1 Introduction

The last decades, new understandings of social and material practices have emerged. It is a heterogeneous process; the changes are taking place within different academic disciplines and traditions, and the various contributions understand practices in somewhat different ways. Still, it is possible to talk about a ‘practice turn in social theory’ and of ‘practice theories’ as one collective movement.

In this article, I will give an overview of ‘practice theories’ and discuss possible implication for the understanding and research of religion. I argue that practice theory is a heterogeneous concept but characterized by a certain social ontology. This social ontology has significant consequences for the understanding of religion. The argument is developed in three steps. First, I situate contemporary practice theories. Secondly, I discuss different understandings of explicit ‘practice theories’. Thirdly, I analyze a practice theory approach to religion as a reaction to three separations; between practice and theory; between social practices and individual agents; and between practices and normativity.

Religion is a heterogeneous concept, including very different practices and phenomena. Intercultural and interreligious processes add to the complex and changing character of religion. This chapter is a contribution to a discussion of how to develop the complex, changing and processual character of religion.

2 Situating Practice Theories

Having a background in religion and academic degrees in theology and then moving to the field of education, one of my interests is the intersection between the fields. In this chapter, I move from practice perspectives that are influential in educational science over to religion, and then analyze what they do to the conception of religion.

Giving attention to human practice is of course not new. Much attention has been given to the ‘theory-practice’-gap. In a much-sited work, Schön (1983) argues for the value of practical knowledge and reflection-in-action. Schön’s context is the relationship between professional practitioners and research, or more precisely, the lack of relationship: “Practitioners and researchers tend increasingly to live in different worlds, pursue different enterprises, and have little to say to one another,” he claims (Schön 1983, 308). There is a rift and gap between theory-producing research and the practical knowledge of professional practitioners. Theoretical knowledge is abstract and general, and cannot account for situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and conflict in
practitioners’ everyday life. Practitioners’ knowledge is mainly tacit, theoretical knowledge is unable to account for practical situations and experiences.

Interestingly, Schön (1983, 280) argues that one of causes of the problem is the separation of thinking from doing. Thought is understood as prior to action, and action as implementation of thought. In professional practices doing and thinking is complementary, he argues.

Other contributors to the discussion of the theory-practice-relation draw on Aristotelian perspectives, emphasizing phonetic, moral knowledge as different from both technical, practical knowledge on one hand and epistemic, theoretical knowledge on the other (Dunn 1993). Many of these contributions are critical to trusting a combination of scientific, epistemic evidence and technical, instrumental rationality in public sectors like health and education.

Practice theories should also be situated in other philosophical traditions. Dewey ([1938] 1986) and pragmatism argues that there is no foundation of knowledge beyond practice, and that reflections are constituted in practical habits. Wittgenstein (1997) understands language as language-game, which means that language should be understood in use and in light of the practices of which it is a part. The interwoven character of language and social practices is also elaborated by Taylor:

The situation we have here is one which the vocabulary of a given social dimension is grounded in the shape of social practice in this dimension; that is, the vocabulary would not make sense, could not be applied sensibly, where this range of practices did not prevail. And yet this range of practices could not exist without the prevalence of this or some related vocabulary (Taylor 1985, 34).

The close relationship between practice on one hand and language use and theorizing on the other, resembles the one Schön is arguing for, but the argument is more general. It is worth noting that while practice in Schön is by and large understood individually, Taylor argues for practices as social and collective.

Despite differences between the different accounts above, social practices are given a key role in understanding human and social affairs. Practices are often discussed in relation to theory and language, and all authors argue against theory having primacy over practice and for a dynamic relationship.

In the social sciences, Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977) emphasize the importance of practices, and in the 1980s and 1990s research in several fields took what could be called a “practice turn” (Schatzki et al. 2001). Practices had a key role in these studies – often more implicit than explicit. In some cases, the term ‘practices’ was used, in others it was referred to ‘activities’ or ‘networks’. Many of these research fields worked separate from each other. It seems that studying social and material practices and working with practices as a unit of analysis was a general trend. The concept of practice was more used than theorized, but by putting practice in the forefront, a new understanding of social practices emerged. In this context four different traditions are interesting.
The first practice-oriented tradition is situated in moral philosophy, famously argued in MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* ([1981] 1985). MacIntyre (1985, 187) argues that human beings are participants in social practices, and that these social practices have internal goods and standards of excellence. This means that through participation in these activities moral virtues are shaped and developed. The moral is not restricted to autonomous, rational deliberation and choice, it is an aspect of social practices. Such an account does not end in social determinism, the individual navigates through her stories about herself, where she comes from, where she is going and who she is and wants to be.

