RESISTANCE TO PRAGMATIC TENDENCIES IN THE WORLD OF WORKING
IN THE RELIGIOUS FINITE PROVINCE OF MEANING

1. Introduction: Eidos and the Paramount Province of Meaning

Alfred Schutz makes repeated, but only fleeting, references to religion as a finite province of meaning, and he never develops any description of that province in the way that he does for the provinces of phantasy, dreaming, and theoretical contemplation in “On Multiple Realities” or the province of literary reality in his essay on Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Wanderjahren.1 A careful reading of Schutz’s account of these finite provinces of meaning shows all of them involve a kind of resistance to the pragmatic dimensions of experience in the world of working that he regularly calls the “paramount reality”2 or even the “archetype of our experience of reality.”3

In this essay, first I will describe some of the basic pragmatic tendencies of the world of working, and then I will show how these dimensions are “contested” in the finite provinces of meaning of theoretical contemplation and literature. Indeed, this contestation plays a key role in the “prevalent form of spontaneity”4 of these provinces’ cognitive style. On the basis of this opposition to such pragmatic tendencies, I will try to show how Schutz’s notion of a religious province of meaning might have involved a similar resistance to the world of working.

I will not, therefore, be attempting to develop an account of the religious finite province of meaning, and hence I will not follow Schutz’s prescription in “On Multiple Realities” for
explaining “the cognitive style” of any finite province of meaning by filling out the abstract paradigm of the six basic features constitutive of any such province. Of course, in articulating some of the features of the religious province that resist the pragmatic dimension of the world of working, I will be pinpointing some features that could be taken as constitutive of the religious sphere, but before commencing this discussion, a few cautionary comments are in order.

a. *Eidos*

Of course, it is a precarious thing to speak of “the” religious province of meaning, which has something of an eidetic ring to it, since one would have to engage in sufficient free variation to determine what belongs essentially to that province and what does not. This is indeed a daunting task when one considers the great variety of religions throughout the world. One would have to be an anthropologist of religion to engage in such an exhaustive process of free variation. Moreover, Robert Bernasconi, wary of the violence possible in speaking of a philosophy of religion that might involve subtly taking one’s own religion for religion in general, warns, “If the philosopher is to speak of religion, and I believe it is incumbent on him or her to do so, it should preferably be in the plural.” Consequently, my reconstruction of the contestation of the pragmatism of the world of working from within the finite province of meaning of religion, will draw upon examples from Judaism and Christianity, with which I am familiar. From my limited experience, I know that other religions also engage to a degree in such resistance to the world of working, but whether such resistance constitutes an eidetic feature of the eidos of religion would require a different, thorough investigation. Consequently, this essay will fall short of the kind of eidetic achievement for which phenomenology usually strives, though perhaps one might
consider this essay as advancing a hypothesis that the contestation of pragmatic dimensions of
the world of working constitutes one eidetic feature of the religious province of meaning

In addition, there is a further question about the eidetic character of Schutz’s own
analyses of the finite provinces of meaning in “On Multiple Realities.” Nowhere in the essay
does Schutz claim that he has given an eidetic description of any one province, nor does he ever
state that the array of finite provinces of meaning that he depicts are eidetically characteristic of
every life-world. Certainly, one can imagine life-worlds that might lack a theoretical-
contemplative province of meaning. In addition, it is imaginable that *epochés* formally
distinguishing various finite provinces of meaning from the world of working may not
historically have been enacted in the ways that Schutz suggests. For instance, if one considers
that entrance into a museum and standing before a painting that is framed may constitute an
*epoché* marking the finite province of meaning of art off from the world of working, it is
arguable that this type of *epoché* is only characteristic of the contemporary world since in other
cultures and eras, visual arts may not have been cordoned off into the museums with paintings
distinguished by the frames that separate the painting from the surrounding world within the
museum. The famous ancient cave paintings at Lascaux, for instance, suggest that art has not
always been so distinctively set off from the surrounding world of working via museums and
frames, serving as a kind of *epoché*, as “On Multiple Realities” suggests, but that art may have
been much more intimately interwoven within the world of working in other cultures. Schutz’s
reluctance to claim eidetic status for many of his own claims warrants caution about making any
eidetic claims for this analysis of anti-pragmatic emphases in the finite province of religious
meaning.
b. The Paramount Province of Meaning

Before discussing how Schutz might have constructed the religious province of meaning, it is important also to understand in what sense the world of working is the “paramount reality” or the “archetype” of our experience of reality. Schutz claims that the world of working, that is, of one’s gearing into the outer world, deals with objects, including my own body, and other people, which one has to deal with in order to achieve one’s pragmatic purposes. All communication, which involves an actor gearing into the outer world and relating to others, takes place in the world of working, to which one finds oneself resorting from within other provinces of meaning, as, for example, when one in the theoretical sphere finds it necessary to communicate her findings. In addition, the world of working is one in which we have an “eminently practical interest” since in it we must comply “with the basic requirements of life,” in the sense that we need to do such things as secure, prepare, and eat food; earn a wage; build a house; preserve health; or avoid accidents that might cost us our lives—all of which require that we negotiate with the things and others in our world. The world of working provides a stratum that accompanies the other finite provinces of meaning (e.g., it is available to them if I need to communicate with others); or one could simply inhabit this world by concentrating on one’s practical purposes at hand without launching into another finite province of meaning.

It is important to correct false notions of why the world of working is the paramount reality. Schutz is clear that working is not paramount in the sense that it is or ought to be valued more highly than other provinces of meaning, as if life had a “higher dignity” than theoretical contemplation, an alternative province of meaning. Also it is not the case that the world of working occurs historically first and that then one must exercise an epoché in order to enter
another province of meaning. One might think that there is such historical precedence because
one construes the transition from the world of working to alternative provinces too much after
the fashion of the phenomenological reduction that involves a deliberate *epoché* that clearly
succeeds upon immersion in the natural attitude. One might also be misled because Schutz’s own
presentation in “On Multiple Realities,” describes first the world of the working and then the
*epochés* adopted toward it, but one ought to recognize that this neat sequential philosophical
*exposition* does not necessarily represent how the transitions are historically *lived*. Schutz
himself is well aware of this, and hence he does not see the change to alternative provinces of
meaning as involving a transmigration of a soul to a new world, but rather the finite provinces of
meaning

are merely names for different tensions of one and the same consciousness, and it
is the same life, the mundane life, unbroken from birth to death, which is attended
to in different modifications. As we have said before, my mind may pass during
one single day or even hour through the whole gamut of tensions of
consciousness, now living in working acts, now passing through a daydream, now
plunging into the pictorial world of painting, now indulging in theoretical
contemplation.¹¹

