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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

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Introduction: The Concept of 'Religion as Experience'

The term 'religion as experience' is understood here as the core of a meaning-making process and is presented in the form of an interpretative approach which is empirically grounded on symbolic action theory (cf. Boesch, 1991) and cultural psychology of religion (cf. Belzen, 2010). This methodological and theoretical framework was developed as part of the author's own empirical research on religious self-concepts in autobiographical narratives of German Protestants before, during, and after their involvement in religious missions (Arnold, 2010). This approach is inspired by the theoretically motivated studies in the philosophy of religion of Matthias Jung (1999; 2005), and sociology of religion of Hans Joas (2002; 2004), although in some important respects there is a need to go beyond their underlying argumentation, especially in the case of analysing the meanings of cultural actions in the process of interpreting lived experiences. Culture is referred to in this chapter as a "social, knowledge-based, symbolically imparted practice" (Straub, 2006, p. 174). This approach guides us – when studying religion, religiosity, and spirituality in everyday life – from a psychological perspective. It takes into account that the modes of description of underlying social, science-based concepts vary with regard to the social contexts, practices, and formulation of questions for research on religion. Likewise, no form of explanation can ultimately avoid reductions and schematisations either of the complex reality of experiences or the process of their formation and acquisition by human individuals. In view of this, this chapter argues for the integration and meaningful relation of a multiplicity of epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of empirical research on religion. Our concept has the ability to overcome the limitations of strategies of homogeneity (i. e. negation of differences), and thus is able to keep in mind precarious tensions, mutual incommensurability, and reductionisms.

In this context, the frequently used term, 'experience', is based on a holistic concept that involves cognitive assumption of facts as 'true', as well as personal

attitudes and affective conditions (such as states of great emotion and aston-
ishment) – all the while remaining indissolubly linked to a practical and com-
municative approach to the individual self in its social environment (cf. Joas,
2004, p. 66; Jung, 1999, p. 264). Experiences are embedded in actions, which
allow us to relate the quality of (religious) experiences to specific capabilities of
articulation, and modes of expression. For such a pragmatic perspective we
need, on the one hand, to distinguish between the primary (subjective) quality of
lived experience and the closely related 'creative' performance of meaning-
formation (cf. i. e. Joas, 2002). On the other hand, it is impossible to consider
expression-formation (Ausdrucksbildung) and understanding of sense (Sinn-
verstehen) seperately (Jung, 2005, p. 242; trans. MA), since every capacity for
articulation is always interlinked with cultural and religious symbolic systems of
beliefs, as well as their interpretation (or 're-interpretation'). Such a holistic and
integrative concept of experience is picked up within the complex and over-
arching structure of a 'spider's web' in which multidimensional relations –
which can neither be considered independently nor defined only with regard to
their place in the (whole) ensemble – exist between the single constituents.
Experiences and actions, articulations and interpretations, are integrated into/
within this multidimensional and polyvalent, reciprocal and pragma-semantic
"network of interwoven and inter-definable terms" (Straub, 2006, p. 173) or "web
of meaning-making activities" (Valsiner & Veen, 2000, p. 18).

This web of connotations and denotations goes beyond the suggested her-
meneutic approach of experience-formation in form of a tripartite relationship
between "(lived) experience-expression-understanding" (Erlebnis-Ausdruck-
Verstehen; cf. Jung, 1999, p. 36; trans. MA) as described in the later work of
Wilhelm Dilthey. The individual's lived experiences are part of the system of
"objective apprehension" (objektiver Geist; cf. Dilthey, 2002, p. 58; trans. MA)
and are irreducible components in the process "understanding" (Verstehen; cf.
Matthes, 1992). With regard to the terminology referred to here, the experience-
formation process distinguishes between two interwoven levels of the inter-
pretation of experiences (see Figure 1): a subjective perspective (inner circle), on
the one hand, and an intersubjective perspective (outer circle) on the other. A
transformation between these different levels is realized by the 'articulation' of
the subject's meaningful experiences. Thus, an interpretative cultural psychol-
ogy of religion is described in this chapter in two parts: firstly, the basic concepts
and components; secondly, the methodological approach.

First, we focus on the complex interplay between experiences and actions,
expectations and unexpected events. Attention is given to the concept of artic-
ulation, the process of making one's own experiences, and to the relevance of
communicative action. A subject-oriented approach to an individual's meaning-
making process is regularly confronted with the problem that not every in-

dividual experience, or the singularity thereof, can be fully apprehended by appropriate language. However, language equips humans with the ability to articulate precarious tensions between the 'sayable' and the 'unsayable'.