Secondly, sociocultural and –material approaches of learning and knowledge expanded the understanding of learning from individual, cognitive processes to distributed, situated collective practices. In *Situated Learning* Lave and Wenger (1991) argue against learning as acquisition, the idea that processes of learning are the same all over – the cognitive acquiring of abstract knowledge, which in turn is used in choices of action. Through ethnographic studies they argue that learning is taking place through participation in practices; one learns to be a tailor in the social practice of tailoring. Cognition is taking place in action and interaction. Learning should be understood as a collective and relational process and learning processes must be seen in light of the practices where they take place. There is no general theory of learning; learning is situated. Learning is an aspect of social practices, not abstract, internal cognitive processes. Several authors argue that cognition is distributed between human and material-symbolic actors in practices (Hutchins 1996). Cognition is not an internal property; it is a relational process happening in-between actors. In an academic context one can argue that a researcher is thinking with her articles, computers, and research community. Cultural psychology (Cole 1996) understands human behavior and cognition as aspects of cultural practices, which means that one cannot understand the individual apart from different cultural, social, historical, and situated practices.

Thirdly, authors used many of the same perspectives in organizational studies. Wenger developed the idea of situated learning to a broad theory of *Communities of Practice* (1998), of how participating in a community of practice is connected to identity- and meaning-making-processes. Participation in a community of practice constitute who I am and how I make sense of experiences. Several of these researchers are influenced by Vygotsky (1986) and his idea of mediation. Vygotsky argued that human cognition is mediated by cultural tools, and therefore constituted by and in cultural practices (see also Wertsch 1998). Also building on the work of Leont’ev (1978), Engeström (1987) and others developed Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). An activity is different from an action in the sense that it is collective, it has a history, and it has a direction and affective drive towards something. Furthermore, activities use different kinds of material and symbolic tools, and they are constituted by divisions of labor and different sets of rules. Mediation is important in understanding activities – the idea that tools, rules, and division of labor constitute affordances and restrictions of what is happening in the activity. Human agency is
understood as constituted and conditioned – a middle position between full individual autonomy on one hand and social, structural determinism on the other.

Fourthly, a large and heterogeneous research tradition emerged in the same period, called the Actor Network Theory (ANT). Starting with laboratory and science studies, Latour (2005) and many others (Law; Callon; Knorr Cetina) developed ANT to a general sociological theory. It is a ‘sociology of associations’, in the sense that it starts ‘in the middle of things’, in practices, and then analyzes the different parts and how they are associated and related. The relations are not understood causally in the sense that one variable effects another in certain ways, but as translations and mediations. The different associations and relations create networks, and these networks expand the space and time of a ‘community of practice’. In a network, actors can be connected to things and persons in distant spaces and times. Furthermore, networks create time and spaces in a different way than regional space and time. Famously, material things are understood as actors on the same level as human beings. Agency is understood radically relational, “an actor is what is made to act by many others” (Latour 2005, 46) – agents are understood as collectively assembled actants. Practices are therefore not primarily social, they are also natural and material, or more exact material-social hybrids. Practices are neither ‘communities’, like a church choir. To understand a church choir, one has to trace the various material and social connections – across space and time – of which it is made.

3 What Is a Practice Theory?

As mentioned, the theories above are less theories of practice than theories where the conception of practice has a key role. The similarities between these contributions and others, have led authors to formulate explicit theories of practice.

A crucial text is the anthology The practice Turn in Contemporary Theory (Schatzki et al. 2001). Several key authors in the development of the new generation of practice theory have contributed to the book: Knorr Cetina, Thévenot, Swidler, Bloor, Lynch, Rouse – and not least, Schatzki. In his introductory chapter, Schatzki discusses what characterized the practice turn, across quite different research traditions:

In social theory, consequently, practice approaches promulgate a distinct social ontology: the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings. This conception contrasts with accounts that privilege individuals, (inter)actions, language, signifying systems, the life world, institutions/roles, structures, or systems in defining the social. These phenomena, say practice theorists, can only be analyzed via the field of practices. (Schatzki 2001, 3)