It is not the case, then, that the world of working is the first, free-standing strata of experience to
which the other provinces of meaning introduce modifications, as if they were mere
epiphenomenal “ad-ons,” appearing only when one figures out how to implement the appropriate
*epoché*. Schutz, in fact, says as much:
The concept of finite provinces of meaning does not involve any static
connotation as though we had to select one of these provinces as our home to live
in, to start from or to return to. That is by no means the case. Within a single day,
even within a single hour our consciousness may run through most different
tensions and adopt most different attentional attitudes to life. 12

Furthermore, although Schutz describes distinctive *epoché*, such as falling asleep as the
opening to the world of dreams or the scientist’s decision to theorize as entering the
contemplative province, one needs to realize again that Schutz’s formal description may not
mirror the exact way people experience these *epochés*. People have fallen asleep and commenced
dreaming for centuries without identifying the falling asleep as an *epoché*, and one can suddenly
take up a theoretical, phantasying, or religious attitude without thinking about it, and
subsequently become aware that he or she has been in such an attitude, and then one might think
back to some *epoché*-like moment when he or she adopted this attitude. It is Schutz the
phenomenologist who marks the fact that a different tension of consciousness is at play and then
proceeds to describe how the adoption of the attitude or tension of consciousness in question
points back to some kind of *epoché* that was undertaken. These varied tensions of consciousness
have existed, though, long before Schutz identified them and depicted their distinctive *epochés*,
and, as such, one might claim that they are co-originary with the world of working—a variety of
provinces of meaning, intertwined with each other, as alternatives into which one might immerse
oneself as one passes through a day.
Likewise, although the relevances of world of working are particularly impressive because they have to do with the preservation of life, it need not be the case that for any individual or group the practical relevances of working are the most highly ranked in their scheme of relevances, since they could be seen as merely providing the conditions of the possibility for one to enjoy art or as relevances that might be disregarded if standing for one’s religious values might require that one suffer martyrdom.

Instead of conceiving the world of working as having some primacy, as worth more, or as historically preceeding all other provinces of meaning, it is worthwhile to conceive it as one province of meaning among others which one might occupy in the course of an hour or a day. To be sure, Schutz takes it as an ‘archetype” for his exposition, since he explains the other provinces by modifying it. In addition, it is “paramount,” because even if one should place a priority on some other province of meaning in one’s life, as, for example, a scientist (the province of theoretical contemplation) or a monk (the religious province of meaning), and if, as a consequence, one might spend most of one’s life in those provinces, one still cannot escape needing to deal with persons and things, communicating with others, or taking steps to maintain one’s life. The medieval monk may dwell in the religious province of meaning rather constantly, valuing it above all others, but there are moments when he will have to build a fire, cook a meal, convince another person, clean a room, etc., and, in such moments, the world of working will have to assume a prominence in his or her life, as religious matters may recede to the horizons of his consciousness. This paper, taking the province of literature and theoretical contemplation as models, will argue that the religious province of meaning, had Schutz ever developed an account of it, would have included, like these other provinces, resistance to the pragmatic tendencies that assume prominence in the world of working. Perhaps it is a testimony to the power that the world
of working has over us that most of alternative provinces of meaning in their different ways offer this kind of resistance.

2. The Pragmatic Character of the World of Working

Within the natural attitude of the world of daily life, an attitude which is governed by pragmatic motives, those bodily actions that overtly gear into the outer world, beyond covert thinking, and seek to realize a projected state of affairs, are characterized as “working,” and such actions, in concert with those of others go into making up the “world of working.” The working self originates its ongoing acts and acts as undivided total self, as opposed to adopting a reflective stance on itself through which the self appears as a past, partial self, considered to be a “Me” as opposed to an “I” by G.H. Mead.

The following features characterize the world of working and explain its distinctively pragmatic orientation. It consists in 1) an organization of the world about one’s self as the 0-point in relation to which all temporal and spatial coordinates are mapped, 2) the sense of power that the ego agens exercises and experiences in its ability to bring spatial and temporal transcendences within reach, 3) a self whose set of relevances are dominated by practical concerns that ultimately depend on the fundamental anxiety that one will die, 4) a self prone to focus on what is typical because of its pragmatic efficacy and to neglect what is unique and atypical, and 5) a self whose intersubjective relationships are based on typifications of others as pragmatically useful to itself and who is prone to overlook the uniqueness of others, their differences from oneself, and the limits of communication.
a. **Organization of the world around one’s self as the 0-point**

The wide-awake self takes its starting point from the locus of its body, its actual Here, the center 0 of its system of spatial coordinates (e.g. right/left, below/above), and its actual Now is the origin of the time coordinates though which its organizes events (past/future, simultaneity).

The *ego agens* does not merely observe or think about what is spatially distant, but is able to overcome this distance by acts of working, principally locomotions. It can also overcome temporal distance through acts of memory or the projection into the future. The *ego agens* is located in the world within actual reach, including what Mead called the “manipulatory area” and the objects within one’s range of one’s sight and hearing. Then, there is the more-distant world within restorable reach to which one can go, recovering a past location or past event, by shifting the 0-point of one’s coordinates, moving physically from one’s *hic* into an *illic*. One can also retrieve distant temporal moments through memory. Finally, one can proceed to the world of attainable reach in the future, insofar as one moves toward a distance place in which one had not been before or one anticipates by protention or projection a situation to which one proceeds through the present. Personal relationships are also grouped about my 0-point whether we discuss Consociates or Contemporaries, within my temporal and/or spatial reach (and the worlds within their reach fall within my reach also), or Predecessors or Successors, within to a degree restorable or attainable reach, however incomplete such a reach might be. The *ego agens* at the center of its set of spatial, temporal, or social coordinates repeatedly has the experience of being able to bring into its present or its physical immediacy distant things, places, events, or persons—by altering its physical position, remembering the past, or anticipating the future toward which it goes. This sense of being able to bring within reach in all these ways is experienced as a power over one’s self and one’s circumstances that one exercises continually.
without any hesitancy and that Husserl describes in terms of the “and so on” and its subjective correlate “I can do it again.”