Interpretative-Hermeneutical Perspective

SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE FROM A FIRST-HAND PERSPECTIVE

THE PROBLEM OF ARTICULATION IN THE PROCESS OF EXPERIENCE-FORMATION

Articulatory Understanding of Meanings with regard to Cultural Symbols and Patterns of Interpretation

Cultural Patterns of Interpretation and System of Beliefs as Intersubjective Perspective (Outside)

Exploration of Meanings

First-Person-Plural Lifeworld of an Individual in Social Reality

Interpretation of Lived Experiences from a Subjective Perspective (Inside)

Individual Articulation of the Subjects' Lived Experience

First-Person-Singular Subjective Experience

Expectation due to the System of Symbols, Orientations, Beliefs (e.g. Moral, Tradition, Ritus)

EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS

Structuring of the Horizon of Expectation based on Subjective Experience

Quality of Experience and States of Consciousness and Perspectives of Meaning

Quality of Experience and Articulation of their dual States of Consciousness and Perspectives of Meaning

Experience and Action Theoretical Perspective

QUALITY OF LIVED EXPERIENCES AND ARTICULATORY MEANING

Articulatory Meaning: (Re-) Identification of Experiences due to Interpretation

LIVED EXPERIENCES

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH (RE-)ARTICULATION

EXPERIENCE-FORMATION AND THE COMBINATION OF ACTIONS AND UNEXPECTED EVENTS

Unexpected Events and Incidents and External Feelings

(Internal) Non-Intended Action and Failure to Action

Articulation of Individual Life Stories as Creative Performance with Individual Character

Location of Self-Stories in Socio-Cultural Context and Application of Well-Known Narrative Techniques, Repertoires, Symbolic Forms of Expression

ARTICULATION OF (RELIGIOUS) EXPERIENCES IN (AUTO-) BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

Constitution of Narrative Constructs (e.g. Life Stories)

Subjective Self-Concept, Self-Assurance, and Personal Belief System

Experience- and Knowledge-Formation

Text Interpretation Based on Horizons of Comparison and Counter-Horizons: Inner Perspective - Remodalization - Comparative Analysis

Constitution, Development, and Transformation of Individual Relations of the Self to the World

METHODICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR AN INTERPRETATIVE CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

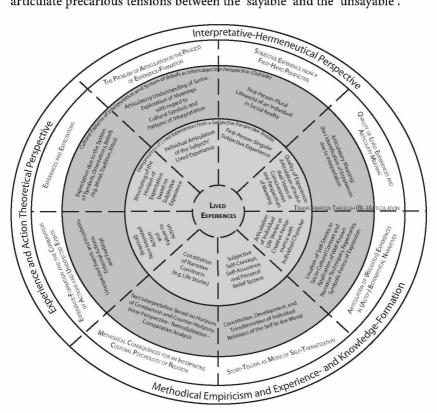STORY-TELLING AS MODE OF SELF-THEMATIZATION

Methodical Empiricism and

Figure 1: Basic concepts and terminology of an interpretative approach empirically grounded on symbolic action theory and cultural psychology of religion (Source: illustration from author)

In addition, our discussion not only needs to consider the perspective of the 'first person' singular or plural, but also the sequential structure of the experience-formation process. This process starts with a qualitative experience and ends with the interpretation of its meanings in the course of articulation. Conversly, collectively shared and culturally determined patterns of meanings, symbols, and articulatory expressions determine the making of experiences. Consequently, the articulation of experiences in the context of religion requires a specific cultural technique: story telling, in form of (auto-) biographical narrations, as a mode of 'self-thematization'.

Second, we draw attention to the underlying methodical and methodological consequences for an interpretative cultural psychology of religion, starting with an outline of the problem of reductionism in the research of religion, and fin-

ishing with a description of a comparative analysis which attempts to identify, explain, and interpret types of experiences based on methodical empiricism and knowledge-formation in cultural psychology.

Basic Concepts, Components, and Terminology of an Interpretative Psychology of Religion

Relationships between Experience and Action, Expectation and Events

'Experience' and 'action' are not to be understood as disjunctive but as complementary categories. With the inclusion of perspectives from symbolic action theory in an experience theoretical framework, it should be possible to overcome the dualistic differentiation between activity and passivity in experience and action. As Jung (2005) has pointed out, with the dualistic concept in John Dewey's (1896, p. 359) essay "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology", it could be argued instead that both terms need to be embedded in an overall structure with relational character: actions are not single entities, or inseparable creative outputs of human experiences, but rather action go into experiences and *vice-versa*. Dewey (1896, p. 358) aptly clarifies the structural aspect of the relation between experience and action with regard to observations of the human physical organism. According to him, all human behavior is an interaction of both the receptive moment of a stimulus and the spontaneous quality of a reaction to that stimulus (Jung, 2005, p. 234). According to Dewey (1896, p. 358), a reaction, in the context of experience-formation, is "the so-called response (…) not merely to the stimulus; it is *into* it." Within this pragmatic approach, this means that human action is not just a response to an experience, but that experience is also an action, which finds its way into the everyday world in the course of its occurrence. Consequently, in confronting its environment the experiencing self cannot do anything other than react. Therefore, on the basis of this relationship between experiences and actions, we can infer that a receptive and a spontaneous perspective of the self and its relation to the world are different "characteristic phases that remain in contrast to each other" (Jung, 2005, p. 243; trans. MA) and cannot be assumed to be disjunctive sequences of the process of experience- and knowledge-formation, as is usually assumed in theories of perception. Any attempt to merge human experience with such an empirical concept of perception inevitably leads to an unsubstantiated reduction of social reality (Alston, 1993, p. 186). First, theories of perception obscure the fact that, besides the content of religious experiences, acting subjects are themselves involved in the practical application of convictions and orientations

in ritual practice. Second, such theories also neglect the fact that experience is always regarded in a process-oriented "interdependence between lived experiences and the search for expressions" (Jung, 2005, p. 244) in which the entire existence of an 'I', acting in its life-world – perceiving, thinking, feeling, fantasizing, wishing, and remembering – is embedded.

