

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Embodied world construction: a phenomenology of ritual

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Abstract

This article presents a new approach to understanding ritual: embodied world construction. Informed by phenomenology and a philosophy of embodiment, this approach argues that rituals can (re)shape the structure of an individual's perceptual world. Ritual participation transforms how the world appears for an individual through the inculcation of new perceptual habits, enabling the perception of objects and properties which could not previously be apprehended. This theory is then applied to two case studies from an existing ethnographic study of North American evangelicalism, indicating how the theory of embodied world construction can shed new light on how individuals are shaped by ritual practice.

Keywords: Ritual; phenomenology; anticipation; liturgy; habit; embodiment; evangelicalism

Rituals, beliefs, and false beliefs

In his 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', Wittgenstein (2018; henceforth RFGB) lampoons the notion that rituals stem from false beliefs. This idea – that ritual practitioners are, in effect, ignorant of the facts of the world and act out in their rituals a primitive and uninformed science – is patently absurd from even a cursory review of the evidence. Consider a community which practices a ritual to usher in the rainy season. Does this community believe that their ritual causes the rains to come? This would be far too simple an explanation: if such a community held this belief, then why do they not perform the same ritual in the height of the dry season, when the land is arid and rain could be lifesaving (RFGB, 52)? Interpreting rituals in this way implies that 'people do all this out of sheer stupidity', which is a highly implausible way of interpreting the practices of other cultures (*ibid.*, 32).

The problem with this false-belief interpretation of ritual is not that it considers rituals to be based on *false* beliefs but that it considers belief to be the primary (even exclusive) analytic concept with which to interpret ritual. Rituals such as burning an effigy or kissing a picture of a loved one are not practices that can be explained by just referring to the agent's beliefs – no one burns an effigy or kisses a picture believing that this will have any effect on the person represented (*ibid.*, 36). This is not to say that kissing a picture involves no beliefs whatsoever: clearly, one who kisses a picture in this way believes that the picture depicts their loved one, and that this person is now absent.¹ However, an adequate explanation of the ritual behaviour will require more than an appreciation of the relevant beliefs. We can see this clearly when we consider individuals or communities who perform the same ritual but with different underlying beliefs. For example, imagine one community which performs a rain-dance in the full belief that doing such

a dance will inaugurate the rainy season, and another community which performs exactly the same dance but has long since given up believing that the ritual has any effect on the weather. Both rituals involve beliefs (some are shared, such as beliefs about how the dance is performed, while there will be divergence over other beliefs); however, to understand fully the significance and function of these rituals for the two communities, something more than just an appreciation of the beliefs involved will be required. Thus, while all rituals (just as all human behaviour) involve beliefs in some way, an analysis of ritual is not exhausted by a doxastic analysis. Philosophers interested in the philosophical import of religious rituals should go further than mining them for the beliefs they presuppose.²

Rituals are not merely representations of beliefs but practices with their own pragmatic logic which cannot be fully understood through an exclusively doxastic lens. When we apply the ritual-as-belief view to so-called primitive cultures, we inevitably render a view of such people as ill-informed, pre-scientific communities. Hence, as Catherine Bell argued a quarter of a century later, modern ritual study must overcome the dichotomy of thought and action (and ultimately mind and body), which implicitly prioritizes the thoughts and ideas that supposedly lie behind a ritual act (Bell (1992), 14–19). This means that we must move beyond a view all too common in philosophy that rituals are only interesting insofar as they shed light on what people or communities believe.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to present the outline of a phenomenological analysis of ritual which is capable of moving beyond a dualist, belief-oriented conception and towards a clearer understanding of what rituals are and how they affect human beings. Ritual is ever-present in religion, so the idea that religion can be understood without a clear analysis of ritual is nonsense. While developing a full theory of ritual is clearly too great a task to complete in one article, the intention here is to present the first stages of an approach which will support and stimulate further philosophical research into ritual. To do this, I will turn the tools of phenomenological analysis to ritual practice in a way that will help us to understand ritual as a human phenomenon.