The practice turn is an ontological one – practices are understood as the “primary generic social thing” (Schatzki 2001, 1). Practice theory is an alternative to individual explanations, methodological individualism, and homo economicus on one hand
and structural explanations, methodological holism, and homo sociologicus on the other (Reckwitz 2002, 244). The social is not explained as individual rational choices or individual intentions, nor as consequences of external, abstract structures. The generic social thing is more than the individual actor and less than universal structures, it is the nexus of everyday, collective, historical, material, embodied social practices (Hui, Schatzki and Shove 2017). It is imperative to understand social practices as an analytical and not only empirical concept. The practice turn does not mean to do more study on social, collective practices, and less on individuals and institutions. It means that individuals, institutions, and everything else are understood as social practices. The ontological character of practice theories means that: “[...] such phenomena as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects or components of the field of practices” (Schatzki 2001, 2).

Reckwitz (2002) locates practice theories within the broad tradition of cultural sociology, which is an alternative to purpose oriented, individualistic sociologies on one hand and norm, structural oriented sociologies on the other. Practice theories distinguish themselves from three other forms of cultural sociology: mentalism, textualism and intersubjectivism. While mentalism focuses on the internal, cognitive meaning-making, textualism is outward-looking and look for how external discourses and linguistic practices order the social world. Intersubjectivism is searching for an interactional, communicative, objective mentalism. This means that practice theories are related to, but different from, theories of meaning-making, discourses, and interaction.

How, then, do practice theories understand ‘practice’ or ‘practices’? Reckwitz argues for a distinction between practice in the singular and practices in the plural. ‘Practice’ is simply the doing and the action mode of being human, in contrast to theory or thinking. “Practices”, however, are “routinized type[s] of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’, and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz 2002, 249). Examples of practices vary from rearing practices and political practices to cooking practices and the practice of brushing teeth. Religion is another example of practices. Practices are sets of doings, but also include sayings and meaning making. The relationships are turned on their heads: Discourses and meaning-making do not create practices, discourses are parts and aspects of practices.

Schatzki (1996, 89) understands practice as “a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings”. Taking teaching practice as an example, it consists of a complex blend of ways of doings and ways of sayings. The practice of teaching has a past, present, and future – it is constituted and evolves in time. At the same time a teaching practice is prior to and more than the individual teacher. The teacher enters a teaching practice, participate in it and negotiate the practice. But teaching practice can never be understood by researching the individual teacher. The practice is prior to the practitioner. Furthermore, a teaching practice is dispersed
in space. Teaching takes place in the classroom, but not only so. Political, economic, and legal regulations are constitutive parts of teaching. Teaching takes place in numerous contexts, in workplaces, sports and the family. Furthermore, the teaching in the classroom is extended by the students and by material tools like books, calculators or computer software to other spaces and activities (Schatzki 2010). This means that practice theory does not only study local micro-phenomena or delimited practices. Practices are connected with other phenomena, stretching in time and space.

In his introduction of practice theories in the context of organizational studies, Nicolini (2013) identifies five characteristics of practice theories. The following is my own elaboration of these characteristics. First, practice theories understand activity and performance as primary in social life. That is, practice theories are processual. Practices are unfolding and evolving more than they are essentialized ‘things’. This does not exclude processes of reification, that for instance valuing in social processes may be reified as values or that meditating may be reified to meditation. The point is that processes are primary, and the analytical context of reifications.

The processual and performative character is connected to the production of social practices. The practice of politics is producing policy, the practice of teaching is producing learning, the practice of religion is producing religion. Practices have a drive towards something, a drive which have affective character and involve questions of value. Schatzki calls this the teleo-affective structure of practices, and CHAT understands the ‘object’ in an activity in somewhat the same way. Secondly, material things and bodies are fundamental to practices. Through the conception of habitus, Bourdieu shows how social practices are inscribed in the bodies of people. The teacher take part in the teaching practice through the habituation of the body. Cognitive sense-making does not happen prior to, but in bodily participating. Cognition is constituted by habitus, not a separate and independent faculty. The same goes for material things, artefacts, and tools. Material things are not separate instruments for human will and actions, things make people act. Furthermore, material objects are integrated in human practice to such extent, that they are extensions of agents (Wertsch 1998). Thirdly, practice theories understand individual agency as constituted, not as full autonomy or determined. On the one hand, individual agency cannot be understood apart from social practices; on the other hand, the practice does not determine the actor. She is constantly negotiating, maneuvering, and expanding.