As Ulrike Popp-Baier (2006, p. 141) emphasizes, the process of experience-formation always involves a combination of expectation, action, and "unexpected events" (Widerfahren). We can draw at least two implications from a pragmatic perspective on the 'I-to-world' relationship. First, on the basis of particular cognitive and emotional (affective) expectations and attitudes, which can be either met or disappointed, an individual is able to gain experiences. Generally, from an inside perspective, shared willingness, agreement, and belief in the semantic content of expressions (which also to some extent perform the perception) is necessary if we are to have experiences. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider typical, culturally shared meanings and forms of expression that can only be determined in the action and during such "semanticized practices that require an inner commitment to its semantic content" (Jung, 2005, p. 244; emphasis in original; trans. MA).

Second, in relation to the terms *expectation* and *action* it is also of paramount importance here that not every (generally human) behavior is predictable. As Niklas Luhmann (1971, p. 41) stated, individuals frequently encounter limitations while making experiences. Unexpected events and incidents surprise them or disappoint their expectations and interests. The experiencing 'I' is challenged to perceive what has happened, reflecting and interpreting its lived experiences, and making new experiences in the meantime. However, expectations are not inevitably disappointed in the making of experiences. What is more, it is also possible that through surprise and evidence which does not conform to expectation, conscious experience comes to be. In this sense, it can be concluded that our continuous exposure to the 'intangible' and 'unavailable', which we experience without actively *doing* anything (e.g. independent of our thinking, desiring, feeling, and action), is an anthropological constant. This has psychic implications for the persons affected, restricting or extending their facilities for action, marking specific moments in their life stories, or leaving a typeable "trajectory of life events" (Verlaufskurven; cf. Schütze, 1983, p. 288). Furthermore, the process of experience-formation includes the fact that subjects thematize and articulate their lived experiences in a specific manner, and that articulation is confronted with the basic obstacle of language.

The Problem of Articulation in the Process of Experiences-Formation

In linguistic terms, 'articulation' has usually been understood merely as a category which primarily emphasizes the desire "to (adequately) express oneself." According to this meaning, 'articulation' refers to vocalization and the precision of pronunciation in terms of phonetics (cf. Weisgerber, 1971). However, this usage of the term misses one particular aspect: namely, that articulation involves both a phonetic and a mental quality, which are responsible for expressive diversity. Joas (2002, p. 507) approaches the "problem of articulation" from a pragmatist and social theoretical perspective while considering the "necessary tension between the sayable and unsayable", asking whether it "is indeed obsolete and naïve – or whether this idea – what I call 'the problem of articulation' – can lead us any further." To answer this question he refers to the central problem of (analytical) philosophy of language in the twentieth century, which is based on the assumption that language is a characteristic of almost every human perception and schematization of reality. In the effort to develop a solution to this problem, Joas discusses Cornelius Castoriadis' essay "The Sayable and the Unsayable" (1984).

In his essay, Castoriadis (1984), being interested in a 'post-phenomenological' conception of language, meditates on the late philosophical work of the French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the model of language essential to his philosophy of consciousness. Castoriadis' reflection on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1968) is an attempt to preserve the fundamental premises of a language-theoretical tradition in philosophy – such as a concept of experience as "always already mediated through prior understanding, so that we can never reach unschematized, non-linguistic 'pure' experience" (Joas, 2002, p. 506). At the same time, however, certain premises in the philosophy of consciousness need to be overcome, such as the assumption that mental consciousness is the starting-point of human perception, "that becomes only secondarily translated into language" (Joas, 2002, p. 507). Castoriadis (1984) rejects this position of a "pre-linguistic conditionality" of human consciousness out of hand. For him, language is nothing but a secondary transformation and translation of the "relationship between the consciousness and the world" (Joas, 2002, p. 507). In order to explore all possibilities for getting to the root of the problem, the relationship between language and its expression, Joas (2002, p. 509) states that the "idea of 'expression' in the sense of a pre-linguistically constituted meaning, which only secondarily becomes translated into language, is clearly overcome; but it is not replaced by the image of a closed set of linguistic meanings forming a finite repertory for the possibilities of experiences."

This interpretation of Castoriadis' idea of visibility and invisibility is also the

basis of our experience-theoretical considerations. Castoriadis (1984) deals with the principal problem of how new things can be created by language if we assume that human experience is primarily based on a limited capacity for articulations. We must not think of a concept of articulation as an exclusive act of "re-combination" (Joas) of previous thoughts, feelings, and actions. As such it would remain incomplete. 'Expression' is not merely determined by language, although language is a "privileged mode" of our "organization of the world" (Castoriadis, 1984, p. 123). In addition, the articulatory process is also influenced by various intentions of action, attitudes, and expectations. Conversely, symbolic expressions determine the diversity of meanings and the meaning-making process. But not everything that is intended to express is actually an expression. The use of language is always a struggle for expression, whereby the tension between what could be said (the primary intention or consciousness of an expression) and what is sayable, but has not yet been formulated (the secondary formation of an expression by use of language), cannot be completely resolved. If we were to content ourselves without a reference to the pre-linguistic origin of the 'sayable', we would have to finish our deliberations here with an imagination of a completely closed process of experience-formation, mediating between language and expression.

