

# **Reviewed Articles**

## **‘Human Like Us’ - some philosophical implications of ‘naturalising’ fundamentalism**

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*The serious study of fundamentalism in recent times has had to reckon with the problem of unfavourable popular images of fundamentalists which militate against a proper understanding both of fundamentalists and of the phenomena of fundamentalism around the world today.*

*This paper is a philosophical appraisal of ways of representing fundamentalists by comparing unfavourable and judgemental descriptions with ones that are more nuanced and more charitable. The latter, more nuanced accounts represent fundamentalists, not as atavistic and aberrant, but as ‘human, like us’. The broad use of the term ‘fundamentalism’ in recent scholarship and the ascription of general traits to diverse examples of fundamentalism within different faith traditions further strengthens the idea of an anthropological commonality across cultural and religious differences. The fact of commonality also implicates the scholar in quite a profound way, in an anthropological continuity with fundamentalists. Important philosophical implications follow from this.*

Fundamentalism has often been described and analysed historically and sociologically but less often appraised philosophically. From the time in which the very word ‘fundamentalism’ was coined, there have been various representations of religious fundamentalists, as well as various explanations for the rise and appeal of fundamentalisms around the world. This paper looks at the differences in these accounts and considers some philosophical implications that follow from them. In particular, it looks at the marked difference in tone and approach between earlier representations and more recent ones. The former, based more on popular stereotyping than serious scholarship (see eg Cox, 1984:50; Neilsen, 1993:5-6), came from a modernist, evolutionary and liberal perspective and accordingly judged fundamentalism unfavourably from the standpoint of its own values and beliefs. Fundamentalists are accordingly depicted as irrational, primitive, unscientific, or as

immature human beings who are fearful of adult freedom (see Cameron, 1995). In contrast, some recent accounts that view fundamentalism as a defensive reaction to modernity also see it as arising out of the fear of the loss of identity in the face of change and displacement (see Hunter, 1990, Marty and Appleby, 1991, 1992, 1995; Marsden, 1991; Hughes, 1995; Giddens, 1991). These latter accounts are noticeably different because they give us something of the *human* side of the fundamentalist reaction. It is said, for example, that the particular appeal of fundamentalist communities is that they provide security, a kind of a 'protective cocoon' (Giddens:142) for those who join their ranks.

In this paper, I will consider the significance of this noticeable difference in the way in which fundamentalists are represented, and will show how, reflected in these different approaches are differences at a paradigmatic level in which views about history, the place of religion within it, the human person, and the theoretical understanding of religion are bound together. The recent accounts break from the older, modernist paradigm in the way in which they 'naturalise'<sup>1</sup> the phenomenon of fundamentalism. That is, unlike the older, liberal, modernist approach, the latter do not represent fundamentalists as atavistic and primitive, but rather, as 'human like us'. In other words, some recent theorists show how fundamentalism is neither an unnatural nor an unexpected response, given the social and political realities, and given the way that human beings are. The implication of this human, or 'anthropological dimension' in these accounts is significant and will be discussed.

In their attempt to understand the world-wide phenomena of fundamentalism, scholars, such as those within the Fundamentalism Project<sup>2</sup> also presuppose anthropological commonalities across a diversity of cultural and religious traditions and speak about 'family resemblances' across these differences (see Almond, Sivan and Appleby, in Marty and Appleby (eds.), 1995). The appeal to anthropological commonalities assume, of course, some notion of philosophical anthropology, but it implies even more, for what is suggested of anthropological commonality also indirectly implicates the theorist by suggesting something shared between her and the fundamentalists that she seeks to understand. This point about continuity is raised in Wittgenstein's later philosophy on the question of how we come to understand an aspect of human life, such as religious faith and practices.