b. Bringing transcendences within reach

Another way of looking at the capacity of the ego agens to bring what is within reach into its present time or spatial proximity involves its ability to overcome transcendences which is particularly relevant for Schutz’s theory of symbols. Every experience of an object, for instance, when the front of the house appresents its backside. Indications, such as smoke on the mountainside or the gas needle on my car dashboard, play a symbolic role in enabling me to cross the spatial boundary separating me from the fire or the empty gas tank. Likewise, I can establish my own “marks,” such as the bookmark I leave in my book, to symbolize to myself the place I have left off reading when I return to the book I am reading a few days hence. In these examples the indications bring into spatial nearness what is distant and the mark brings into the temporal present the past (the point at which I had stopped reading) which I would not have been able to remember and bring into the present without difficulty unless I had left the mark. The medium transcendences have to do with understanding and communication with our co-human beings whose experience we can reach via “signs,” though there are limits here in that even though, for practical purposes, we understand the other experiences through signs, we never experience his or her experience with the originariness that he or she does. Finally, the great transcendences, what is given in another finite province of meaning beyond the world of working and so more distant even than the other’s experience given through signs (or indications or
marks) within the world of working, are symbolized via symbols such as the stone of Jacob that becomes a *pillar* announcing God’s presence, a flag that appresents a whole national experience, or even a nation that takes itself to represent the cosmic order. The idea of an *ego agens* at point 0, around which everything else is located, and which is the starting point from which one reaches out beyond itself, overcoming various transcendences through indications, marks, signs, and symbols, shows how the pragmatic world of working can be correlated with a theory of symbolization.

*c. Practical relevances and the fundamental anxiety*

The world into which we gear bodily is not an object of thought, but a field of domination, which offers resistances and enables me to achieve or not my purposes and which is shared with others who share my projects or impede them. Centrally important for the *ego agens* and motivating its engagement with the world is the system of the interests or relevances for which it acts. Our system of relevances is founded on the basic experience that I know that I will die and fear it, which Schutz describes as the “fundamental anxiety.” As Schutz describes it, the fundamental anxiety is the primordial anticipation from which all others originate. From the fundamental anxiety spring the many interrelated systems of hopes and fears, or wants and satisfactions, of chances and risks which incite man within the natural attitude to attempt the mastery of the world, to overcome obstacles, to draft projects and to realize them.
It is not clear whether one’s projects are meant to ward off death by protecting oneself, to ensure that the time one has before dying is used productively, to bring it about that one will be remembered by what one achieves, or to yield some other result. All of these projects mentioned would be ways of coming to terms with one’s impending death, and hence Schutz would not have to specify how one’s projects relate to one’s fundamental anxiety since there are many possibilities.

It is important to keep in mind that in this world of working, no philosophical concerns about whether the world actually or exists make their way into it. We trust that our past experiences will generally unfold as they have in the past and that new experiences can be subsumed under our current stock of knowledge. The *epoché* of the natural attitude, as a consequence, involves suspending any doubt about the existence of the external world.\(^\text{18}\)

d. *Focus on the typical*

The pragmatic imperatives governing everyday life play a major role in determining the selectivity of our attention, what we focus on and what we overlook, and this becomes particularly apparent in our use of typifications. For instance, the first time we engage in an action \(A'\) in circumstances \(C'\) to bring about a state of affairs \(S'\) (e.g., leaving home to go to school and spending the day at school for the first time), we are very uncertain about the outcomes and everything is somewhat shocking in its novelty. The second day we perform action \(A''\) in circumstances \(C''\) to bring about results \(S''\) we will have many of the same experiences we had on the first day, but there will be some, at least slight, changes (e.g. we leave a little later,
take a slightly different route, walk a little faster, encounter trucks that block the way for a little while, or do different things in class on the second day), but the central difference is that we have far less uncertainty the second time through. The third day we repeat the action ($A^{\prime\prime\prime}$, $C^{\prime\prime\prime}$, $S^{\prime\prime\prime}$), but we keep the “primes” in order to indicate that no one day of going to school under certain circumstances and spending the day there is exactly like any other. Even though each day of going to school is unique and irretrievable, after going to school day after day, we often just think in terms of a typical action, “going to school in certain circumstances in order to spend the day there,” and we leave out all that is individual and unique in each day. We conceive our actions, circumstances, and results as a matter of a typified “going to school” ($A$) in the usual circumstances ($C$) with the usual result of attending class ($S$) because it is not necessary practically to distinguish each day from the other. When I say the night before that “I am going to school tomorrow,” it is irrelevant to recall and anticipate the many ways in which every other experience of going to school has been and will be different from what I will do tomorrow (and each experience is different from all the others in the past). For pragmatic purposes, I suppress the primes as being irrelevant. Schutz rightly notes “This, incidentally, is characteristic of typifications of all kinds.”

We are constantly using typifications to refer to the “tree” or the “dog” or the “fence,” without distinguishing between the tree, dog, or fence before us and every other instance of these items, each of which is never exactly the same as any other, because if we had to do so, life and language would become utterly impractical. We could not tell someone, go stand by the fence or under the tree, but would have to spell out all the ways in which the fence or tree under which we wish them to stand differs from other trees and fences—an unbelievably burdensome task, from which typification enables us to free ourselves.
The interesting thing about the example of going to school, however, is that it leaves out all the rich temporal conscious processes that make up going to school each day, e.g. the fears and anxieties that wax and wane, the disappointment of expectations and surprises as one, step by step, goes to the school the first day, or the different worries or joys, on which one focuses at one moment and allows to recede in another, in day four. One simply typifies the experiences of all these days as if they were the same.

This pragmatic emphasis on typifying experience and neglecting the rich temporal flow involved in every experience reaches something of a climax insofar as we assume that we can easily understand the intended meanings of others—something perhaps that we typically achieve without any problem in our ordinary conversations and interactions with others. The ease with which we understand others, a pragmatic necessity of everyday life, however, leaves out the rich temporal process constituting each individual. Hence, Schutz reminds us that understanding the other’s intended meaning is only a limit concept.