Another perspective is the thematization of social, cultural, practical, everyday experiences. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in articulations of experiences we can also trace prior attempts at articulation. If we accept this we can argue with Castoriadis (1984), and also with William James (1902), that in the process of articulation an individual makes use of the richness of a complex, culturally preformed repertoire of (linguistic) expressions. Every articulating and experiencing subject has the opportunity to choose between different available and selectable alternatives of expressions, and is able to create new expressions to add to, differentiate, and expand that repertoire (e.g. neologisms). The non-identity of the repertoire of linguistic expressions with the lived experience in need of articulation will neither be relativized nor naturally disappear. Neither the articulatory repertoire nor human experience is qualitatively or quantitatively determined by the subjects' capacities and possibilities of expressions, but are always culturally formed and shaped by individual biography.

According to Castoriadis (1984, pp. 129–130), we can summarize the results of our analysis as follows. The original idea of an expression is not always visible to us; we can, nevertheless, identify and observe the implications and effects of how new meanings are created. In the process of experience-formation interdependencies exist between subjective experiences, qualities of lived experiences, individual articulations, and the available finite repertoire of culturally preformed and determined linguistic expressions and interpretations (cf. Joas,

2002; Jung, 1999). In such use of verbal expressions specific, cultural experiences of difference, otherness, and alterity are elucidated, and common patterns of articulation are reproduced. In this regard, culture functions as a system of meanings, symbols, and orientations to life. In the process of interpreting lived experiences, or rather transformations and translations of qualities into expression, the question also arises of its meaning for the individual, who is continuously trying to achieve consonance and coherence between reflected experiences and his or her self and worldview.

These relations between experience and its cultural meanings will serve to evaluate the tension between the sayable and the unsayable, and imply various consequences with regard to the concept/notion of articulation as it is used here. Although it is not possible to present these implications in detail (for an overview cf. Arnold, 2010, pp. 70 – 76), we can make two observations. First, the tension between pre-linguistic intuition and the available repertoire of linguistic expressions does not exist per se but can be articulated by means of language – although not with complete success or sufficient quality. Second, there ist a reciprocal relationship of interpretation between experience and articulation. Therefore, the experience-formation process becomes an on-going process of the formation of expressions (through language), on the basis of available meanings, or the recreation of new expressions to develop and expand the repertoire of possible expressions by individuals. Thus, the meaningful articulations of individuals' subjective qualities of lived experiences need to be analyzed from a 'first-hand perspective', and, thereafter, the relation between the quality of lived experiences and articulatory meaning-making.

Subjective Experience from a First-Hand Perspective

Experiences do not immediately become tangible to us, and cannot simply be made. They provide a subject-oriented approach to exploring one's own self in the social scene (Boesch, 1991). In paying attention to the self-concept and relationship to the world from the "first-hand perspective" of an individual, we take into consideration that the "conscious life of every individual has to be lived unjustifiably as one's own" (Jung, 1999, p. 268; trans. MA). A starting-point for a thematization of the first-hand relationship of the experiencing subject to its environment is provided in the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), Paul Ricœur (1991) and Niklas Luhmann (1971), who all understand 'experience' as a "complexly structured first-hand relationship to the world" (Popp-Baier, 2006, p. 141; trans. MA).

In addition, analytical philosophy has investigated the epistemological reference to the "first person" (singular and plural) under the aspect of "privileged

access" (cf. Alston, 1971; Nagel, 1974). It is common sense that individuals have particular access to their own inner psychic being (thoughts, perceptions, feelings, dispositions, etc.). Not only the formal structure of the privileged access to the subject's perspective, but also the preferred mode of this access to particular mental states is still in need of explanation (cf. Jung, 1999). Instead of taking the (descriptive) knowledge that "a person has of his own mental (psychological) states, such as thoughts and feelings" (Alston, 1971, p. 223) for granted we should speak of capacities for "articulation" (Jung, 1999, p. 272) in order to better respect the subjects' first-hand experiences. Nevertheless, in the transformation of a description into an articulation, the interpretative tensions between articulation and claims to universal validity – like those of religions and philosophies of life – should remain intact (Jung, 1999, p. 287). However, articulation should not be misunderstood as a naïve representation of a subject's inner world (cf. Taylor, 1980).

According to Jung (1999, pp. 290 – 291; trans. MA), descriptions can be illustrated by the metaphor of 'seeking' a possible expression of the sayable, while the term 'articulation' refers to both the metaphors of 'seeking' and 'generating' meaningful expressions. In this regard, we assume a meaning-making process in which a selection of particular forms of expression for lived experience occurs under the exclusion of a multitude of alternative interpretations. The choice of specific expression-formation is, therefore, an interpretation of the subjective content of lived experience, which cannot be reduced to the first-hand perspective. As Jung (1999, p. 291 trans. MA) notes, choosing a particular form of expression integrates (at least) two interlocking levels (cf. Figure 1): "schemata of objectification" (e.g. identification with religion) and "schemata of subjectification" (individuals' horizon of experiences). Therefore, at the center of studies of religion is an individual who relates their subjective experiences, and the content of these lived experiences, by simultaneously using their cultural repertoire of symbols, interpretations, and expressions, while either subsuming the cultural repertoire under their own lived experience or creating a new expression through reflection.