Fourthly, practice theories offer a certain view on knowledge. Knowledge not limited to epistemic knowing-that, but also includes know-how, practical knowledge. Knowledge is connected to taking part in the practice, knowing what and how to do in practices. Knowledge in processual, knowing, not only reified. This does not mean that knowledge is limited to certain ways of knowing within a practice. Practices are knowledge-producing, knowledging (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Knowledge is not only represented, but re-presented, translated and transformed (Latour 2005). Knowledge as product is not separated from the production of knowledge. This means that knowledge is distributed within practices, in-between humans and in-between humans and material objects. Fifth, all social practices are characterized by
issues of power, conflict, and politics. Even the ‘purest’ social practices – the laboratories and natural sciences – are characterized by human interest, deep conflicts and power-relations. There is no reason to think that these characteristics of production will not affect the product. The same goes for practices of religion. There are few reasons to think that power-relations and impure production of religion will not affect religion as product.

Further characteristics could be added. Practice theories as a distinctive social ontology has been mentioned. This ontology can further be described as flat, relational, and processual. According to Schatzki (2016, 29) “[a] flat ontology holds that everything there is to phenomena of some general sort is laid out on one level of reality”. This means that there are no a priori social and analytical levels, like the global, institutional and the person level – or macro, meso and micro. Furthermore, practices are neither located at the everyday, local level – as different from institutions. As mentioned, social practices are an analytical as well as an empirical concept. The social consists of a nexus and bundle of different practices, Schatzki uses the concept of ‘plenum’ to indicate that all the bundles of practices are at the same level and potentially related. This leads to the relational ontology in practice theories. In quite different ways, authors like Engeström, Latour and Taylor argue against atomism and for understanding the world as associations. An individual, an object or a phenomenon cannot be understood in isolation. Relations are not external contexts of a person, a person is acting, feeling, and thinking in response to someone or something. Furthermore, a person appropriate symbolic and material tools in acting, in the sense that the person would be different without these tools. Human life and society are a network of relations, and through these relations and associations, actors are gradually changed, transformed, or translated. This translating character of relations shows the processual character of practice theory ontology. According to practice theories, social-material phenomena should be understood in use and in motion. Human and material actors are what they are in relations – and in motion.

4 Three Purifications and Religion as Practice

This section will discuss one last characteristic of practice theories in the context of the conception of religion. In general, practice theories draw on pragmatism and their a-dichotomous approach. We have already seen that there is no dichotomy in practice theory between actors and structures, between the individual and the social, between knowledging and knowledge, between autonomy and determinism, between theory and practice and between language and practice. There is neither a dichotomy between facts and values, between is and ought, the descriptive and the normative. Latour (1993) argues that using dichotomies like these, enables purification, which in turn is a key aspect of an account of the modern. The problem, he argues, is that in real life all these things are mixed:
By all means, they seem to say, let us not mix up knowledge, interest, justice and power. Let us not mix up heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, the human and the nonhuman. ‘But these imbroglios do the mixing’, you’ll say, ‘they weave our world together!’ ‘Act as if they didn’t exist’ the analyst replies (Latour 1993, 3).

Practice theory works from the assumption that the confused masses, the hybrid mixes, the imbroglios, exist. Furthermore, the hybrids are more and different than the sum of pure forms (Latour 1993, 78). The analysis does not start with purified structures, agents, nature, or society, but with mixed practices and the nexus of practices. That is, analysis does not assume or aim for foundational truths, it starts in the middle of things. In the following, I will discuss what the unpurified notion of the individual, language and normativity means for the understanding of religion.

4.1 The (Un)purified Religious Individual

Separating the individual agent from hybrid practices, means that religion can be located in the pure agent. In the study of religion, this is done in several ways. The most (in)famous is understanding religion as beliefs, for instance Tylor’s definition of religion as ‘belief in spirits’. McKinnon (2002) argues that with the collapse of structural functionalist theory, functional definitions of religion seemed less plausible. Despite criticism, there was a comeback of substantial definitions, and the key role of beliefs in the understanding of religion. There are several alternatives for what kind of beliefs that qualify as religious – superhuman being, supernatural assumptions or transcendent reality (McKinnon 2002). In his genealogy of religion, Smith (1978) argues for religion as a modern concept and for the priority of ‘faith’ over religion. There are similarities between faith, Tillich’s ultimate concern and meaning making in psychology of religion. McKinnon argues that faith is not an improvement from belief; faith resembles protestant intellectualism. Anyhow, faith, ultimate concern and meaning making are concepts which locate religion in the individual. The individual is in the foreground and the social in the background; the social is an external context, and the individual agent is generic in understanding religion.