This is a valuable exercise not only for philosophy of religion but for philosophy in general. Ritual is not just the preserve of religion but an unavoidable feature of human life.³ Ritual saturates human life and operates in all kinds of mundane experiences – from handshakes to graduations to football matches.⁴ By analysing ritual, we do not just learn about rituals or religions, we learn about one of the key experiences of human life which shapes how humans perceive and interpret the world. Thus, while this study engages with religious rituals in some detail, its findings are relevant not just to phenomenology of religion but to phenomenology more generally.

The rest of this article is split into three parts. In the next section, I critically examine the expressivist view which interprets rituals primarily as expressions of pre-existing thoughts, beliefs, or values. These theories, I argue, are phenomenologically inadequate and rely on an implicit but problematic dualism of thought and action. The following section then puts forward my positive construal of rituals as world-building. I will argue that rituals, as habitual embodied practices, have the capacity to transform one's perceptual world. The final section will then demonstrate the payoff of this approach by applying my analysis to an existing ethnographic study of North American evangelicalism. By examining two case studies of religious experience, I will show how regular ritual participation can restructure an individual's perceived world and thereby make possible religious experiences that would otherwise be unavailable.

Ritual as expression

If rituals are not fully explicable in terms of belief, how should we understand them? One intuitive view would be to understand rituals as expressive. This seems to be

Wittgenstein's approach when he compares a ritual to someone who hits the ground when angry: 'But surely, I do not believe that the ground is at fault or that the hitting would help matters. 'I vent my anger'. And all rites are of this kind. One can call such practices instinctual behaviour' (RFGB, 52). Rituals are of a kind with this more common venting of emotions, an expressive act which comes instinctively to human beings. The form of the ritual is less important than what is expressed.⁵

Recently, Guy Bennett-Hunter has sought to move beyond the dichotomy of belief and action by presenting rituals as 'expressions of a normative perspective upon the world rather than expressions of factual belief' (Bennet-Hunter (2017), 60). This, for Bennett-Hunter, explains why people continue to perform rituals that have no practical utility. For example, when one kisses a picture of a loved one, this action is not based on a belief that doing so will have any effect on the person represented (*ibid.*; see RFGB, 36). The kiss is an expressive act which 'is appropriate to a system of values in which the pictured individual has an especially prominent place' and does not require any belief that the person represented will be in any way affected by the kiss (Bennet-Hunter (2017), 60). What determines this behaviour is the expression and not the belief – the form does not matter, so long as it resembles closely enough what is being expressed. As Wittgenstein notes, kissing the written name of the loved one would have the same effect (RFBG, 36).

However, this kind of expressivism does not improve much on the ritual-as-belief interpretation. If ritual does not express belief, then what precisely does it express? When a person kisses a picture of a loved one, what are they expressing? Most obviously, it might be an expression of love for that person. Perhaps too it is an expression of desire to see them, or alternatively of grief after their passing. But if the act can be fully explained in terms of expression, why go through this complicated process? Why not simply say aloud 'I love this person', or think to oneself 'I wish to see them soon'? There is clearly something phenomenologically different between kissing a picture and simply expressing one's love verbally. The kiss is a much deeper sensory experience and feels more intimate. One may feel close to the person when kissing a picture of them in a way which they do not when simply expressing their love verbally. With the kiss there is a feeling of reality associated with the act. Even when one knows perfectly well that kissing a picture cannot affect the person depicted in any way or bring them physically closer, one still feels closer to the loved one through the performance of this ritual. We can thus already see that such a simple ritual as this functions as more than just a means of expression but is involved in how an individual perceives and constructs reality.

Further, Wittgenstein is mistaken in his claim that kissing the written name of the person depicted would work just as well. Certainly, it is possible to imagine someone who kisses the name of their loved one – and not a picture – and that this is a deeply meaningful practice for them. Wittgenstein is right when he argues that the form of the ritual is not essential to the practice. However, for the person who routinely kisses a picture of their loved one, the picture could not just be replaced with a written copy of their name. Imagine this picture is somehow lost or destroyed – is it plausible to believe that this person would simply write down the name of their beloved and continue the ritual? Clearly not. While the ritual does not depend on the form – and we can imagine the same kind of ritual being formulated differently – when it comes to concrete practice, specificity matters. Thus we see again that ritual is about more than just expression: there is something about *this* way of expressing that is meaningful to the individual, beyond the content of what is expressed.