This means, however, that in a scientific study of religion perspectives of the first person singular and plural cannot be simply reduced to the supposedly neutral position of an uninvolved 'third person', nor can they merge with the latter. The concept of a neutral scientist seeking objectivity (from the perspective of the third person) does not take into account the fact that particular qualitative contents of lived experience are not objectifiable, since they cannot be represented other than from the perspective of the first person (cf. Nagel, 1980). Therefore, the process of scientific experience acquisition and knowledge-formation needs to include expectations and attitudes as well as implicit and explicit knowledge (deriving from the cultural background of the experiencing

subjects under investigation), and not only the knowledge of the scholars participating in (textual) interpretation. In the scientific process of experience-formation, the existential singularity of religious interpretation is closely related to the conditions of the everyday life world, and the verbalizations of social and cultural practices. Thus, an articulation that refers to the social and cultural life world cannot avoid the theoretical perspectives of symbolic action theory.

Quality of Lived Experience and Articulatory Meaning

Generally, the philosophical term 'articulation' subsumes a relation between 'the whole' and its 'structure'. In his famous *Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften* (1924/1957: Xcvi), Wilhelm Dilthey references Immanuel Kant, emphasizing the dynamically developing and differentiating structure and organisation of the whole, in the relation "(lived)experience-expression-understanding". As will be shown in the following, from Dilthey's (1924/1957) expression, "lived experience", and Dewey's (1896) concept of the "quality of lived experience", we can elaborate a pragmatist perspective for the concept of articulation. The subject's individual experience is thereby regarded as a core element of the experience-formation process.

Experience is not only the main focus of Dilthey's relational model, but also constitutes an interface between the individual ability to form expressions and the available cultural repertoire of meaningful interpretations (Jung, 1999, p. 290). According to Dilthey, it is the particular relationship between lived experience and expression that underscores the concept/notion of articulation. The representation of lived experience becomes possible, owing to a shared cultural horizon of expectations and a corresponding culturally preformed structure of experiences of individuals, as well as to the knowledge of common forms of expression. Thus, experiencing is the process "in which the quality of lived experience is determined from the meaning of articulation and, *vice versa*, the phenomenal determination of the self is also qualitatively characterized by articulated values, norms, etc. themselves" (Jung, 2005, p. 245; trans. MA). It is especially through articulation that the subjective interpretation of the meaning of life becomes possible, whereby the individual makes accessible the qualitative content of lived experience by means and reference to a shared cultural system of action, orientation, and symbols. The experience-formation process is characterized by the fact that the articulatory process of the understanding of sense, and the opening up of new meanings based on subjective experiences, are two inseparably linked elements (Joas, 2004, p. 24): religions, religious traditions, and institutions provide individuals with a rich repertoire of cultural symbols and patterns of interpretation, out of which an experiencing subject borrows

patterns of interpretation for his/her lived experiences, in order to seek a suitable expression for the specific quality of the lived experience at hand. The lived experiences articulated by believers are not independent of the cultural repertoire. Moreover, individual and collective experiences and beliefs are indissolubly, interdependently, and dynamically related to each other.

Thus, cultural patterns of interpretation make it possible for believers to make particular experiences, which they then classify as religious: e.g. prayer, sacramental experiences. During such activities, a person has religious or mystical experiences, owing not only to familiarity with patterns of interpretation of ritual practices, but also to the accessibility of such experiences from the first-person perspective. Due to the the generation of individual interpretations of existing symbolic patterns of articulation, the qualitative content of the interpretation of religious experiences can be explained, and a process of the understanding of sense starts. In a way, this is also a prerequisite for the intersubjective transparency and validity of individual experience. As has stated above, experience and articulation cannot be separated from each other.

Assuming this structural limitation of a concept of lived experience, in the next step we will not be able to ask, in a Diltheyian sense (determined by expression), how an orientation to action could develop from this concept.

Since Dilthey does not help us to answer this question, we will refer to Dewey's essay, "Qualitative Thought" (1930), which clarifies the sequential structure of experience-formation, beginning with a qualitative experience and ending with an articulation of meaning (Jung, 2005, p. 246). According to Dewey, we cannot take the actual 'existence' of qualitative experiences as a starting-point and conclusions can only be inferred from the fact that lived experience, with a particular meaning for an individual, has been made and internalized. There is the "quality of a situation, but not existence itself" in the world of our experiences (Jung, 2005, p. 246; trans. MA). Inasmuch as qualitative experiencing is necessarily entangled in meaningful situations the lived experience becomes, so to speak, visible through an expression, pinpointing the inherent meaning. A conversation about the qualities of lived experiences becomes possible – although meaning can vary from individual to individual – because of a commonly shared descriptive vocabulary for articulation, and because the acting and articulating individual can extrapolate from a quality of lived experiences, situations and particular contents of experiences. In this context, Dewey (1930, p. 254) speaks of a "given, total, persuasive quality" of an experienced situation. As a requirement, this discourse about the qualities of lived experiences is only possible when the intended meaning of a situation is articulated from the first-person perspective. Conversely, in the articulatory meaning-making process, an individual always refers to the underlying cultural system of convictions, orientations, and symbols. Jung (2005, p. 247) also speaks, in this

case, of a "creative translation between culturally preformed patterns of inter-
pretation and the qualitative act of life." Between these two elements, which are
sequentially related to each other in the experience-formation process (the
"qualitative act of life" and the "cultural interpretation"), there is a lively in-
terdependency, the regularity of which empowers the individual self to develop
and to change on the basis of everyday lived experiences.