This paper falls into four parts. In part one, I describe examples of the modern, evolutionary, liberal approach to fundamentalism and fundamentalists. In part two, I consider recent accounts from the scholarship on fundamentalism that show a change in approach and in tone from representations described in part one. In part three, I discuss the philosophical significance of the differences between these approaches, considering first the background assumptions with respect to each of them. In considering the notion of 'anthropological continuity', I raise the question of what recognition of this fact could mean for scholarship in religion. For example, what would it mean for the scholar in relation to the religious phenomenon that she studies. Given that continuity and 'porousness' with the subjects of her study, to

what extent could the scholar maintain critical distance? In particular, what judgements are still possible and appropriate of fundamentalism and of fundamentalist claims and actions? In the final part, I will provide an example of a study of fundamentalism to show that critical discussion can remain even when 'anthropological continuity' is acknowledged.

## **Part one - fundamentalism - modern, liberal representations**

Until recently, many things have militated against a proper examination of the position of fundamentalism. As far as North American Protestant fundamentalism is concerned, this has been due to the vicious circle of suspicion and lack of understanding. Protestant fundamentalism has been regarded as bizarre and obsolete in theological circles precisely because there has been no serious study of its position. In fact, such has been the suspicion that liberal academics have viewed any serious or sympathetic study of fundamentalists as a kind of fraternising with the enemy (see Cox:50). This goes towards explaining why in the history of the relationship between Protestant fundamentalists and liberal academics in North America, fundamentalists have been represented by liberals simply as atavistic and regressive. A good example of this is the way in which the Scopes trial was reported in the mid 1920s in which the satirist H.L. Mencken bitterly attacked William Jennings Bryan who opposed evolutionary theory. In his reporting, he did not hold back his personal feelings about Bryan and about fundamentalists in general. However, in depicting them as he did, as rural and obscurantist, Mencken also revealed his own ideological beliefs.

As a Darwinist and an anti-Semite, (see Nielsen, 1993:5) Mencken applied Darwinism rather uncritically to human ethics and history and neatly fitted fundamentalism into the primitive stage in that history. His representation of Bryan as the 'fuddled biblicist' of Dayton from a 'one horse Tennessee village' that espoused a 'baroque theology' (quoted in Nielsen:5) is both unfair and unnuanced, and such representations as these have clouded our understanding of North American evangelicalism in the early twentieth century. For example, it will surprise us from Mencken's representation of Bryan to learn that the latter was remarkably enlightened for his day. He held a brand of evangelicalism that included an opposition to capital punishment and a championing of women's suffrage (see Wills, 1990:102).

What we see in that particular, though influential example of hostility towards fundamentalists, is not only extreme prejudice at a personal level but also a case of opposing ideologies. Mencken and Bryan represented different conceptual frameworks because Mencken held a Darwinist view of nature and Bryan, in contrast, worked out of a model that premised a 'two book theory', ie the belief that the two books of nature and scripture witness harmoniously to divine truth. But there is more in the difference between them. The popular debate and the standoff referred to earlier

between fundamentalism and modernism has also been sustained by opposing mythologies - religious eschatology as opposed to secular futurology (Neilsen:7). What is at stake here are opposing views of history, with the fundamentalist notion of providence on the one hand, and the secular view of history on the other. According to the latter view, religion was projected to decline as part of the primitive stage in human history as it progressed toward a more rational and scientific future (see Marty and Appleby, 1992; Cox, 1984; Sacks, 1990). Such a futurology has sustained the modernist judgement of fundamentalism against which it appears as a kind of 'throwback' and aberration that needs to be eliminated. This 'imaginary' or background ontology accounts, not only for the way in which fundamentalists are viewed and understood, but also for the disrespect with which they have been treated.

Disrespect is also shown in the way fundamentalists are viewed as inadequate and immature human beings who are incapable of living with uncertainty and who are fearful of adult freedom. What is distinctively 'modern' about this judgement is that it is based on values of liberal individualism which assume certain norms about human development. A good, very recent example of this kind of judgement of fundamentalists is Peter Cameron's portrayal of them as people who continue to act like children because they are too fearful of the ambiguities of life and of the world to relinquish childhood myths (see Cameron, 1995). However, there is something strangely anachronistic about Cameron's position and the degree of attachment to traditional liberal values of individualistic freedom that we find there. We have in recent times seen challenges to these values and this critique has impacted upon the way in which religious fundamentalists are understood and judged.