The problem here is that the expressivist view suffers from the same dualism as the ritual-as-belief theory. Both of these positions conceive of rituals as expressing pre-existing mental content, whether thoughts, beliefs, values, or something else. Thus,

Bennett-Hunter sees no problem in describing the distinguishing feature of religious rituals as ‘the fact that they are practically useless’ (Bennet-Hunter (2017), 59). Despite his intentions, Bennett-Hunter’s comments betray a latent thought–action dualism since he regards the ritual action as meaningless in itself, without the input of some anterior thought. To demonstrate the limitations of this view, let us consider another ritual: a handshake. A handshake is a social ritual which can perform a variety of functions – such as welcoming someone or concluding a deal. Following Bennett-Hunter, it might be argued that a handshake is practically useless: it appears that there is nothing about grasping another’s right hand and moving it up and down that transforms a deal from pending to completed. This, however, is inaccurate. By shaking your hand, I do not simply express my desire that the deal be struck or my belief that it is now concluded. In the performance of the handshake, the deal is concluded (Crossley (2004), 38). Without the handshake (or an alternative ritual in its place), there is no deal.⁶

The perlocutionary capacity of rituals to do things in the world should indicate the limitations inherent in viewing rituals as primarily concerned with expression. This expressivism is rooted in a dualism of thought and action whereby the ritual activity can be presented as an inert vehicle for the delivery of some pre-established meaning. Only on such a view could one reasonably propose that the specific form of a ritual might be changed without affecting the ritual in any meaningful way. By attending to how rituals do things in the world, we recognize that a ritual’s meaning cannot be entirely contained in the minds of the ritual participants. Rather, the ritual’s meaning is, in part at least, materially manifested in the physical performance of the ritual.

To take this further, I intend to argue in this article that rituals do not just do things in the world but are also involved in processes of world-building for ritual participants. This is an aspect of ritual which has been less thoroughly researched but is equally important in understanding how rituals work.⁷ The argument of this article is that rituals can reshape the structure of an individual’s world, causing the world to appear differently to that individual and thereby shaping processes of belief-formation and normative evaluation. According to this view, expressivism underestimates the importance of the physical act of ritual participation in shaping the world for an individual. The implication is that a ritual cannot simply be an expression of some anterior thought because the ritual is itself a part of the process by which thoughts are formulated.

To begin thinking about how rituals can alter one’s perception of the world, we can return to Wittgenstein’s example of the individual who kisses a picture of a loved one. We might consider that this behaviour does not simply reflect the relationship or express feelings that already exist but actually contributes something to it. The act of kissing a picture may itself induce feelings of love or longing for the loved one. More than this, a routine of kissing a picture could play a constitutive role in sustaining a relationship with a loved one who is absent or deceased. It is possible (even common) for a bereaved person to continue a relationship with the deceased (Ratcliffe (2021)); it is thus possible that such rituals have the capacity to contribute to continued bonds. Rituals can therefore be involved in world construction, creatively remaking the perceptual structure of an individual’s world.

Constructing the world

When I argue that rituals construct the world, I mean that participation in rituals can shape the salient features and structure of an individual’s perception, and that these effects can be global and long-lasting (i.e. effect a change which endures beyond the specific time and place of a ritual). This conception of world-construction is inspired by the phenomenological tradition, which recognizes that humans perceive the world as a

meaningful whole, always already structured by layers of meaning and patterns of salience. These structures and patterns are determined by an individual's embodiment: the way in which one bodily approaches the world will affect how the world appears. Further, these structures are habitual, such that repeated practice can form stronger, more durable, and longer-lasting structures.