I argue that practice theory locates religion in social and material practices. More so, religion should be understood as practice, not something that is practiced. Religion does not exist beyond or prior to practices. To rephrase Schatzki, religion is a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings. There is no essence of religion beyond how religion is done and made as practice. This does not exclude the extensive processes of reification in religion. In a practice theory perspective, these reifications are not essences. Reification can only be understood as an aspect of practices.

Understanding religion as practice is different from conceiving religion as tradition. Religion is the empirical, hybrid practice, not a normative, prescriptive tradition. Furthermore, religion often takes place in the nexus between different practices.
Religion may be done in a political speech, in a hospital or in gym (Bender et al. 2012). This means that a practice approach to religion does not limit religion to faith communities of practice. The practice of meditation may be understood as hybrid religion; the mix of health, body, mental processes, ways of doing and saying, internet websites, books, and movies, work out stuff and so on. Religion does not have to be pure to be religion. But it is a practice. The same goes for a funeral. A funeral is a nexus of different practices: the practice of human separation, the practice of the funeral agency, the practice of the professional pastor, the practice of grief, the practice of singing, of commemorating, of preaching, and so on.

A lot of important work has been done in sociology of religion on the individualization of religion, in the sense that people are less concerned about religious traditions and construct autonomous religiosity and spirituality (McGuire 2008). The argument here is that the active constructing religious individual does not require methodological individualism. Meditation and healing practices, for example, are not pure constructions of the individual – they are social and material practices. Actors are participating in and actively maneuvering in nexus of practices. Still, understanding the practices are necessary to analyze the maneuvering of individual actors.

4.2 (Un)purified Religious Language

Secondly, practice theory is arguing against a purified conception of language, where language is separated from social practices. I understand language broadly here, including texts, discourses, and theory. Texts and language have of course always played a significant part in several religions. There is a long tradition in religious studies and theology for treating texts as primary source to religion, that is, the meanings of texts are interpreted prior to investigating texts in use in religious practices. Independent of an outsider or insider perspective, religious texts are often understood as expressions of religious universes and sacred ontologies. That is, the development and content of religions can be traced through (historical critical) interpretations of texts. The point here is that meaning of texts is created prior to use. The meanings of texts are applied to practice, not created in religious practices. This may also be combined with a realist view of language as representation, that language represent religion in different (good or bad) ways. The empirical rejoinder is of course: Where do we find this real religion? And who decides what religion really is?

The separation of language from practice may be understood in light of western, protestant religion, emphasizing the particular role of religious scriptures and preaching, and how this religious mode shaped the general understanding of religion in a variety of disciplines (Asad 1993, Bender et al. 2012). Understanding religion as beliefs in sociology of religion and meaning making in psychology of religion, gives primacy to language as the key mode of religion. Inter-actions, rituals, materials, and practices are phenomena that can be explained by beliefs and meaning making, not vice versa.
Understanding religion as practice does not oppose language and action, giving primacy to one or the other. “Practice theories must stress that ‘language exists only in its (routinized) use’” (Reckwitz 2002, 255). Doings and sayings are parts of social practices, and nexuses of practices, as are material objects and human actors. This means that texts, language, and discourses should be understood and analyzed in use. Texts are not transporters of a religious content, but mediating artifacts in the practice of religion. Texts and language are used in practices to do and produce things, and to create meaning of the doings and productions.

This leads to a radical symmetry between all the elements and aspects of practices. One element cannot be used a priori to explain other elements and processes, like rituals, affective climate, interactions, the materials in use, and so on. Only empirical studies of religious practices, nexuses and networks can trace the role of the different subjects and objects, what is frequently used, what is not and how religion is made, by whom and what, with which tools and affective direction and production.

A practice theory approach to religion starts, as mentioned, in the middle of things, in the imperfect and blended doings of religion. The focus of analysis are the relations and associations between the different and heterogeneous elements. This requires a radical relational and flat ontology in the study of religion, in the sense that neither texts, language, faith or belief are located at another and separate analytical level than practices.