## **Part Two - representations of fundamentalism in recent scholarship**

In more recent times, the modern idea of history as progress has been challenged and along with this, we have seen a rebirth rather than a decline of religion (see eg Cox, 1984: 20; Sacks, 1990: 3; Marty and Appleby, 1990, 1992, 1995; Nielsen, 1993). Liberalism, while still a credible position for many has had to re-invent itself in the light of its critics ( see discussion in Mulhall and Swift, 1992). One criticism of modern liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism and contractual relationships, is the way in which it has left the individual lonely and dislocated without a 'moral ecology' and a sense of 'narrative coherence'. A view that has been advanced is that the re-birth of religion may be directly due to this fundamental impoverishment of modernity, and to the devastating effect that it has had on both the individual and on tradition (see Sacks, 1990; Giddens, 1991).

Jonathan Sacks' thesis for the persistence of religion has a distinctively anthropological character because he links it directly to the fact that modern society has been unable to meet what he regards as fundamental human needs. Sacks says that modernity has failed human beings because it focused directly on two entities:

the individual and the state. As a result, individuals are left lonely and dislocated since human beings need particular communities and traditions to find personal meaning and to be sustained as moral agents.

In his state of dislocation and deprivation, the modern individual finds fundamentalism and fundamentalist communities attractive since these provide, not only grand narratives that make sense of human destiny, but they also give the individual a sense of place within both community and history (see also the Marty and Appleby, 1990, 1992). Fundamentalist communities and fundamentalist commitment also give individuals a sense of place in history since the stance that is taken is a kind of resistance to the world order which is viewed as being threatening to identity. Fundamentalists often think of themselves as 'putting history back on track' again since, in their eyes, history has 'gone awry' (see Hunter, 1990:70). It may be this sense of insecurity and militancy that leads fundamentalists to 'freeze' truth to support the oppositional stance that they adopt (see especially, Marty 1989).

The study of fundamentalism sheds light on the context of the modern world which has given rise to it by revealing to us 'the pressures and strains it creates for ordinary people and the religious communities of which they are a part' (Hunter, 1990:71). In the light of this, many scholars now see that fundamentalists are not necessarily irrational and marginal, but in many cases are educated and sophisticated people who are concerned about the moral, social, political, and economic failures of their respective societies and who believe that the answer lies in a return to religious values and lifestyles. Fundamentalists also often show that they understand human needs and concerns and in their moral concern, they often show insight in their criticism of society (Marty and Appleby, 1991).

Scholars like Marty and Appleby are aware that their approach to and representation of fundamentalism go against the long accepted modernist paradigm about the future of religion in which social scientists wrote religion off as having no significant future (Marty and Appleby, 1992:176). Within such a paradigm, fundamentalists are especially easy to write off since they espouse the kind of religion that seems particularly irrational and regressive. Marty and Appleby do not share this view. Neither do they subscribe easily to the stereotype of fundamentalists as aberrant or barbaric. On the contrary, they are concerned about giving a nuanced account of fundamentalism and they expect that their 'revisionist' approach would be a surprise to many who still see religion through that liberal, modernist paradigm (Marty and Appleby, 1992:176).

One of the concerns that Marty and Appleby express in their study is the risk of violating 'agent's description', that is, they are concerned about the dissonance that occurs between the representations of fundamentalists that come out of their study and 'the perceptions and declarations of the fundamentalists themselves' (Marty and Appleby, 1991:vii - viii). Their hope is that the adherents of each tradition written about within the Fundamentalism Project would recognise themselves in their uniqueness as they are represented in this research. Yet the broad use of the

term 'fundamentalism' would seem to deny this very uniqueness (Marty and Appleby, 1992:182). This expression of concern is significant, if only for the new sensitivity and respect for the fundamentalist that it introduces into the study of fundamentalism. We have come a long way from Mencken. In spite of these qualms, Marty and Appleby decide to persist with the broad use of the term on the basis that there is no other co-ordinating term that is as serviceable and that makes sense of a global phenomena which urgently needs to be understood.