   This means that articulation takes place within the process of experience-
formation, which is limited in two ways. On the one hand, in the process of
understanding, the biographically stacked-up lived experiences presume a
specific (culturally and symbolically preformed) horizon of interpretation in
conjunction with the selected forms of expression. On the other hand, the va-
riety, variability, and infinitude of possible ways of articulation are limited, in
reality, to the creative potentials of "selection, precision, clarification" (Jung,
1999, p. 291; trans. MA). Language is not simply reproduced in expressions,
since an experiencing subject in need of articulation is constantly seeking an
expression appropriate to a quality of the lived experience on the basis of a
culturally shared repertoire of expressions. In this case, the impetus from
symbolic action theory lies in the naïve and reflective interpretation of a phe-
nomenon (Jung, 2005, p. 248): with an articulation of an intensive experience, an
individual also attempts to understand the meaning of this experience and to
find out the meaning of his/her lived life with reference to known interpretation.
A newly arising perspective on life may guide individuals' later action or, at least,
lead to a change in the (creative) potential for action. As a result, different forms
of development in biographically consistent and coherent personal identity are
possible. Thus, in the process of articulation, seeking, finding, and creating
meanings are closely linkedby means of cultural symbols and corresponding
actions. In order to be able to articulate specific experiences, subjects usually
make use of a particular expressive form and mode of 'self-thematization'.

Articulation of Religious Experiences in (Auto-) Biographical Narratives

Experiences refer to an experiencing subject. They do not exist in an 'empty
space' but take place in the world and in everyday life. According to the Aris-
totelian definition of experience (εμπειρία), "everyday life experiences have to be
understood as explicit foundations and frames of reference for all forms of
knowledge formation" (Straub, 1989, p. 202; trans. MA). Everyday experiences
are an important element of one's own life story, which is also a history shared
with other individuals. Major life events, in which an "I" locates itself, are partly
predictable and partly unpredictable. Stories about life need to be understood
and interpreted. The process and meaning of a life story is constructed by the

variety of possible representations of one's own experiences. The articulation of a life event and its reconstructed meaning always require a specific narrative form of expression, a narration.

In the process of experience-formation narrators become intuitively involved with their own life story, in story telling as an everyday communication practice, especially from the perspective of the first person (singular and plural).

In stories about everyday life, which follow particular rules, a person expresses his or her own lived experiences. A violation of these rules can only happen at the expense of understanding and traceability, and may also lead to the loss of consistency and coherence. Different "compulsions of storytelling" (Zugzwänge des Erzählens; Schütze, 1983; for an overview cf. Straub, 1989, p. 191) constantly guide the narrator. Nevertheless, the assumption of a homology between the constitution of stories and experiences has already been identified as a problem. Experiences are not simply retrievable or available at any time, but are already reflections of former lived experiences. Experiences once made can be overwritten and stacked up, not only via reflection, but also via other events, experiences, and narrations. Because all narrators tell their interesting and 'authentic' self-stories to express and thematize their own point of view, life experiences cannot be investigated without regard for the situation and context in which they are narratively expressed, or the presumed expectations of the recipients.

Story Telling as a Mode of Self-Thematization

Story telling can be regarded as a widespread mode of 'self-thematization' (for an overview cf. Straub & Arnold, 2009). In life stories a person creates his or her own perspective on his or her life. Narrations are not simply reproductions of 'actual' or 'authentic' experiences which 'really' occurred in the way depicted, but are reconstructions of moments of shifting life, and are only accessible as more or less appropriate 'versions' of the past. The thematization of one's own life in stories depends on the narrators themselves, who act in the narration, or realize that something happened to them. An important and necessary condition is that they locate and position themselves on the basis of participation in a cultural practice.

The techniques and repertoire of storytelling, acquired during life, vary depending on the culturally shared repertoire of traditional narratives, adaptability to the life stories of significant others, and creativity in generating new stories about one's own life. The constitution, formation, and interpretation of self-stories is not only a creative performance of the memory, but also locates and thematize the self in a socio-cultural context (e. g. Straub, 2008; Straub &

Arnold, 2009). In self-stories a person not only remembers and evaluates what once happened, but also tells about future plans, notions of life, and whether their expectations and longings have been met or disappointed. Rational assessments and conscious decisions go hand in hand with emotional fluctuations and moments of elation. Rational arguments can suddenly stand side by side with beliefs. Precarious tensions may emerge. On a pragmatic level, narrations guide, organize, and regulate human action.

Stories never represent the entire life history, spaces of experiences, and horizons of expectations of the story telling 'I', but are selectively reduced to verbal articulations, remaining unavoidably incomplete, whereby the perspective of time and space cannot be separated from the narrated content (Popp-Baier, 2009). As a matter of course, narrations can also consist of non-accessible or rarely accessible articulations and seemingly cognitively inaccessible elements of one's own life story. Language, as a medium of articulation, makes it possible to express the tension between the 'sayable' and the 'unsayable' (Castoriadis, 1984), e. g. in meditations or prayers. In all cases, the narrator goes back in each description, explanation, and evaluation to (auto-) biographical elements of his/her own life.