The postulate, therefore, that I can observe the subjective experience of another person precisely as he does is absurd. For it presupposes that I myself have lived through all the conscious states and intentional Acts wherein this experience has been constituted. . . And this experience of mine would then have to duplicate his experience down to the smallest details, including impressions, their surrounding areas of protention and retention, reflective Acts, phantasies, etc. But there is more to come: I should have to be able to remember all his experiences and therefore have had to live through these experiences in the same order that he did; and finally I should have had to give them exactly the same degree of attention
that he did. In short, my steam of consciousness would have to coincide with the other person’s, which is the same as saying that I should have to be the other person.\textsuperscript{20}

Given the proclivity fostered in the world of working attitude to focus on the typical for pragmatic purposes, it is no wonder that the uniqueness of the individual stream of consciousness is lost sight of, at least until a reflective process, such as the phenomenological reduction, deployed by Schutz just before the passage above, brings it to visibility. As Schutz observes in variant formulations, “In the natural attitude, in which the pragmatic motive dominates, these ‘atypical,’ namely, unique and unrepeatable aspects of experience, are in general of no interest.”\textsuperscript{21} I will hope show later that in the finite province of religious meaning, one focuses on the uniqueness of experience and its unrepeatability instead of its typicality, and the uniqueness of an individual emerges into prominence from its concealment because of the pressures of the practical.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{e. Typifying others}

Of course, the stream of consciousness, including our diverse biographical situations and systems of relevance, radically individualizes each of us and inflects the interpretive schemes used between communicator and interpreter in such a way that a full identity of the schemes is impossible. The objective meaning of “demonic” is given with all kinds of subjective connotations when Goethe uses it, for example, but these subjective connotations will not appear when used by others, and this is the case for all objective meanings taken up with the subjective
framework of any speaker or author. Given that each person’s temporal stream of consciousness individualizes him or her such that his or her connotations never coincide with anyone else’s, when it comes to intersubjective communication, it would seem that there are “insurmountable limits for a fully successful communication in the ideal sense.” But here again the pragmatic imperatives of everyday life lead us, once we have understood the other sufficiently, not to pursue any further exactly what he or she may mean by the signs he or she uses. Typified combinations of motives and goals guarantee agreement between both parties, sufficient for the practical necessities of everyday life. We disregard the ways the other differs from us, and subjective meaning structures are “bracketed out” and replaced by the objective meanings pertaining to a shared sign-system. In some sense, the degree of exactitude we seek in understanding another is contingent on the pragmatic purposes we have at hand.

In the interchangeability of standpoints and the congruence of relevances, which together constitute the general thesis of the *reciprocity of perspectives*, our differences in apprehension and explication resulting from our different biographical situations become irrelevant so that we might be able to achieve the practical goals we are both intent on. Once again, the recognition of our distinctiveness and uniqueness is subordinated to the overriding practical values at stake in the world of working. In many other ways, the pragmatic motives take precedence in the world of working insofar as we fasten on monothetic products rather than the polythetic steps leading to monothetic results and insofar as we do not follow up on our curiosity about understanding ultimate explanations (e.g. understanding the physics behind the operation of a telephone). Likewise, attention to individuality is circumscribed when we relate to Contemporaries, Successors, and Predecessors whom we relate to as types, when we ignore the differences that gaps in space and time induce in our relationships, and when we leave anonymous the
individuality of a Contemporary as, for instance, when we consider that Contemporary strictly in terms of the pragmatic function he or she performs for us (e.g., the mailman). Moreover, even those moments when we escape from the immediate pressures of the practical in the world of working, such as when we contemplate our own projects before deciding how to act, are still directed toward practical purposes and ends, unlike the kind of contemplation in scientific theory that breaks with the pragmatic imperatives of the world of working. It should be borne in mind that typifications, which leave out individuality, are habitually employed in the everyday life because they have proven themselves practical. They are applied immediately, automatically, unquestioningly, via passive synthesis which are evoked by a similar present situation evoking typifications that were effectively deployed in the past.

Although the world of working’s stock of knowledge is confirmed repeatedly, a fundamental suspicion of the adequacy of this stock of knowledge is always possible and can be generated by not easily mastered crises. These crises can motivate a “leap” to non-working finite provinces of meaning, from the perspectives of which the working world’s stock of knowledge appears as inadequate. For instance, a bloody civil war or destructive terrorist attack can prompt a culture to turn to literature or philosophy or religion in order find some sense in a world that is becoming more and more meaningless. We will now turn to the theoretical-scientific and the literary finite provinces of meaning to consider their resistance to the world of working as a prelude to speculating about how Schutz might have developed the finite province of religion.

3. Resistance to Pragmatic Tendencies in the Theoretical-Contemplative and Literary Finite Provinces of Meaning
a. General resistance to worldly-working pragmatism in theory and literature

The scientific theoretical province of meaning “does not serve any practical purpose” since its intention is not “to master the world but to observe and possibly to understand it.” To be sure, in transitioning from the world of working to the scientific sphere, one may enter the sphere because one wants to better the world, to invent new technology that will enable us to come to terms with it, or (in the case of philosophy, perhaps) to put to rest the fears generated by the fundamental anxiety; however, once in the theoretical sphere, one devotes oneself to solving the theoretical problems at hand, regardless of their impact on the practical world. One cannot doctor evidence or alter what one realizes is true because it will be more practically beneficial (if one does so in the natural sciences, it is likely that one’s fabricated conclusions will in the end prove quite unbeneficial).

Likewise, the literary sphere is defined by it escape from the imperatives of the pragmatic world of working. Schutz, for instance, considering how characters in a novella in Johann Wilhelm Goethe’s second edition 1829 Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre suddenly appear in the main body of the novel, reflects on how the novel and the entire literary sphere are not bound to the rules of the everyday world of working. After asking a series of questions about pragmatic details that the novel does not answer, Schutz explains the distinctiveness of the literary sphere:

All these questions are meaningless. The dominating motivation is not pertinent to the reality context of daily life, and it is incommensurable with that realm’s logic. It is a motivation of an entirely other kind, a motivation which resembles that of the dream experience, in which dream images mix, shove each other out, pass into
each other, without such phenomena giving one access to astonished questions about the how, where from, or why. A map with an arrow, of which the dream-content to this point knew nothing, is sufficient motive for the dreamer to envision relationships between contents that would not be compatible in real life. There is a logic of the poetic event, which runs against the current of daily life as against that of rational thought, even as there are grammatical categories in the language of lyrics, which run against the grammar of everyday speech.  

b. Reversal of the five features of the world of working in theoretical contemplation

Once one has entered a finite province of meaning whose fundamental definition involves not being bound to the pragmatic imperatives of the everyday life world of working, one sees that many of the pragmatic dimensions present in that world (and described in our second section), go missing or are modified. For instance, in the theoretical sphere, the theorizer puts in brackets his physical existence and his body as the 0-point of all spatial and temporal coordinates; the theoretician does not “gear into the outer world,” as does the pragmatically oriented actor in the world of working. The project of coming to terms with various spatial and temporal transcendences becomes irrelevant insofar as the theoretician is unconcerned with such gearing into the world or solving the personal problems appearing within his personal environment and is, instead, interested in problems and solutions “valid in their own right for everyone, at any place, and any time.”