At the beginning of the project Marty and Appleby find family resemblances between these culturally diverse movements and pick out at least fourteen traits (see Marty and Appleby, 1991:vii-viii, see also chapter 15:814 et seq). Heading the list is the feature of opposition to modernity which particularly characterises fundamentalisms that arise from the 'religions of the book'. Another trait is the crisis of identity which leads to their positing of an 'erosion-free truth'. While, in the face of challenges and research insights that have emerged from within the Fundamentalism Project itself over the period of five years, these traits are re-examined and are less confidently espoused at the end of the Project, yet the directors are confident enough to persist with general properties of the 'family' that are manifested in varying degrees in a variety of movements (1995, chap 16:399-424). Moreover, with reference to the various movements they still identify as 'fundamentalist', Marty and Appleby speak of 'one substantive similarity' (1995:6) which they describe as 'a process of selective retrieval, embellishment and construction of "essentials" or "fundamentals" of a religious tradition for the purposes of halting the erosion of traditional society and fighting back against the encroachments of secular modernity' (1995:6).

In the definition of fundamentalism above, informed and nuanced by five years of study involving at least seventy five international scholars of a variety of cultural and religious traditions, we are again presented with a human side of this phenomenon, especially the human response to the challenge of history in the form of 'secular modernity'. We are also reminded in this description, as in many other parts of the project, that 'the fundamentalizing process' (1995:6) is a highly creative and adaptive one in which the past is not simply recalled 'holus bolus' but used as a source of inspiration, in a selective way as a 'shrewd mimesis of what works in the present' (1995:2). Fundamentalists are very far from being 'throwbacks' or even simply nostalgic people, but are often profoundly adept at the game of survival in the modern world.

While this last point gives the impression of strength and ingenuity rather than human vulnerability, the point of vulnerability should not be forgotten either. As noted previously, it is important that we see the phenomenon of fundamentalism as a 'window' to the modern world, with the strains that are placed upon human beings living in that world. Giddens' account of the 'tribulations of the self' in 'late modernity' is illuminating here (Giddens, 1991). In a way that is reminiscent of Sacks' diagnosis, he sees fundamentalist movements as providing centres of moral

meaning which modern institutions have dissolved. He says that personal identity suffers from instability and uncertainty in our 'post-traditional' age because the self has to be reflexively made amid a diverse number of options. Giddens says that there is great appeal of any system that would present itself as trustworthy and authoritative and which provides a sense of 'ontological security' to individuals. 'The more enclosing a system a given religious order is, the more it "resolves" the problem of how to live in a world of multiple options' (Giddens, 1991:22).

However, Cameron's approach offers an interesting contrast to Giddens. While he makes a similar diagnosis of fundamentalists' inclination towards a religious position that offers as much certainty and psychological security as possible, he does so with profound judgement and disapproval. In contrast to Giddens' account above, Cameron says that fundamentalism offers an escape for those who fear 'the pain of freedom' and who prefer 'voluntary servitude' to adult responsibility (Cameron:46). For example, he castigates young people who join American movements for chastity as ones inspired by 'herd instinct' and describes them as people who 'prefer the security of the prison cell to freedom and the responsibility which accompany a free existence' (Cameron:12). It is not surprising that given such a condemnation of fundamentalist commitment, Cameron has entitled his discussion 'Freedom and Fundamentalism' for that is the contrast that is drawn throughout, a contrast that reveals Cameron's own philosophical assumptions (see Lamb, 1996).

However, it is in understanding the historical context of religious fundamentalism and the acute strains that context creates for many people that we can begin to understand the important difference between traditionalism and fundamentalism. According to Giddens, the difference is that whereas traditional religious faith essentially rests on trust and, to a certain extent, lives with uncertainty, the appeal of an authoritarian religious faith is that it involves an abnegation and an act of submission in which the individual absolves himself from the 'problematic gamble' involved in all trust relations. In this way, fundamentalism becomes a 'protective cocoon which guards against the self in its dealings with everyday life' (Giddens:23).