An excursus on phenomenology and religion

It will not have escaped some readers that the application of phenomenological methods to the study of religion is hardly novel. In fact, phenomenology of religion has a dual heritage, one in comparative religion and religious studies, and the other in late twentieth-century continental philosophy. Despite a nominal similarity, these two strands of thought are in fact quite distinct research agendas with little overlap. The distinction between these approaches can be traced to a distinction between English-speaking and German-speaking uses of the term 'phenomenology' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The German *Phänomenologie* described a philosophical method to determine the principles and limitations of perception, exemplified by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. On the other hand, the English term *phenomenology* was used in the eighteenth century to describe the task of describing the extant phenomena in the world, through a threefold process of description, arrangement, and aetiology. Broadly put, Husserl's method develops the German-speaking conception of phenomenology, while early comparative religion was influenced by the English-speaking concept (James (1985)).⁸ We should thus be careful to avoid confusing these two distinct approaches to phenomenology of religion, refrain from judging one by the standards of the other, and not allow the potential merits of one version of phenomenology to be tarred by the widespread critique of the other.

This article is engaging with the continental philosophy interpretation of phenomenology, rather than the religious studies methodology of the twentieth century. However, given the propensity for confusion between the two, it is necessary to take a brief excursus to describe this latter movement and explain how my approach differs from it. I shall engage more deeply with the continental philosophy version of phenomenology of religion later on.

Phenomenology was the dominant view in religious studies during the middle of the twentieth century until sustained criticism in the 1980s and 1990s led to it largely falling out of favour. This method was concerned with discerning the shared underlying structures of religious experiences in the search for the essence of religion (James (1985), 313), using a version of the *epoché* to suspend judgement about religious reality (Cox (2006), 128) or achieve a methodological agnosticism (Smart (1973), 61). Thus, a key feature of the phenomenological approach was that it regarded religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon, with an essential core that makes it irreducible to more basic forms of analysis. For many scholars this core was explicitly supernatural (see, e.g. Eliade (1959); van der Leeuw (1967); see also Cox (2006), 116, 178), hence phenomenology has often been closely identified with the *philosophia perennis*.⁹

The shortcomings of the phenomenological approach are well-established enough not to require much elaboration here. Key to this critique was the objection that, by asserting religion's autonomy and irreducibility, phenomenology introduced into religious studies a kind of crypto-theology and thus failed in its task to provide a neutral, objective analysis of religious experience (Segal (1985); Fitzgerald (1997, 2000)). In a recent attempt to revive the phenomenology of religion, Jason Blum has argued for a method which focuses not on transcendence but on the conscious subjectivity of religious individuals (Blum (2012), 1029). This can be achieved by disentangling the descriptive from the explanatory tasks

(see Proudfoot (1985), 196–197) and regarding religion as a distinct but not autonomous domain (Blum (2012), 1035). Proper application of the *epoché* will, Blum argues, resist crypto-theology (*ibid.*, 1033).¹⁰

While there may be merit in Blum's approach, it is important to distinguish his proposal from my approach in this article. Blum proposes a phenomenological analysis of religious consciousness, with the experiences of religious adherents as the primary data. By contrast, my approach seeks to understand how rituals can shape human experience, utilizing insights from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. I am not in the first place interpreting ethnographic or historical data but rather exploring the logical implications of phenomenological research for analyses of ritual. My contention is that philosophical reflection on perception, embodiment, and habit can illuminate precisely how rituals interact with human ways of being in the world and influence how that world appears, and that these insights could stimulate and enlighten further empirical ritual research.

I would note here that this kind of approach ought to receive support from scholars such as Blum. If religion is not a *sui generis*, autonomous phenomenon, then we should expect general findings from phenomenology to be applicable to religion – as we expect them to be applicable to other domains of human experience. Indeed, part of my claim in this article is that rituals are *not* exclusively religious phenomena; only on a *sui generis* or essentialist viewpoint should we expect religious rituals to operate in a radically different way from rituals more broadly.

