

Response to Professors Carrasco and Sullivan

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LET ME FIRST join the other members of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies in expressing my great pleasure at the organization of this symposium after so many years and in welcoming our three distinguished guests from abroad.

My task here today is to respond to the presentations of Professors Carrasco and Sullivan, which I read with great interest. As you are all aware, both of them may be called representatives of the currents of religious studies that formed around Mircea Eliade, and we are grateful for this opportunity to hear from them firsthand about developments in religious studies they are engaged in. Before that, however, I would like to raise a few questions about the general topic under discussion here today.

To begin with, let me first introduce the problem of how to respond to religious and cultural pluralism. Professor Carrasco opens his paper with remarks about the state of religious and cultural pluralism in the large urban centers of present-day America. As I read them I was once again struck forcefully by the situation there, about which reports reach us from time to time. His words not only convey a powerful sense of the manifold pluriformity of contemporary America, they also propose the quest of new *arché* to deal with the trends emerging from that reality. I will return to this matter later, but let me begin by making sure that this pluralistic situation actually drives us to this kind of elemental pursuit.

The phenomenon of religious pluralism leading to interreligious dialogue has been part of our experience for some time. In this regard, we may refer to John Hick's well-known distinction of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. His pluralist thinking seems to end up only in a higher form of monism, which leaves us with the question of what comes after the acceptance of pluralism as a given fact. This is where the problem begins. In the case of the pluralism in American society, too, the same problem arises as soon as we try—as try we must—to take a posture of leadership. Does not the pursuit of *archés* end up where Hick's pluralism does, in the pursuit of some sort of monism or other?

There has been a fair amount of talk about religious pluralism and pluraliformity in Japan as well. Indeed, religious pluralism is even held up as the strongest defining trait of Japan. Naturally, this brings up the question of the differences between religious pluralism in Japan and America. There are many others in the hall much better suited than I to discuss the matter, but I would only add the obvious and perhaps simplistic impression that American society today represents the first time in history that a society has confronted true pluralism head on. One hears it said often enough that because monism is dominant in monotheistic Christian and Islamic societies, throughout history other minor religions have been excluded. Today, with the acceptance of great numbers of immigrants from other cultures, the age of exclusion has passed. Like it or not, pluralism has had to be accepted as well, or at least efforts are being made in that direction. For my part, I would like to hear more of the actual problems and difficulties this entails. Depending on conditions, pluralism can produce good effects or bad. A pluralistic situation may invigorate people, but not all invigoration is desirable. Clearly there are tensions and conflicts that are brought about by a pluralism of values. Or again, in Japan (where the situation is markedly different from America) religious pluralism has long been fostered in a monoethnic setting. The contrast strikes me as an interesting one. Also of interest is the fact that the very syncretism that Carrasco speaks of overcoming is a source of pride for Japan before the rest of the world.

I was also deeply impressed by the noticeably positive stance that Professors Sullivan and Carrasco take to contemporary social problems. Each of the *archés* that Professor Carrasco pursues has close ties with practical issues: the natural world and human beings (environmental destruction), the overcoming of colonialism (imperialism), and the creativity of urban culture. At a still more concrete level, Professor Sullivan's explanation of the projects of the Center for World Religions in Harvard indicates a cooperative effort "that can have a positive impact on issues of great actuality in today's world." Environmental issues are being taken up; plans for a museum of religions and international forums aimed at mutual understanding among the cultures and peoples of the world are already in progress. I am personally interested in any number of details regarding these efforts. (A sudden change of plans for my research leave prevented me from paying a visit to the Center last summer as I had hoped to do.) But in the interests of time, I shall postpone my questions for a later date. Surely I am not missing the mark in drawing out from the two papers at hand the issue of the social responsibility of the scholar of religion. It is a topic that has taken on added urgency for scholars of religion in Japan with the tragic events surrounding the Aum Shinrikyō. If it is agreeable to everyone, I think an exchange of views here regarding the problems of pluralistic society and of the social responsibility of those of us who face it as scholars of religion would be of great benefit.

That said, I now turn to the second topic. As I stated at the beginning of my remarks, I am interested in the religious studies of Professors Sullivan and Carrasco as bearers of the legacy that Eliade left behind. In particular, if I be permitted still another request, I would like to focus on the possibility of dialogue with the empirical study of religion.