The 'protective cocoon' of the fundamentalist community is described in an illuminating way in Nancy Ammerman's fictitiously named Southside Gospel Church where she finds a world of order and certainty that has been created, clearly for people who feel vulnerable in the world of 'problematic gamble'. She describes the world of the fundamentalist as an orderly one in which God is in control. This is reflected in fundamentalist theology, for in contrast to orthodoxies which have usually been more cautious in their interpretation of traditional symbols, such as creation and eschatology, fundamentalists give graphic and detailed descriptions of world beginnings, as if these things were without mystery. In the same spirit, the Bible is read as an encyclopaedia of truth in which God's will can be discerned and providence can be precisely read. 'Clear lines exist, as between God's eternal favour, right and wrong doctrine, and correct living, on the one hand, and apostasy, promiscuity, and

damnation, on the other' (Nielsen :11).

The sense of certainty is also provided by the categories of 'inside' and 'outside' in the fundamentalist world, since these give the fundamentalist his moral bearings. What is 'outside' is to be shunned and attacked because it represents chaos and immorality. In Peter Berger's words, the orderly world of the fundamentalist is a sheltering canopy which offers the 'ultimate shield against the terror of anomy' (Berger, 1969:26-27, quoted in Nielsen:10).

The foregoing description of the world of the fundamentalist believer and of the psychological comfort that is sought and found in fundamentalist belief is illuminating and goes a long way to explaining its appeal in the contemporary world. However, this way of representing fundamentalism and fundamentalists also raises its own questions. In what follows, I will consider some of these philosophical implications and the questions that arise from them.

### **Part Three - Philosophical Implications**

I will begin by looking at some background assumptions behind the different ways of representing fundamentalism described in Parts One and Two. In the latter, we saw how Sacks affirms the importance of particular traditions for human well-being. In doing so, he speaks for others who have also emphasised the importance of tradition for recovering the 'sense of at-homeness in the world' in this way (Sacks:31; see also Walzer, 1994; MacIntyre 1981). The point of view represented in the 'communitarian' emphasis from such writings is relevant to our discussion in at least two ways. The first is the view of the person that we find within such an emphasis, and the second is the question of the role of reason in human life.

As we noted, the critique of modern individualism that we find in Sacks is based on the view that human beings need to be situated in particular traditions in order to belong and this is important, not only from the point of view of personal well-being, but also because particular traditions provide a 'moral ecology' that sustains both personal and public life. Sacks' argument is based on a view of persons that is contrary to the individualism that he wants to reject but it is also based on a different view of the place of reason in human life. Sacks rejects what he calls the 'abstract rationality' and the 'view from nowhere' (Sacks:31) idea of reason which he associates with modern individualism. Within modern individualism too, reason is also given prime place in human life. This priority of reason in human life is consistent with a kind of metaphysical idealism, ie the idea that the human person is primarily driven by views and deliberations upon which he then acts (see Kerr:42 et seq).

The relevance of this to religion is two-fold. Firstly, the dominance of reason and the place that it is accorded in human history help to explain the place that is accordingly given to religion, for as we have seen, in the light of the belief in history as progress towards a more rational future, religion was projected to decline with all

that was considered irrational in human life. Secondly, and developing from this and earlier points, given the view of persons, and given the importance of reason, it also came to acquire a normative status for human development. In other words, it is assumed that the best direction for personal development is towards greater rationality and personal autonomy. This was implicit in Cameron's judgement of fundamentalist belief and it is explicit in ideals of human development found in much of contemporary educational writings. In such writings, especially by analytic philosophers of education, we find a decided emphasis on the values of personal autonomy and rational reflection, with the effect that the full range of human experiences is not sufficiently acknowledged (see Peters, 1972)<sup>3</sup>. Acknowledgment is not given to the experiences that do not reflect rational autonomy and are not completely articulable, that show some loss of agency, or of passivity, such as are found in religious experience.