Moreover, the theoretician’s relevances are not shaped by the fundamental anxiety (though, as a philosopher he or she may have become a theoretician, a philosopher, for instance,
in order to address that anxiety). Once within the theoretical sphere, the theoretician sets aside all anxieties and fears and seeks simply to find what is valid, what will survive future tests of verification, and hence she becomes a disinterested observer, exchanging world-of-working relevances for those of the scientist, pursuing what Max Weber called the objectivity of social science by detaching herself from the values governing the behavior of everyday actors within the world of working.

As far as the pragmatic focus on the typical and the neglect of the atypical, to be sure the theoretician, by her decision to undertake science, participates in the universal style of that science that depends on the tradition of the science she pursues. However, it is acceptable for the scientist to accept or to reject the way the pre-constituted problems she seeks to solve have been framed, although, to be sure, she must give reasons why such suppositions must not be followed. The unique “resolve not to accept unquestioningly any pregiven opinion or tradition”\(^{34}\) in order to strive for “what is true in itself, an ideality”\(^{35}\) based in evidence—an attitude that Husserl sees as critical for philosophical theory from its inception in early Greece—implies that the theoretician has to have an eye for what is beyond the typically accepted way of formulating problems and finding solutions, an eye for what is original and unexpected—more so at least than the denizen of the world of working. Moreover, the reflective stance characteristic of the theoretical sphere is able to bring into focus the uniqueness and atypicality of the individual insofar as it surfaces the temporal stream of consciousness, which Husserl examined in his studies of the transcendental ego and which, as Schutz noted, never repeats another’s stream in its order and history.

Finally, one adopts an approach to others that is not based on their pragmatic usefulness to oneself, but rather there is a kind of solitude endemic to the theoretical stance. To be sure, the
theorician’s universe of discourse depends upon problems, results, solutions, and methods worked out by others, but the resolve not to accept unquestioningly the other’s beliefs or one’s own, requires adjustments to the pragmatic approach to others in the world of working. One cannot approach the other simply through passive-synthetic, culturally-approved typifications that structure relationships that unfold smoothly, with little question. In fact, one must interrogate critically the other’s claims, shaping oneself “with actual autonomy according to ultimate evidences”\textsuperscript{36} that one has produced for oneself and that result in the responsible solitude informing the theoretical province of meaning. In addition, the other is not merely conceived as someone who can execute one’s pragmatic purposes; instead, because of one’s search to find what is valid, one must be open to the other’s placing in question one’s own beliefs, interrupting them and upsetting their taken for grantedness—in a manner rather foreign to the atmosphere of the world of working in which others are related to in terms of their pragmatic efficacy for my purposes. In all these ways the scientific-theoretical province of meaning runs counter to the basic features constitutive of the everyday world of working, prescinding thereby from its pragmatic emphases.\textsuperscript{37}

c. Reversal of the five features of the world of working in the literary province of meaning

Similar the literary province of meaning, likewise, exhibits features at odds with the five features characterizing the world of working. While one retains to a degree the 0-point in relationship to which a novel, drama, or poem is presented, there is a sense in which the reader is dependent on how the author chooses to guide and lead him or her, luring the reader forward through an appresented past or future or through appresented loci that are near or distant. The
little transcendences of a distant space or time presented by the author in the text and the text’s Leerstelle spur the reader’s curiosity and anticipations onward, as she plunges into the horizons that beckon her forward.\textsuperscript{38} One also enters into relationships with characters in a novel or drama who enable one to overcome medium transcendences only to the extent that the author sees fit to allow them to disclose themselves, and the great transcendences, the meaning that a whole novel appresents, also depends on what the author communicates. While one may have the sense of pressing forward to overcome transcendences on every level, one also has the sense that such overcoming is being guided by the author or that one is collaborating in constructing a novel with the author, who as one progresses through poems, plays, and novels often recedes from prominence.\textsuperscript{39} In addition, one can find oneself in a novel reliant on the viewpoint of the narrator or a certain character/narrator whose viewpoint may or may not coincide with the author’s own. One’s 0-point of orientation seems then to be one’s own, and yet it is often identified with someone else’s, the author’s or a character’s. The sense of power one has in overcoming transcendences as one proceeds through a novel, then, is belied by the fact that it is the author who sets the literary table. In addition, in entering the literary sphere, the reader abandons his or her spatio-temporal coordinates in the world of working, and refrains from gearing into that world, watching characters gear into their world of working as the reader imagines it, taking up possibly a multitude of 0-points of orientation as one enters the viewpoint of diverse characters. Finally, in reading a novel (such as the Wilhelm Meister novels) or watching a drama, one is often led to recognize how actions have never intended consequences downstream, and these consequences provoke reflection about the operation of one’s own fate and destiny beyond one’s own control (“The hero has no plan, but the play is fully planned.”)\textsuperscript{40} Novels thereby undermine the sense of power that one has in the world of working, namely that one can pragmatically
master contingencies, and engender wonder about whether one is really in control of one’s
destiny at all, as if a broader point of view encompasses and contextualizes the 0-point of view
from which one seeks to realize one’s pragmatic projects. In the literary sphere, though one has a
sense of overcoming transcendences in the novel, in many ways the self loses its position as the
0-point for temporal and spatial coordinates and finds the power it exercises as an *ego agens*
diminished or placed in question.

In reading literature, one takes a respite from the practical imperatives of the world of
working insofar as one no longer intervenes physically in the world of working. Practical
relevances are replaced by the relevances involved in appreciating literature, attending carefully
to the poem, drama, or novel at hand and analyzing symbols and the significance they appresent.
One no longer falls oneself under the sway of the fundamental anxiety, but undertakes a
reflective attitude, similar to the approach of theoretical contemplation (but not as imagistic)
regarding the significance of that anxiety according to an author, various characters in a novel or
play, or a poem. One places oneself at a reflective remove from *one’s own* fundamental anxiety
that governs the world of working.

