Representing Religion. Essays in History, Theory and Crisis, by Tim Murphy. London-Oakville: Equinox, 2007. 224pp., Hb. £45.00/$85.00, ISBN-13: 9781845530914; Pb. £14.99/$28.95, ISBN-13: 9781845530921.

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The author, Tim Murphy, who is Assistant Professor of History of Religions at the University of Alabama, faces the particularly difficult subject of describing, theorizing and representing religion. In this book Murphy focuses on the crisis of representation, thus approaching phenomenology and concepts such as subjectivity, consciousness and experience which are considered as fundamental for historical studies applied to religion and the development of its historical study. The considered authors are William James and Darwin, Eliade and in particular Barthes, Chantepie de la Saussaye, Clifford, Derrida, Dilthey, and Durkheim, as well as Foucault, Bakhtin, Nietzsche and de Saussure. Many quotations refer also to Hegel, Heidegger, van der Leeuw, Otto, Schleiermacher, Troeltsch and Wach. Therefore, the overall picture is quite articulated and promising.

The book is divided into two parts. The first one is analytic and critical. The second part is more concerned with offering solutions. Through the examination of the phenomenological concepts and at the same time of consciousness and essence there is, first, a critical review of the history of religion studies. Afterwards, the author hypothesizes a semiotics of religion derived from Nietszche's thought.

The starting point is that academic studies of religion are experiencing a crisis of identity. As a matter of fact, the truth of all disciplines is at present under question. The Eurocentric point of view of social sciences is especially called into question. This is why, as Murphy says, "the question of identity is also the question of representation, i.e., it is also a social and political question" (12). The proposed solution is to use post-structuralist modalities as a "very effective heuristic for interrogating, theorizing and critiquing this joint problematic of power/knowledge which hinges on the issue of identity and the 'crisis of representation'" (13).

Why Nietzsche? "Nietzsche is still useful because he was able to combine, in non-dogmatic and non-pedantic ways, semiotics, hermeneutics, deconstruction, genealogy, and politics, at both first- and second-order levels, in

ways which still surpass most of his commentators and adherents" (20).

The post-structuralist critics have deconstructed phenomenology. In this process, Derrida himself has had an active role, especially concerning the critics of phenomenology, metaphysics and humanism, which is grounded on the idea of "Man." In this regard, Murphy considers the individualistic approach of James, with the varieties of religious experience, as well as the hypothesis of social construction suggested by Berger and Luckmann. James is considered naïf in his schematic categorization (47), which, starting from historical grounds, would attribute to conceptual categories such as "religion," "experience," "religious experience," "religion founders" and "personal versus institutional religion" a previous form, before phenomena are examined (48).

Moreover, Murphy considers the essence and manifestation of religion in different authors, starting from Hegel, Dilthey, van der Leeuw and Otto, in order to reject any attempt at totalization, unification and interaction (77).

The underlying idea of Murphy's interpretation comes from his refusing to take an entirely occidental and Christian point of view, which may be a sectarian way of interpreting phenomena (95).

The mythology of Eliade is also taken into account, not without criticism: "The legacy of Eliade in religious studies is synonymous with the era of the subject, and the era of the subject has been, if not synonymous with, then deeply complicit in, an aggressively assimilative history of the same" (110). However, when the philosophy of difference appears, the era of "Man" studies over religion enters a post-subjective phase, that is to say a post-Eliade phase.

Murphy proceeds in his sharp and well thought out interpretation. It is not possible to share all his observations. Most paragraphs would need to be discussed at length, in order to widen the argumentation and reply to his logical-linguistic elaborations.

However, a review cannot go so deep. I simply intend to highlight a good, scientifically accurate piece of work, which deserves attention in the scientific community, especially the final part, where a post-structuralist interpretation inspired by Nietzsche's thought is proposed.

Murphy opens a wider horizon for studies on religion (114) and suggests that:

> Nietzschean post-modern genealogy, then, is a refiguration of the methodological field of 'history' in light of the absence of any form of transcendent grounding of signification. It offers a way out of the failures of the modernist, subject-based paradigm. In order to fully articulate this refiguration, a series of theoretical displacements must be reviewed. (115)

The final proposal is to replace phenomenology with genealogy. Working on genealogy means to work on historical documents (neither abstract materials, nor *a priori*). Furthermore, genealogy itself gives an account about the nature of historical identity (129).

Murphy is convinced that religions transform, combine and recall previous cultural contents. In fact, "that religions constitute variations upon pre-existing materials is a point borne out both by empirical analysis and theoretical reasoning" (156). Finally, a semiotic theory of religion concerns the nature of pre-existing essence, its inner relations, the continuity through time and space of identity, even if with changes.

In this way, for example, "it would be hard to understand the very meaning of the word 'god' here other than as the product of a long, probably bitter, semiotic agon" (168).

One of the major merits of this text is certainly the invitation to amplify the concept of religion and its related terms. The indication for a Nietzschean and poststructuralist perspective might be of help (however, not in an exclusive way) for a redefinition of religion and for overcoming the identity crisis. However, the author's contention must also necessarily be shared: "I intend this essay as nothing more than a précis to a fully elaborated discussion. It has, perhaps, raised more questions that it has answered" (154).