The prime place of rationality in human life is also consistent with the way many scholars have approached religion, ie with an objective critical distance, often judging religion as, at best, a means of permissible private consolation and escape (Sacks:27). In the worst cases, scholars have seen their role as a 'policing' and therapeutic one. That is, they have seen it as their task to detect instances of irrationality and unintelligibility in the claims and practices of religious believers. We find this kind of 'policing' approach, for example, in a great deal of work done in philosophy of religion. A notable example of this is the empiricist critique of religion advanced by Anthony Flew (Flew, 1971).

This approach to religion was something that Wittgenstein found unacceptable and this is seen in his criticism of the renowned scholar of religion, J B Frazer. Wittgenstein said that Frazer worked on the assumption that religious practice is something that is driven by a belief or a theory which would then be open to correction (see Kerr, 1986:159). According to Wittgenstein, this approach is misconceived because the meaning of a religious practice, such as a religious ceremony cannot be provided by a rational explanation of it. In trying to understand something like a religious ceremony, it is better to attend to the story of that ceremony or ritual which as Wittgenstein says, *already* communicates significance. He said that when we are struck by a religious practice (and one could add, a religious stance), this reaction is 'continuous with' what occasioned the practice in the first place.

In other words, the very thing that strikes us in this episode as terrible, impressive, horrible, tragic, etc. anything but trivial and insignificant is what brought about the ceremony in the first place (Wittgenstein, 1979:31).

According to Wittgenstein, human experience and practices are embedded in 'the phenomena of the natural world, of death, of birth and of sexual life, and much else, ....' which prompt certain human reactions. It is this 'phenomena of the natural world' which gives rise to religious faith and practice and which makes us 'ceremonious animals' (see Kerr:160).

We can apply this insight to the study of fundamentalism in modernity and postmodernity because there is a sense in which, however we feel about fundamentalism and fundamentalists, we can also appreciate the *naturalness* of this kind of human response in the face of dislocation and anomie. If Wittgenstein is right, it is not surprising that we have it in us to understand this all too natural reaction since it is continuous with, and has its 'resonances and surrogates' in our own experiences (Kerr:161).

The theorists we referred to in Part Two can be seen as taking a Wittgensteinian approach to an extent. Certainly by doing so, they show not only more charity but also more understanding than a stand off, judgmental approach based on a universalist and abstracted rationalism. Instead of regarding fundamentalists as somehow aberrant and as qualitatively different human beings, the scholars in that section go some way to owning anthropological continuity with them. If Wittgenstein is right, then to understand the power of religion, we have to 'rediscover the strangeness in our own nature' (Kerr :163). In the case of religious fundamentalism, we will need to understand something of the times in which we live, and something also of how the phenomena of the natural and constructed world drive people to build protective cocoons which they describe in elaborate religious terms.

Important philosophical questions for religious scholarship arise out of the Wittgensteinian position in its recognition of the pre-reflective dimension in religion and the fact that all human beings share a 'strangeness' in their nature. How then does the acknowledgement of this position affect the scholar's approach? To what extent is he or she able to exercise important critical judgement in her examination of religious faith and practice? I will now turn to an example of a recent study of religious fundamentalism which takes an approach that is consistent with the Wittgensteinian position and that helps to address those questions.

## **Part Four - A Case Study - 'Fundamentalism, Mythos, and World Religions'**

Niels C Nielsen Jr (Nielsen, 1993) sets fundamentalism in the context of the history of religion, of religious paradigms, and of the notion of myth. He argues for the historically conditioned nature of fundamentalism, such as, how Protestant fundamentalism was a reaction to, and shaped in character by its opposition to features within modernity, such as theological, cultural and political liberalism, historical/critical reading of the Bible and above all, the theory of evolution (Nielsen:2-10; Marty and Appleby, 1992:176). However, it is also in the nature of fundamentalist faith to deny this historical conditioning since it claims to possess an ahistorical position, and an unmediated truth.