The argument of this article, therefore, is that rituals, through repeated bodily practice, restructure the perceptual world of their participants. Rituals can create new objects and new properties in an individual's perceptual world, which can then further be responded to through ritual practice. For example, as Nick Crossley argues, a secular monarchist will 'imaginatively generate a "majesty" which they misrecognize as emanating from the person whom they, by way of ritual, invest with it' (Crossley (2004), 43). Monarchist rituals can restructure an individual's perception, changing how the monarch appears by making them appear more salient in perception and imbuing them with new qualities which were not previously perceived. The phenomenological effect of such ritual activity is not limited to a particular time and place (such as a particular, specifiable ritual) but will continue to affect how the monarchist perceives the monarch outside specific rituals. The purpose of this article is thus to examine exactly how a ritual could generate such a majesty and shape the structure of perception.

I should note at the outset that my position in this article is somewhat similar to Pascal's suggestion that anyone who desires to believe Christian doctrine but cannot just summon it up themselves should participate in Christian rituals until belief comes 'quite naturally' (Pascal (1966), §418). Pascal clearly recognizes that beliefs are influenced by ritual participation. In one sense, then, this article can be seen as outlining a phenomenologically informed explanation of why Pascal's insight is correct. However, there is also an important difference between my position and Pascal's. My argument in this article does not strictly concern belief change but rather the transformation of the perceptual world. I do not argue that ritual participation will necessarily alter what one believes but rather that it can change how the world appears. Belief change may follow but it may not. This is particularly important because belief (at least propositional belief, understood here as private conscious assent to a proposition or doctrine) is a contested term when applied beyond Christianity (see, among others, Lopez (1998); Lincoln (2006); Lofton (2012)). Thus, unlike Pascal, my argument is not restricted to those contexts in which propositional belief is an important concept.¹¹ Rather, I am interested in a broader phenomenological analysis of how human perception and embodiment is such that

participating in rituals can change how one's perceptual world appears and is structured. To do this I will begin by considering the role of anticipation in perception.

Anticipation

Human perception is structured by anticipation. As Matthew Ratcliffe argues (following Husserl), perception includes 'a sense of the possible'. Perception involves not only the present appearance of an object but also its perceptual possibilities. For example, if I perceive a cup from one angle, I also perceive its reverse – not because it is visually present to me but because the perception of the front of the cup includes the possibility that I could turn it around and see the reverse side. This is not an active judgement I make following my perception of the cup but rather an anticipation that is integrally bound up with the perception (Ratcliffe (2017), 123). Perceptual experience is thus structured by a horizon of anticipated possibilities which influence how objects appear to a perceiver and shape expectations about how an object will appear in the future. What I perceive now already includes a sense of what I expect to see in the future.

The anticipatory structure of perception normally expands our horizon, allowing us to perceive objects that are not immediately apprehended in sensation. This is useful and important for our ability to engage and interact with the world. Because of anticipation, our world is not limited to that which is immediately sensorily present: we can project ourselves forward into new possibilities and make action-plans based on realities that we cannot immediately sense (Merleau-Ponty (2014), 108). For example, I can pick up the cup on my desk with an intuitive movement – I do not need to think through in advance the precise movements of my hands, arms, or fingers. Anticipation makes this intuitive movement possible: without thinking, I know that the shape of the cup is uniform enough for my action to succeed, even though I cannot see it in its entirety. I perceive the whole cup, even though only part of it is present in my visual field, and act according to this anticipatory perception.

However, anticipation can also mislead perception: it is because of anticipation that we experience optical illusions. As a result, anticipation can also frustrate our practical projects. As Samuel Todes notes, a crudely counterfeited dollar bill can remain in circulation for a long time because we do not expect our currency to be forged. We anticipate seeing a genuine bill and so this is what we see. For the same reason, writers will often overlook typographical errors in their work because anticipation fills in the perceptual details as they read their writing (Todes (2001), 80).¹² These examples are illustrative because they convey the deep interrelationship between anticipation and perception, and the potential for perception to be misdirected. When we look at the forged bill, we do not see the errors and then judge that it is nonetheless genuine. We do not *see* the errors at all – they never become perceptual objects that we notice and to which we can respond. Anticipation guides perception so we do not see what is there.

