The Ethology of Art and Religion

Introduction: Some Warnings to the Reader

First, while I do use some of the findings of science in my study I do not claim to practice science. I do not myself aspire to the status of science. My intention is to clarify and solidify a certain understanding – even a definition – of both art and religion and to elucidate the relationship between them as members of the genus of human behaviour and to explain what differentiates these behaviours from one another and from other non-religious and non-art behaviours. Such definition is proper to the discipline of philosophy and I am content if my approach is adequate as philosophy. To use the German expression: I practice the study of religion as a Geisteswissenschaft and not a Naturswissenschaft.

Second, I should dispel any concerns occasioned by the spectre of “behaviourism”. Although ethology is the study of evolved behaviours, it must not be confused with behaviourism. Behaviourism is a group of doctrines related by metaphysical concerns over dualism and epistemological concerns over the status of mental terms and entities. Behaviourism became increasingly radical, especially as it was expressed by B.F. Skinner (1904-1990), who sought to reject any reference to consciousness or “mentalistic terms”, and radical behaviourism was increasingly rejected. However, the fact that the word “behaviourism” is most often associated with this impractical and widely – scorned position did not prevent the greater part of the more reasonable principles of Skinner’s precursor, J.B. Watson (1878-1958), from being absorbed into psychology. The study

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3 Cfr. P. Harzem, Behaviorism for New Psychology: What was Wrong with Behaviorism and What is Wrong with it Now, in «Behavior and Philosophy» 32 (2004), pp. 5-12, for a good account of this.