Nielsen says that ironically the literalist claim to truth in fundamentalism is not unlike a positivist position and he illustrates this with reference to the thought of Auguste Comte, the 'father of positivism' who saw human development in terms of

a three stage scheme in which religious myths feature in the early stage of history. However, later in history, the need for human beings to look to religious myths for explanation is transcended in philosophical reflection but this itself becomes replaced by the factuality of scientific discovery. At this stage of human development, according to Comte, the 'onto-theological' metaphysics contained in 'obscurantist mythology' will no longer be necessary (see discussion in Neilsen: eg 7).

Neilsen argues that while such a positivist idea of history, if advanced in our day, is incompatible with religious fundamentalism, both positions, positivism and fundamentalism, reject the notion of myth and its place in human life. Comte dismissed myth as superstition and religious fundamentalists, at least of the literalist kind, dismiss it also as pagan largely because myths are narratives that are not reducible to literal and precise claims. Nielsen, however, shows that in spite of such denials, myth is inescapable and indeed, is present within both positions. Within Comte's positivism we find the myth of progress in the three stage scheme of history, and within forms of religious fundamentalism there is, at least implicitly, the myth of the golden age which is an age of an earlier sacred order that must be recovered. This projection of the past as an ideal is a vital aspect of the fundamentalist identity and agenda (see Hunter, 1990; Marty and Appleby, 1990:819; Neilsen: eg 2 ).

What Nielsen characterises as myth in both positivism and religious fundamentalism is described also as 'macroparadigm' (Nielsen:7). However, fundamentalists deny the fact of paradigm as well as the fact that religious positions in all traditions have developed from earlier paradigms. Instead, they claim an 'ex nihilo' truth and so deny any place for the history of religions (Nielsen:32). However, Nielsen's criticism of the incoherence of the fundamentalist position is based, not only on the history of religion, but also on the nature of myth. Drawing upon writers such as Rudolf Otto, Leszek Kolakowski and above all, Mircea Eliade, (Nielsen:32-44; 57-70), Nielsen shows how myth is not only inescapable but it is also primordial, irreducible and ontologically prior to theological expression. Nielsen says that once we recognise this, we will not be able to dismiss myth as primitive in an evolutionary sense, ie as a stage of ignorance to be overcome and superseded, neither would we want to subject it to rational analysis and scientific criticism. Myth is, in fact, *sui generis* and arises out of the 'limit situations' of human life and experience for which propositions and rational pronouncements are inadequate expressions. Eliade's view of myth corresponds to Wittgenstein's view that religion arises from the phenomena of the natural world, of birth, death and the possibility of re-birth. Such phenomenon prompt human reactions and is the context of pre-reflective, ceremonious and religious behaviours. Nielsen therefore concludes that in rejecting myth, both fundamentalism and positivism become incoherent and self contradictory in the process.

## Conclusion

What Nielsen maintains about the nature of, and inescapability of myth is compatible with Wittgenstein's position that religion arises pre-reflectively out of the phenomena of the natural world. It is consistent too with the recommendation that in order to understand religious phenomena, the scholar cannot simply maintain objective distance without acknowledging some biological continuity with other humans who engage in various religious practices. What Nielsen's study also illustrates is that the fact of anthropological continuity and the scholar's empathetic experience of the strangeness of religion and religious practice does not have to take away from the possibility of critical reflection of those phenomena that they seek to understand. However, when it comes to religious fundamentalism, the scholar, while remaining critical, may finally have to recognise that there is, in a broad sense at least, a fundamentalism in us all.

## Notes

1. I use the term 'naturalise' to mean, that accounts and reasons are given with reference to human behaviour and needs - ie with reference to an 'anthropological dimension'.
2. The Fundamentalism Project is a series that involved scholars from around the world to explore the nature and impact of fundamentalists movements in the twentieth century. Five volumes have come out of this work, two of which are cited in this paper.
3. The well-known philosopher of education, RS Peters provides us with good examples of this as he represents personal development as co-terminus with rational development. (See, for example, Peters, 1972.)

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