Next, preceded by a discussion of the problem of reductionism, the methodological consequences of such an analysis of religion are described on the basis of an interpretive psychological approach, which in turn is based on the concept of religion as experience, also including pragmatic aspects of the subject's everyday life.

Methodological Consequences for an Interpretative Psychology of Religion

The Problem of Reductionism and Possible Solutions

As paradigmatic problems in religious studies, reductionist positions are "critical – distant to claims of validity of religious belief" (Jung, 1999, p. 364; trans. MA), while reductionist ways of interpretation and explanation do not necessarily depend on personal beliefs of the interpreter. Mircea Eliade (1984, p. 6) once observed – referring to Freud and Durkheim – that the most important aspect in the controversial debate on reductionism is this: on the one hand, there is the attempt to consider the object of research as a "religious datum", as a pre-interpretative, pre-scientific, or a priori fact; on the other, religious explanations and patterns of interpretation are more or less replaced by psychological, socio-

historical, or theological arguments. Hence, one could ask how reductionist argumentation can occur in descriptions and interpretations of experiences.

It is common sense that (religious) phenomena need to be analysed first 'on their plane of reference'. Wayne Proudfoot (1985) also follows this line, being critical and sceptical of religion when it comes to a detailed analysis, and confronts reductionism with a differentiation of the 'descriptive' and 'explanatory' aspects of the reductionist problem. First, as a methodological consequence of an experience-oriented theoretical approach, it is necessary that 'descriptions' of an object should be oriented as precisely as possible, and narrowed down as much as possible, to the research partners' understanding of reality. The verification of such descriptions is then guaranteed if the individual is able to recognize and identify himself/herself in the chosen form of articulation and expression in his/her first-person relationship with the world. Descriptions which do not arise from the horizon of the subject's experience are excluded, resulting perhaps in a misjudgement of the subjective-qualitative moment of the individual's experience. Second, an 'explanatory reduction' contains any offer of explanation of (religious) experience which is new, typical, and congenic to the subjects' horizon, e. g. from the psychology of religion or sociology. The explanatory content is thematized in a new and different context, and terms and patterns of explanations are applied which do not emerge from the experiencing subject's horizon of interpretation, and do not even need to be agreeable or consensual (Proudfoot, 1985, p. 197). Thus, in an explanation or interpretation, the subject's everyday world is no longer a normative directional indicator and, therefore, its identification in the found explanation, no longer necessary. However, deviations between the self-expression of an individual and of a religious community or even outsiders (non-believers or dissenters) are the normal scenario. Descriptions with which an experiencing subject could identify, recognize, or approve cannot *per se* be applied to the level of explanation. Accordingly, scientific statements and explanations about religious life do not necessarily require the individual's consensus to claim validity.

Thus, Jung (1999, p. 358) suggests a threefold differentiation of the problem of reductionism: (1) the inner perspective of an experiencing subject, (2) the evaluation of alternative explanations of the lived life and (3) the inclusion of external explanations. First, in an interpretative analysis, it is of paramount importance to assume a subjective form of expression and the pragmatic relations that are located in the everyday life of a subject.

Second, a "remodalisation of the actual" (Jung, 1999, p. 358; trans. MA) makes it possible that in the process of articulation – whether conscious or not, obvious or hidden – other possible and plausible ways of understanding need not be excluded. Furthermore, it becomes possible for an individual to decide on a personal perspective from a multitude of different possibilities which are

plausible for himself/herself and comprehensible to others. This is so because the "[k]nowledge of the choice made, as a choice, allows the recognition of dissonant choices" (Jung, 1999, p. 359; trans. MA). Thus, a broad spectrum of possibilities can be uncovered in which alternative forms of articulation can be investigated. Third, interpretative analyses should also include external explanations which do not have to comply with the subjective description of the lived experience or the alternative articulation. Objectifications on the basis of external explanations, and from the perspective of the third person, must always be sought within the horizon of meaning and interpretation of the experiencing subject. Finally, on this basis, a comparative approach to an interpretative psychology of religion can enrich our discussion and substantiate our methods.

Comparative Analysis in the Cultural Psychology of Religion

A comparative analysis, based on the methodical principles of symbolic action theory and cultural psychology, predominantly aids the development and differentiation of categories in a systematic comparison of 'cases'. In the scientific process of knowledge-formation, this comparative perspective makes possible interpretative analyses and categorisation of individual experiences, beliefs, and orientations regarding religious phenomena.