I begin with the briefest of accounts of my own reading of the situation and understanding of the problem, which I believe to be of great relevance to the American academic situation as well. Regarding this latter, of late two rather incisive debates have taken shape in the American academy regarding phenomenology of religion and the study of religion. One of them deals with reductionism, the other with the comparative method. In each case, the empiricists have raised doubts regarding the subjective character of phenomenology. The phenomenologists have defended the need for their method as one academic standpoint, countering that the empirical method as a rule tends to lack understanding in matters religious. Eliade is cited in the debate with some regularity, most noticeably in the debate over reductionism, where he ended up being the focal point. The fact that this debate is being carried on energetically in present-day America is itself a welcome development. A similar debate is in progress in the *iahr*, of which the Japanese Association for Religious Studies is a member. Not surprisingly, to the best of my knowledge the political confrontations have advanced further than the academic discussion. This sort of conflict may well be part and parcel of human groups, and confrontation itself is not necessarily a bad thing. Still, one wishes that the debate could be carried out in open forum and in a more academic fashion. In my view, the phenomenology of religion and the empirical study of religion are both necessary and indispensable approaches, and I believe it is not an exaggeration to say the future direction of religious studies hangs on whether or not they can come to a productive exchange and dialogue. My own position in the debate is to do what little I can to uphold the phenomenological position.

To return once again to Professor Carrasco's *archés*, I would like first to question the idea of the *arché* itself. What *can* it be? He himself describes it as "original form" and as "the recurrent orders of meaning and symbols." I take this to mean something like "awakening to a more fundamental and radical level of existence" or "a return to a great state of humanness." Of course I understand *return* as referring not to a past time but to a future one. Earlier I spoke of the pursuit of a kind of monism, but I wonder if it might not be more in the nature of a utopianism (a word for which I admit a special affection). I would also understand Professor Sullivan's allusion to a revitalization of "mythical and aesthetic imagination" in a similar fashion as referring to the development and rediscovery of a deeper human potential, which may also be seen as belonging to the basic stuff of the *arché*. Echoes of the basic spirit behind Eliade's "creative hermeneutics" are unmistakable

here, the strong passion for giving shape to society present and future by reviving the archaic and the ancient realm of myth that modern and contemporary people are prone to dismiss from memory. If Eliade himself was a representative critic of present civilization, I think the same can be said of Professors Carrasco and Sullivan.

This brings me to my next question. Contemporary pluralistic society as you see it—at least as you see it in America—is beset with all sorts of problems, the basic prescription for which you see in “the pursuit of *archés*” and the “revitalization of mythical and aesthetic imagination.” To take this a step further, I wonder about your apparent belief in the potency of the medicine you are prescribing. Obviously there are misunderstandings about phenomenology. To be more specific, there is the suspicion that the phenomenology of religion might turn into a kind of religion with its own prescription for salvation—or rather, that in fact it has already done so. The empiricists engaged in debate with the phenomenologists in American religious studies have expressed this misgiving. Their accusation that phenomenology is actually being transfigured into theology raises serious doubts. I myself think this to be a fundamental misreading of the situation. At the same time, I do think the fact that these suspicions have been around (as evidenced in the history of the *iahr*) since the 1960s, and continue to smolder still, calls for an honest response. Otherwise there is no way for the dialogue to advance. I am reminded here of Max Weber’s insistence that *Wissenschaft* differs from religion and art in that it neither offers nor seeks to offer humans a comprehensive meaning and salvation. His vigorous insistence that science only secures its character by not doing so was aimed against the New Age thinkers in Germany at the time and in fact was voiced in a lecture they had invited him to deliver (“Science as a Calling”). It seems to me that scholars teaching in universities, including phenomenologists, share his view in the matter, and that the phenomenology of religion is really not a religion and does not offer a way of salvation. However, there is something rather important that remains to be said in this regard, something that perhaps only the phenomenologist is in a position to say. And what would that be?

The question we are brought to here is how the prescriptions of the empirical sciences—and obviously they have their own prescriptions—can complement those of phenomenology. Is there a possibility of collaboration? What would our speakers think of a kind of mutual division of labor in this matter? Professor Carrasco has spoken to us of the problems of colonialism and the city. These are issues that fall in the camp of political science and sociology, but if the phenomenology of religion be allowed trespass, there are surely contributions it can make that political science and sociology on their own cannot. I should think phenomenology can open up new perspectives on the same problems which differ from those of political science and sociology. How does this strike our speakers? The

several programs that Professor Sullivan has taken the initiative in promoting represent a dialogue and collaboration among persons from a variety of academic standpoints. This would seem to put him in a better position than anyone persuasively to address the question of the dialogue between phenomenology and empirical scholarship.

Such are my comments, drawn as they are from my own concerns. I look forward to your responses.

[translated by J. W. Heisig]