methodical steps of reduction or placing the phenomenon in baskets (bracketing) or brackets. With reduction the delay of deducing any prejudice against reality, the steps of the method are eidetic reduction, phenomenological reduction and transcendental reduction. In other words, phenomenology must return to data, not thought, that is, to the matter itself that manifests itself. The subject must let go of his personal assumptions and beliefs and sympathetically see the object that directs himself to him (this step is called epoche). Through this process the object of knowledge is released from its intrinsic temporary elements so that only eidos (the essence of the object) appear or constitute themselves in consciousness. With regard to epoche and eidetic vision, this is the subject of debate in religious phenomenology (Mariasusasi, 1995).

Consciousness for Husserl is always awareness of something, therefore consciousness has two complementary aspects, namely the process of being conscious = cogito) and the object of consciousness itself (cogitatum). Thus consciousness is closely related to the intention (intention) of the person, with the presence of intent in consciousness, consciousness always gives meaning to the object faced. Consciousness that contains this purpose is always directed to the field of life (life world), and this field is an intersubjective world, in the sense that humans who are in the world are interconnected so that the consciousness formed between them has a social nature. Personal experience in that world with the experience of others is a shared experience (Shri Ahimas, 1985).

### **3.2 Religious Phenomenology**

As in the development of the social sciences, phenomenology is a new direction in the approach to religion, it can be said that phenomenology of religion is one of the scientific disciplines and modern approaches to religion.

Today's religious sciences have progressed rapidly, with new discoveries, it clearly shows that religion is a living and developing object of study in a distinctive way. This then raises difficulties in the formulation of religious phenomenology. Although the phenomenology of religion is still under debate among religious scientists, the phenomenology of religion can mediate between religious approaches so far. Religious believers seek to compare their own religious experiences, often using methods that are uncritical of those of other religions, along with the formulation of their religious advantages. On the other hand, philosophical circles try to analyze the concepts of legitimacy and then look for similarities between the formulations of each religion. In this way concrete religious experiences are often overlooked. The two approaches above are difficult to get satisfactory results. Observations from the point of religious experience usually have an apologetic subjective bias while observations from a philosophical point of view are suspected of not being in accordance with the reality of religion as something experienced and lived, even by those who research. It is in this context that the phenomenology of religion becomes important.

Phenomenology of religion, according to C.J. Bleeker as quoted by Sudiarja is the study of religion by comparing the same phenomena from different religions to obtain universal principles. For this reason, Husserl's phenomenological working principles regarding epoche and the eidetic view were used. Phenomenology of religion according to Raffaele Pettazoni is an approach to religious problems by coordinating religious data, establishing relationships, and grouping data based on these relationships without having to make typological comparisons between various religious phenomena (Sudiarja, 1995).

James L. Cox, based on the principles of phenomenology developed by Husserl, defines religious phenomenology as a method that adapts epoche procedures and eidetic intuition with the study of the various symbolic expressions that people respond to as of unlimited value to them (James, 1992).

### **3.3 Criticism of the phenomenology of religion.**

The debate on the phenomenology of religion is divided into three themes, namely, first the continuity of phenomenology as a philosophical tradition, second theological motives and third the social involvement of religious scientists in society (James, 2006)

A. Gavin Flood's Critique of the Continuity of Phenomenology as a Philosophical Tradition.

Gavin Flood mentions that the method introduced by phenomenologists, which attempts to overcome the influence of potentially destructive biases, is described by Kristensen and Parrinder as the application of evolutionary theories to religion and culture, and by Eliade and Smart as reductionistic tendencies in the social sciences, is based on a philosophical theory that incorporates deeper, but simpler, biases into the procedures by which knowledge is acquired and Set.

By assuming a universal human experience of the meaning of all religions as cognitively understood (intuition) by separate subjects, phenomenologists ignore, or at least minimize, the importance of cultural, social and historical contexts. In addition, the epistemic privileges given to researchers remain hidden, because they hide the power relations between researchers and the community under study. By exercising phenomenological confinement to eliminate all types of prejudice, religious scientists paradoxically keep control of knowledge, thereby establishing rules for interpreting religious phenomena. This makes phenomenology, at least, vulnerable to accusations that it actually propagates a method of maintaining power over the object of academic study, although there is agreement among phenomenologists that their personal religious experience gives privileged access to the mind of a religious practitioner. This claim strongly implies a theological agenda behind the phenomenology of religion, and thus leads to tensions between theology and the academic study of religions.

B. Donald Wiebe's Critique of the Theological Motives of van der Leeuw, Eliade and Smart

Wiebe said these three figures had theologized academic studies on religions. Van der Leeuw, however, states that every scientist must depart from a cultural orientation towards life, which is very similar to the position of personal belief, and that because scientists are placed in a specific context, their scientific activity is not separated from the religio-cultural quest of the scientist himself. In Wiebe's view, van der Leeuw in this respect is childish and misleading, because it prevents the researcher's biases from being recognized and clarified scientifically. This argument undermines the academic cause he espoused because it ignores critical differences between religion and the scientific-academic study of religion. Leeuw's work according to Wiebe in religious studies did not move beyond the stage that the discipline had reached in the Netherlands, but instead returned to the approach of early theology, a subversive approach to the scientific study of religion.