Furthermore, literature has the capacity to bring into focus the atypical that the world of
working finds irrelevant, and, hence, for instance, the Wilhelm Meister novels show how the
turns and surprises of history shape every individual uniquely, such that “everything that happens
to us leaves some trace behind it; everything contributes imperceptibly to form us,”41 without
necessarily denying our freedom to integrate the experiences through which we pass. Again,
though literature relies on images in the way that the theoretical sphere does not, the issues it
raises about one’s uniqueness converges with phenomenological-theoretical reflection on the
stream of consciousness and the transcendental ego. It is no wonder, then, that Schutz the
phenomenologist spends a great deal of time on the theme of temporality in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* and in his poetry. The theme of temporal unfolding, the evanescence of stability, has everything to do with the development of a unique, individual consciousness, and Wilhelm Meister’s wandering from location to location symbolizes the metaphysical wandering of spirit as it continually passes through one experience to others.\(^{42}\)

Finally, intersubjectivity within the literary sphere involves a reader in relationship to an author and, just as the novella characters in the *Wanderjahre* become the companions of the characters in the main body of the novel, so the characters of the novel become life-companions of the novel reader. In these intersubjective relationships, one is far from looking upon others as pragmatically useful, as one would in the world of working; instead, one strives to decipher the significance of authors and characters and to allow oneself to be instructed by them. For a reader to become involved with characters in interaction with each other is a matter of coming to recognize the uniqueness of individuals in contrast with each other and to recognize one’s own uniqueness vis-à-vis them. It is to become surprised when character development undoes superficial typifications one may have had of a character, when characters act as one might not have expected in the novel’s contingent circumstances, and when one discovers the painfulness of communication gaps that only a reader who has access to the minds of distinct characters can fully appreciate. Literature, in other words, breaks free from the fundamental anxiety to contemplate it, and it concentrates on the unique and surprising character of individuals and oneself and the blockages to communication—just the features of the world of working that pragmatic motives lead us to suppress.

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4. *The Religious Province of Meaning*
a. General resistance to the pragmatic in the religious province of meaning

Like the theoretical and literary provinces of meaning, the religious province resists certain tendencies characteristic of the pragmatic world of working. Sacred times and spaces often mark this sphere of meaning off from the secular world: one lights candles, wears special clothing or costumes, or adopts a meditative posture at the outset of prayer—all as manners of effecting a kind of *epoché* that establishes one’s distance from the world of working and one’s entrance into the religious sphere, in the same way that the decision to theorize or the opening of a novel marks the entrance into their special spheres. It is also possible, though, simply to slip into a religious attitude toward life without executing any explicit *epoché*.

To be sure, one might argue that the religious sphere is much more pragmatically oriented than either theory or literature insofar as the roots of much religious practice, past and present, lie in the desire of the practitioners to appeal to the deity to have practical things done for them, for crops to flourish, rain to fall, or surgery to go well. Indeed, one can also imagine how practical concerns might invade the theoretical or literary spheres, too, for example, when certain pragmatic interests dominate one’s theorizing (and the question of truth becomes ultimately irrelevant, say, in the production of ideological tracts) or when one writes or reads literature for purely didactic purposes, oblivious to the author’s artistry.

However, there are other religious experiences that separate more clearly the religious sphere from the world of working. Experiences of awe, divine beauty, or gratitude can be totally detached from the achievement of some pragmatic goal, and there are experiences of meditation in which one gives up practical urges and the restless thinking accompanying them in order to rest quietly in a divine presence or in the peaceful extinction of the anxiety generated by practical
situations. In addition, religious experiences can involve a summons to serve others or a deity in a way that might be entirely counter to one’s own pragmatic interests, as moral heroes like King, Gandhi, or Romero exhibit—people who, as Levinas puts it, were, because of motivations at once religious and humanitarian, able to fear the murder of the other more than their own death.\(^4^3\) Of course, one might argue that such heroes are only able to go to their death because of the pragmatic hope that they will have an eternal reward. But the testimony of these moral heroes themselves suggest that concern for others preoccupy them far more than any pragmatic plan to give up their lives for the sake of an eternal reward.

A stark example of the motivations that resist pragmatic purposes and that can motivate one in religious sphere appear in the story in the *Book of Daniel* about the three young men who are about to be thrown into Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace unless they worship his statue. This story presents us with a type of fidelity to the deity that seems entirely opposed to pragmatic purposes, when the three young men state: “If our God, the one we serve, is able to save us from the burning fiery furnace and from your power, O king, he will save us; and even if he does not, then you must know, O king, that we will not serve your god or worship the statue you have erected.” (Dn 3:37-38). The religious sphere includes experiences that seem decidedly set against the pragmatic motivations of the world of working and that differ greatly from the motives governing the religious person bent on using the deity to obtain pragmatic goods.

In fact, one could argue that those who approach the deity in the crassest of practical terms, namely that either they obtain what they wish or they will abandon the relationship with the deity, ignore the ways in which religious traditions themselves approach the question of unanswered prayers. Such traditions often assert that the dependence expressed in prayer is part of broader relationship of trust that may be tested, but not necessarily undermined, if one does
not receive what one wants. The completely pragmatized religious relationship eventually will face the test case in unanswered prayer. If one follows the strict pragmatic logic, one whose prayers are not answered might choose to abandon religious practice altogether since it seems incapable of predictably delivering pragmatic goods. Alternatively one might begin to envision religiosity as requiring a less or even completely unpragmatic relationship with the deity. A similar kind of transition might occur when someone who has thoroughly pragmatized the theoretical sphere, as when one who write ideological tracts recognizes that such tracts in making argument makes a pretense to being true and so are parasitic upon an ideal of truth. At the point, the ideological theorist may persist in his or her ideology, or embrace the theoretical-contemplative attitude in its completeness, pursuing truth even it should run counter to one’s pragmatic interests. In a sense, unanswered prayer confronts the religious believer with two stark consistent options: to abandon the religious sphere because of its pragmatic inefficacy and unreliability or to enter more deeply into a religious sphere whose logic runs very counter to the rules governing the world of working.