4.3 (Un)purified Religious Normativity

Thirdly, normativity is frequently purified and separated from how things are done. The issue of normativity is discussed in several contexts, of course. With reference to religion, one may ask what is good and bad about religion, or how is a certain religion done properly, or what is ethically good and right, or how do we decide what is true knowledge. In this context, I want to discuss the use of the transcendence / immanence dichotomy in order to normatively argue what religion ‘really’ is or ought to be.

The dichotomy is expressed in a variety of ways and embedded in everyday discourses. Armstrong (2001, ix) is an example:

Very often, priests, rabbis, imams, and shamans are just as consumed by worldly ambition as regular politicians. But all this is generally seen as an abuse of a sacred ideal. These power struggles are not what religion is really about, but an unworthy distraction from the life of the spirit, which is conducted far from the maddening crowd, unseen, silent, and unobtrusive.

Framing religion in such pure and dichotomous terms is not unusual. On the one hand, there is a sphere of “real” religion, on the other, the worldly sphere, regular and maddening. Real religion, the transcendent, can connect with the worldly, the immanent, but only in the form of the internal, unseen, and silent – as individual faith. Nongbri (2013, 19) comments: “Religion is not political, not concerned with cur-
rent events; it is about ‘the heart’. [...] religion is thought to be divorced from history. Thus, in this view, ‘religious traditions’ have ‘external histories’, but there is something timeless and ahistorical about religion.” Religion and God becomes the “crossed-out God of metaphysics” (Latour 1993, 33) on one hand and in the inner soul and faith of the individual on the other. Real religion is pure metaphysics and pure faith, while the practice of religion is impure representation.

Invoking a separation between this and another world, immanence, and transcendence, is – for understandable reasons – frequently done in the conception of religion. One sophisticated, and currently widely used, definition of religion is Lincoln’s (2006, 1). He describes four domains of religion, and the two first are:

1. A discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal and contingent and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status, (2) a set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected.

Religion is understood primarily as discourses, which in turn produce goals and directions for practices. Language is given primacy to practice, as discussed above. Furthermore, these religious discourses are about what transcends the contingent, mundane, and everyday life, and the discourses get a transcendent status. Lincoln’s definition indicates interest in everyday religious practices, communities, and institutions. Simultaneously, everyday religion is given an analytical frame of transcendence, and transcendence as something different and separated from, the mundane and immanent.

The question is whether much of what we would consider religion in everyday life fits within an understanding that gives primacy to transcendence. My claim is that much of what we would consider more or less religious is not driven by discourses or conceptions of transcendence. As mentioned, a funeral is a nexus of practices, actors, materials, and meanings. A funeral is the un/holy mix of money, everyday professional work, stories about everyday life, strong affect, and bodies in tears, singing, preaching, flowers and a coffin. This practice is not driven by a discourse of transcendence, it is driven by several things. And the funeral constitutes and gives meaning to several things. One could of course argue that only certain aspects are religious, not the entire funeral. That would lead to endless purification of what counts as “real” religious. Furthermore, it would miss the empirical point that a funeral may actually involve transcendence in another mode than a pre-given one. Transcendence may be produced in the funeral, as an expansion of the everyday life of participants. Transcendence may be understood not in dichotomy with immanence and as referring to metaphysics and a super-natural sphere:

It is the conception of the terms ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’ that ends up being modified by the moderns’ return to nonmodernity. Who told us that transcendence had to have a contrary? We have never abandoned transcendence – that is, the maintenance in presence by the mediation of a pass (Latour 1993, 128).
I argue that a practice theory approach understands normativity and transcendence as aspects of practices, not as separated and purified entities. Transcendence may be an aspect of religion, but it is not a necessary or primary condition. Transcendence is produced in religious practices, in interaction and in discourses that are parts of the practices, not by discourses separated from and prior to religion as practice.

5 Impure Religion

In this article, I have given a broad account of practice theories. These theories understand practice not only as the doing mode of human affairs, but as an ontological category in the conception of society. My main claim in the second part of the article has been that giving practices a generic role has several consequences for the understanding of religion, many of which conflict with traditional and current conceptions in the different disciplines of religion. The ambition has not been to give a new definition of religion, but to discuss how religion can be understood as practice, as different from ‘the practice of religion’. In sum, I argue for impure religion – that there never was, and never will be, pure religion.

Bibliography