For Eliade, Wiebe questioned his hermeneutic method, which he called an attempt to restore the transcendent values and meanings that had been abandoned by those traditions. Eliade mentions that ancient and primitive forms of religion are paradigmatic for religious life in general because they reveal fundamental existential situations that are directly relevant to modern man. Wiebe notes that Eliade's interest in ancient and primitive traditions did not depart from a scholarly approach to the study of religion, as it would necessitate reductionistic distortions of religious truths and hence, distortions of truths about religion. Eliade's anti-reductionistic position concealed a veiled theological agenda. According to Wiebe, Eliade's hermeneutic method is indistinguishable from religio-theological.

Likewise with the ideas of Ninian Smart, when an in-depth analysis is carried out there will also emerge theological assumptions behind the phenomenology of religion. Smart believes that studying religion and feeling the living power of religion can not only go hand in hand, but must go hand in hand if the study of religion is to enter into a promising new era. What Smart says is more likely to enter the religio-theological study of religion. By raising the issue of religious truth, Smart re-establishes the original ties between the academic study of religion and piety. According to Wiebe, Smart's theological perspective is seen from his interpretation of the epoche. What Smart calls confinement of expression instead provides space for scientists to incorporate into these postponed judgments, feelings expressed by religious believers, without endorsing or validating those feelings. Based on this, according to Wiebe, Smart's ambiguity, if religious scientists aim not only to acquire knowledge about religions, but also to express their beliefs about religious values and sentiments, then something more than religious knowledge will exist, if not theology, at least metaphysics.

C. The Public Role of Religious Scientists

Mc Cutcheon argues that there are two problems that religious scientists do. First, it is those who view their scientific autonomy, and this has an effect on the institutional separation of religious studies from other disciplines. By defining the primary concern of religion as unknowable, non-historical, sacred-transcendent, Eliade and other phenomenologists have renounced their right to make commentaries on social and political issues. This arises not only from the theology of religious studies, but from the assumption clearly stated by Eliade that the legitimate, healthy, positive and saving. Scientists who

hold this view have lost the critical ability to comment on the social reality of religion as a contributing factor to a wide variety of human actions, both positive and negative, including the relationship between religion and violence. Second, religious data and interpretation offer only in ways that can be affirmed by believers only. McCutcheon calls this method reflective autobiography, which reduces the role of the scientist to a reporter repeating less important insider claims.

The theory that religion is personal, supernatural, sacred or transcendent faith ushers in a highly individualistic interpretation of religion, which stems from the root of the problematic distinction between religion and the world (secular). The world-religion dichotomy is based on the assumption that religion exists in the private sphere. According to McCutcheon, religion is said to be a free variable that occupies a clean space for personal and pure moral views, which opposes and saves the messy world of public politics and economics. The challenge for religious scientists today is whether they will accept a public role. The role of the public is not practical engagement with social and political issues, but as a critic who unmask the mechanisms of power and control. It applies first to the way in which religion is studied, and refers to a critical self-examination of religious methods, theories and studies. In the public sphere, scientists question self-evidence, promote intellectual freedom and by collaborating across other disciplines. This role is called cultural criticism.

James L. Cox's commentary on the philosophical continuity of religious phenomenology should be either placed in subject-object terms, or understood narratively or dialogically. With regard to the inclusion of the perspective of the community of faith into the interpretation given by scientists of the community of faith, in Cox's view as long as the rules used in academic research are applied, the best thing that scientists can achieve is a kind of radical empathy, rooted in self-reflection, but which recognizes the fundamental distinction between the researcher and the other (object of study). Such facts do not hinder dialogue because scientists must proceed according to a clear commitment to scientific rationality, which goes hand in hand with the religious commitment of the community under study by scientists. In the use of *epoche*, Cox applies it loosely, adopting a position of self-reflection, and a commitment to community involvement in every given interpretation, so that phenomena can be made possible to speak for themselves. In this way the task of interpretation comes from a combination of scientific self-reflection and empathy.

Cox said that theology is part of the study of religion. Theologians are practitioners, who study, analyze, interpret, generally within a tradition, the meaning of what tradition preserves. Religious scholars regard theology as the way in which some communities reflect their alternate realities. In other words, theology, a kind of ritual, morality, myth, scripture, community, law and art, forms part of the data on which religious studies depend. This does not assert a position of superiority, but merely determines different roles for the study of religion and theology.

For Cox, a religious scientist needs to play a public role, in the sense of being a critic, not as an administrator. The religious scientist, as someone who has the ability and skill to analyze religious contexts, should bear the responsibility to apply them to important issues affecting society. Thus, the role of religious scientists as public criticism is never separated from the social context. The role of the scientist is not only to describe the social processes emanating from the institutions of power, both religious and world (secular), and to identify the influences these processes exert on religion and spiritual experience in the contemporary context, but also to eliminate harmful practices within the community.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Phenomenology and then religious phenomenology is a new approach in conducting studies of religion, although theologically and methodologically religious phenomenology is still a debate among religious scientists, this approach is able to explore the deeper meaning of a religious phenomenology, in addition to being able to be a middle ground for philosophical and theological approaches in revealing religious phenomena. Approaches in religious studies that separate religion from the sacred, transcendent, hefty forces liberate religion from theology, and religious phenomenology has its context in this regard.

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