### b. The religious province of meaning and the five features of the world of working

Once having demarcated the religious province as one shaped in general by its resistance to a pragmatic orientation, one can also consider the way in which many of the features of the everyday world of working are reversed as they are in the theoretical and literary provinces.

Whereas in the pragmatic world of working, the world is organized about one’s self as the 0-point for all spatiotemporal coordinates, a shift occurs in the religious sphere in that the objects and events grouped about me are suddenly grouped around another center-point. Schutz
describes this shift as anticipated by the basic problem of objective and subjective meaning that is central to Weberian social science.

The tendency to look for a subjective meaning for everything in existence is so deeply rooted in the human mind, the search for the meaning of every object is so tied up with the idea that the object was once given meaning by some mind, that everything in the world can be interpreted as product and therefore as evidence for what went on in the mind of God. Indeed the whole universe can be regarded as the product of God, to whose creative act it bears witness. This is only to make passing reference, of course, to a whole area of problems that lies outside the strict sciences. In any case, the problem of subjective and objective meaning is the open door to every theology and metaphysics.  

In the religious province of meaning, suddenly, the world of objects and history, which unfolded from me as its center, is now seen to unroll under the guidance of another’s viewpoint, and that world and history provide a context within which I locate myself and execute my own acts, even my pragmatic ones.

To be sure, this de-centration from oneself does not exactly involve the intellectual bracketing of one’s body that is undertaken in the theoretical sphere. But one adopts a reflective attitude, similar to that of theoretical contemplation, toward one’s actions and purposes in the world of working. The contemplative stance toward one’s action in the world of working, characteristic of the religious attitude, resembles the meditative attitude one takes up in reading a novel, though in literature this reflective turn is mediated through the events and characters of
literature whereas in religion, one ponders one’s own life and events more directly. In addition to the reflective approach in literature and religion, at a distance from one’s own body and pragmatic engagements, a kind of displacement from one’s own perspective as the 0-point occurs in each case insofar as the viewpoint of the literary author shapes the characters and guides the narrative as the deity is believed to guide the unfolding of events in the religious person’s life. Still, the reader and religious person do retain something of their own perspective insofar as each still has the experience of making one’s own life decisions or choosing how to interpret the actions of characters. Discussions about free will of the agent and viewpoint of providence or divine determinism (exterior to that of the agent) may turn around the difference between the subjective and objective perspectives that the social sciences study. Insofar as in the religious sphere it is one own life narrative that is directly at stake, that sphere differs from the literary sphere in which one’s reflection on one’s own life is mediated, vicariously, through the narratives of characters and events in a novel. Consequently, the unmediated relation between one’s own narrative and the deity is of more direct personal import than the relationship between the reader and the author of a literary narrative whose characters and plots function as an intermediary (between author and reader) that give rise to reflections on one’s own life narrative.

The second feature of the world of working, the sense of power the ego agens exercises and experiences in its ability to bring transcendences within reach, is altered in the religious sphere. To be sure, one does not avoid gearing into the world because one is focused on solving theoretical problems as in the theoretical sphere or because one enters a literary sphere where none of the characters actually gear into the world. In the religious province of meaning, one takes up a peculiar reflective-interpretive approach to the world of working and to one’s gearing into the world and bringing transcendences within reach, but the context of one’s action is
understood as provided by the more encompassing perspective of the deity. One has one’s own subjective meaning for one’s actions, but these take place in a context of meaning pertaining to an objective meaning context of the deity. With the religious province, the impersonal happenings of the past or the accidental, unintended consequences that fuel speculation about fate and destiny in literature are conceived in the religious sphere as resulting from the deliberate personal activity of a deity. In the literary and religious spheres of meaning, although a character in the novel or oneself in life brings transcendences within reach by remembering events past shaping the present or by traveling to a distant place for some experience to happen or by taking steps to bring about a future, one has the sense that the events past, the experience in a distant place, or the future one brings about are not fully one’s own doing. These happenings result from or will result from the design of a literary author or divine providence. A clear example in the *Wanderjahre* occurs when Wilhelm Meister, recalling the past death of a childhood friend due to illness, resolves to become a doctor to help people, only to find himself equipped, “by chance,” to save the life of his own son at the end of the novel. The past event here motivates Wilhelm’s becoming a doctor, which itself results in Wilhelm saving his son in a way that he himself could never have planned or foreseen. While the literary sphere tends to view those transcendences as experienced by fictive characters, who provoke reflection on oneself, the transcendences of past and future within the religious sphere are seen as one’s own again and as resulting, at least in part (depending on how one works out the free will/divine determinism dilemma) from the action of a deity in relation to oneself personally.

It should be added that the mystical traditions of various religions are also emphatic that we are not able to bring within reach the great transcendence, the deity, for instance, by our own power, but must await its freely giving of itself in a revelation. Max Scheler, whose philosophy
of religion emphasized the centrality of such revelation, also insisted “that bliss and despair are feelings that can in no way be produced by our willing.”

Here again, as in the case with unanswered prayer, a resistance to the pragmatic motives of the world of working becomes evident in the religious province of meaning.

As regards the third characteristic of the world of working, that one’s relevances are dominated by practical concerns that ultimately depend on fundamental anxiety about one’s death, the religious sphere neither sets aside this anxiety in order to theorize about it nor does it experience the struggle with this anxiety vicariously through the actions and fears of characters in a novel. Rather, one’s own fundamental anxiety is directly at issue in the religious sphere. To begin with, though, if one is expecting that one’s fundamental anxiety about death will disappear in the religious sphere, he or she ought to pay heed to Levinas’s comment that “No one is so hypocritical as to claim that he has taken from death its sting, not even the promisers of religions.”

Nevertheless, various religious traditions have insisted that persons have worth and value even if they fail to realize the pragmatic projects they pursue, because they are valued in the sight of the divinity, from an objective point of view over against one’s own subjective perspective usually bent on the success of its projects. Their personal worth, then, is taken to transcend their projects. As such, a religious perspective might take a decidedly different tack, a non-pragmatic one, toward the fundamental anxiety in contrast with the approach in the world of working, in which one precisely undertakes pragmatic projects in order to come to terms with the inevitability of death whether, for instance, to protect oneself, to ensure the productive use of one’s remaining time, or to win the renown that will survive one’s death.