Generally, scientific interpretation is here understood as the reflective, purpose-oriented, meaning-anticipating action of a researcher who – in a methodologically comprehensible and intersubjectively appropriate way – aims to understand the verbally formed, interactively communicated, and ex post facto textually fixed part of reality (Straub, 2006, p. 185). An interpretation can itself be understood as an approach in which meanings of experiences and actions are actively and jointly constructed by the researcher and the subject under investigation. Thus, lived experiences are here analysed as articulated expressions in the form of narratives which are adopted in (auto-) biographical constructs via verbally communicated practices and textual manifestations, and produced at first hand from the perspective of a third person, such as a researcher or interpreter. Descriptions of experiences in stories are thereby not only regarded as 'single' points of a mostly complex life history which have an effect on the constitution, development, and transformation of personal identity and self-concepts, but can also be understood as the existential realization of an individual in a cultural and religious context. The process of a text interpretation consists of essentially three (ideal typical) components. As a matter of course, it is permissible, and sometimes necessary, to conduct these sequences in two different ways (as a mutually inclusive process of induction and deduction). The verbal isolation and separation from the subjectively articulated meaning in-

creases not only the degree of abstraction, advancing the content of the inter-pretative explanation, but also leads inevitably to "second-degree-constructs" (Schütz, 1962).

The first step aims at "thick descriptions" (cf. Geertz, 1973) of the experi-encing subject's inner perspective. According to Bohnsack (2007) and Straub (1999), this is a "formulating interpretation": the interpreter "abstracts from the text as little as possible in the attempt of interpretation" (Straub, 1999, p. 213; trans. MA), and finds a thematic overview of the sequential structure of a text in the form of paraphrases, as well as via finding and indexing (sub-) headings. This stage in the procedure aims at a reformulation of what is said, in which no new aspects are added. Furthermore, the description of the analysed texts or text sequences are oriented as narrowly as possible toward the self-understanding and relation of the self to its life world perspective, as well as toward the spaces of experience and horizons of expectation of the subject under investigation. The degree of detail or selectivity of the paraphrased text sequence is determined by the relevance of the sequences to the research question. The purpose of this step is to elaborate a descriptive explanation of the phenomenon in question as a necessary criterion for the methodological control of all further procedural steps in the meaning-making process.

In the second stage of the procedure, a perspectivation of the descriptions from the experiencing subject is utilized via identification of possible alternative explanations for the lived life. This "remodalisation of the actual" (Jung, 1999, p. 373) can be understood as a meaningful and thorough weighing of the realistic against the realizable interpretations of one's own life. Questioned, at the same time, are which kinds of actions and lived experiences are realized, and which other possibilities are negated. Due to the fact that chosen articulations of an experiencing subject exclude other possible articulations – and thus a re-construction of the conscious or unconscious, obvious or hidden – articulation becomes possible. Deviating or non-approvable positions of descriptions of lived experiences remain valid. This act of 'reformulating interpretation' starts with the perspective of what is said, in compliance with the self-image, and the understanding of reality of all research partners. The 'reciprocation' of 'alter-native choices' opens up room for articulation, which serves as a starting-point for comparisons and subsequent processes of categorisation, although this stage in the text interpretation procedure is still not a 'comparative interpretation'. The identification of alternatives usually precedes the comparison and theo-retical reflections in a structural-logical way.

The third stage in the text interpretation is the pragma-semantic operation, "Vergleichen" (Matthes, 1992), in which external explanatory perspectives are integrated.

This is the "comparative interpretation" (Straub, 2006) that realizes the as-

pects of relation, aggregation, and 'putting-in-relation' (not necessarily chro-
nologically or argumentatively consecutive) of text segments, patterns of ex-
perience, and their interpretation with a shared content of meaning. As in the
two previous steps, the meaning of the said is reconstructed and reproduced to a
greater extent: it can be produced intra-textually and inter-textually and as text-
transcendent, meaning-reconstructive reference (Straub, 2006). Comparisons
refer to different horizons of comparison, and counter-horizons, such as the
"interpreter's knowledge of everyday life", "explicit empirical substantial
knowledge", "scientifically grounded knowledge", or "imaginations and creative
meaning-making" (Straub, 1999, p. 225; trans. MA). Owing to the identification,
assertion, and explanation of these sources of horizons of interpretations, a
contrastive comparison becomes possible. By means of comparative operation,
types (or categories) can be determined from the constructions of similarities
and differences of the characteristics, and singularities of the research object,
emerging from the horizons of interpretation: e. g. characteristics of people and
situations, experiences and actions, orientations and beliefs, biographical events
and processes of development, intentions and motives, as well as possible sub-
differentiations. Depending on the researchers' verbal articulatory perform-
ances of interpretation, these types may differ and deviate from the values and
moral orientations of the subjects.

Conclusions

As has been outlined, an interpretative approach to the cultural psychology of
religion leads to new perspectives for the study of religious life in everyday
practices. Such a hermeneutical approach, which draws attention to cognitive
claims on truth, attitudes, beliefs, mental states, emotions, etc., and its practical
and communicative implications to the individual self in its social environment,
reminds us of the relevance and importance of a concept of 'religion as expe-
rience'. Despite some restrictions – due to the practical implementation of this
research in overcoming problems of reductionism in explanation and inter-
pretation – an interpretative cultural psychology of religion (empirically
grounded on a concept of religion as experience, which also includes pragmatic
aspects of the subject's everyday life) reveals a promising perspective. This
theoretical and methodological framework sensitizes to the complexity and
diversity of individual religiosity and spirituality. Furthermore, it addresses the
methodological principles of a comparative analysis, in the empirical research of
religion, from a cultural psychological perspective. In this sense, this chapter
opens the study of articulations of subjective (first-hand) experiences in ev-

eryday life, and links perspectives of narrative psychology with qualitative social research in the psychology of religion.

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