It could well be that the sense of being valued as a person independently of the success or failure of one’s pragmatic projects, which death generally obliterates (unless, in the rare case,
one’s achievements win one enduring fame), might be responsible for the hope that one as a
person can survive death even though one’s practical projects do not. Levinas, however, does not
endorse a belief in personal immortality, but, instead, argues that through one’s responsibility for
others “death can take on a meaning” insofar as the ethical summons of others can call upon one
to forego the final realization of one’s pragmatic projects in a way that leaves one’s death
nevertheless meaningful, as moral heroes like Gandhi, King, and Romero illustrate. Although
death cuts short their projects, their deaths on behalf of others took on an ethical significance that
confers a meaning that surpasses any practical achievements. In all these ways, though death puts
an end to one’s pragmatic projects, limits any future undertaking of such projects, or removes the
person, even though his or her achievements will be remembered, the religious sphere points to
the worth of the person regardless of the success of failure of his or her practical projects. In
addition, in the religious province, often an ethical meaning is given to death for the sake of
others. Even though all one’s pragmatic projects are thwarted by death, in the religious province
one can find to a degree relief from the fear or anxiety that prompts in the first place the adoption
of projects and strategies aimed at giving significance to a life that death will terminate. That
anxiety that death evokes is at least slackened in the religious sphere.

As for the fourth feature of the work of working, a focus on what is typical for the sake of efficacy at the expense of what is unique or atypical, descriptions of religious experiences are
replete with references to a sense of atypical, such as the surprising awe that overtakes one, or a
conversion after or during the collapse of a former worldview, or texts suddenly having a
lifelong significance they have never had before, or other unique encounters, the likes of which
one has not experienced before. The religious sphere is a locus for the experience of the
extraordinary or atypical. In addition, the emphasis in various mystical traditions on the inability
to subordinate the deity to one’s pragmatic purposes is symbolized by the prohibitions in religions to name God or capture God in images, as if the very typifying of God is inappropriate—a prohibition theorized in various versions of negative theology. Often, the atypicality of the deity is mirrored in the uniqueness of the religious believers who through the religious narrative of their lives tap into the uniqueness of their own subjective experience, which no one else repeats and which no human objective perspective can adequately comprehend. However, in the religious perspective that attributes omniscience to the deity, one encounters someone who from an objective standpoint understands the unique course of one’s subjective experience in a way that one experiences with no other outside observer and in a way that exceeds one’s understanding of oneself from within one’s subjective experience.

There is also a convergence here between the discovery of individual identity in a literary novel and one’s personal religious narrative, though the former takes place through reflection on the narrative of other characters in a text rather than directly on oneself. Of course, personal religious narratives are also often developed in relation to the narratives of religious texts (e.g., one finds the repeated sorrows in one’s life resembling those of King David). It is significant in this regard that religious traditions often make use of religious narratives in sacred texts, perhaps because narrative itself represents an alternate route toward discovering the uniqueness of oneself, in contrast with the different, but related discovery of one’s uniqueness through the practice of a philosophical approach such as transcendental phenomenology with its focus on unfolding temporality. Moreover, a certain atypicality becomes central in the ethical imperatives, prominent in Judaism and in other religious traditions, that require one, for instance, to care for people such as the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. Such imperatives direct attention to those
outside the ordinary run of things whose life-situations and plight are so easily overlooked by the rest of us because of their atypicality.

Relationships in the religious sphere are not based, as we have seen, on taking others as pragmatically useful to oneself, just as others are not so conceived in the literary and theoretical spheres. As was noted in the earlier discussion of unanswered prayer, religious and mystical traditions often reject any approach to the deity as if it were a beneficent vending machine that ought to deliver what is asked for in accord with the investment that the believer makes in the deity. Rather such traditions call for reverence before the deity and a refusal to subordinate it to one’s own purposes. In addition, the ethical dimensions, which pervade various religious traditions and seem inseparable from them, extend the reverence due to the deity to others, who, as Levinas notes, upset and offer resistance to one’s totalizing tendencies. Furthermore, the mystical traditions’ emphasis on respect for God’s otherness and for the patient discipline necessary for communication with the deity could be seen as form of training for growing in reverence for human otherness and for employing patiently the subtle processes needed for an always limited human communication. Precisely those aspects of intersubjective experience, our differences and communication limits, which the pressing imperatives of the work of working prevent us from attending to, emerge into prominence in the religious sphere.

Of course, one can question the truth of the claims of religion regarding the existence of a deity or world force and regarding many of the assertions that religious believers might make when inhabiting the religious province of meaning. But, then one is considering religion from within the theoretical sphere or perhaps from within some enclave that shares the territory of the theoretical and religious provinces of meaning.
In addition, it should be noted that the pragmatism that the non-working provinces of meaning resist is here being understood by reference to the pragmatism of the world of working, as Schutz describes it. There may be other versions of pragmatism that might show that religion ultimately leads to a fulfilling life, as appears for instance, in the writings of William James, which might be more compatible with the religious province of meaning. However, if these views make one’s relationship with the deity contingent on whether the deity delivers on the fulfillment that one is seeking, then the views might encounter objections from those mentioned above who argue that the religious relationship with God must be pursued for its own sake, regardless of its pragmatic success (e.g., whether prayers are answered, for example).

In sum, the finite provinces of meaning, such as theoretical contemplation, literary reality, and the religious province of meaning, in their analogous and different ways, introduce tensions of consciousness that differ from and resist the world of working under the sway of pragmatic imperatives. I have attempted to sketch some ideas about how the religious sphere might distinctively counterbalance the world of working. This sphere, like theory and literature, contrasts with basic features found in the world of working by: 1) the way it organizes the world about another point of orientation, 2) its awareness of the limited ability of the ego’s power to bring transcendences within reach insofar as another power underpins the ego’s exercise of its own power, 3) its placing the fundamental anxiety and the relevances it shapes in a non-pragmatic context, 4) its refocusing on frequently overlooked unique and atypical aspects of experience, and 5) its attention to aspects of intersubjective relationships, which the world of working does not allow us the leisure to consider. While pragmatic motives are no doubt present in the non-world-of-working provinces, they do not dominate as they do in the world of working,
and these provinces afford us a space of freedom and respite from working’s pragmatic imperatives.

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9 *Ibid*.


17 *Ibid*.


19 Schutz, “Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action, *Collected Papers 1*: 21, see also p. 20.


35 *Ibid*.


39 Sociological Aspects of Literature…