Anticipation is thus characterized by a duality. Anticipation is essential to our practical engagement with the world, but it also has the capacity to deceive, creating perceptual objects and attributes that are not really there. If, as I will go on to argue, rituals are capable of shaping anticipation, this might appear to facilitate two apparently contradictory interpretations. On the one hand, it might be suggested that, by shaping anticipation, a ritual can reveal deeper aspects of reality to its participants; on the other, one might conclude that rituals simply create illusory objects for participants and serve to mislead perception. While either interpretation would be consistent with the analysis of anticipation presented here, neither is mandated. The question of whether a ritual reveals real aspects of reality or just creates fictions remains open (and will not admit of a generalized answer). However, this apparent dichotomy is not as important as first appears.

Consider the secular monarchist: is the majesty perceived in the monarch real or not? There is no straightforward answer to this question: the monarch's majesty is generated by the ritual but also then becomes a real thing in the world with real effects. The value of analysing it in terms of anticipation consists in the capacity to explain how objects and attributes that are not immediately apparent (either because they do not exist, or because they are not immediately available to perception) can be perceived.

Note that this analysis does not depend on our characterization of the monarchist as secular. Even one who believes in the divine right of kings and holds that the monarch has some kind of majestic essence still needs to be able to recognize this majesty. Consider folk tales of monarchs who dress as paupers and walk unnoticed among the people. Even if they really are majestic (i.e. majesty is an intrinsic property they possess), it still takes the requisite pomp and ceremony for them to be recognized as such.¹³ This should assuage any worries that the account of ritual outlined in this article necessitates a fictionalist account of religious practice, without thereby falling into the Charybdis of fideism. New perceptual possibilities are opened up through changes in anticipation; this is true whether or not these possibilities relate to anything real. If we can show that rituals are able to shape anticipation, then we will have answered the question of how rituals are capable of shaping perception.

Embodied anticipation

The effect of anticipation on perception is deeply intertwined with an individual's embodiment. Perceived possibilities, integral to perception, depend on the possibility of bodily movement. For example, I can anticipate the reverse side of a cup because I know that I could perceive the cup's reverse side immediately by moving my body (Ratcliffe (2017), 125). By anticipating possible future body movement, I can perceive that which is not immediately present to sense experience. For Alva Noë, this is because perception depends on the skilful mastery of one's own sensorimotor abilities. The practical knowledge that I could move my body, and the practical understanding of the effect that this would have on my vision, is what allows my current visual perception to include a sense of future sensorimotor possibilities (Noë (2004), 11–12). The anticipatory structure of perception is thus intimately bound up with an individual's embodiment.

The link between anticipation and embodiment receives a thoroughgoing analysis in the work of Samuel Todes. For Todes, anticipation is manifested in the body through poise. Poise is an anticipatory bodily response to an object, through which one sets the body to react to its perceived possibilities (Todes (2001), 80). Without the reactive readiness provided by poise, an object cannot be fully anticipated. This is because anticipation is the perception of an object's future possibilities – yet, as we have seen, an object's future possibilities are directly related to the future possibilities of my own body's movement. I cannot know how an object may appear to me in the future unless I also have a sense of how my body is likely to respond; this practical knowledge comes from my current poise. Poise is a body stance that is directed to the future and is thus essentially anticipatory. Without poise, the future appearance of an object will remain indeterminate because my body's future action is indeterminate. By adopting a certain poise, I project my body into a particular future and resolve the anticipatory ambiguity.

Thus, Todes argues that an object is not fully perceived until a poise has been adopted in relation to it. For example, if a baseball is flying towards me, I can perceive it as a baseball only once I anticipate it as such – and I can anticipate it as a baseball only by setting my body to catch or otherwise respond to it. Otherwise, the baseball is nothing more than an indeterminate blur, to which I cannot react, which will all of a sudden either hit me or whizz past my head (Todes (2001), 80). By anticipating the ball in the distance, I also

anticipate its trajectory relevant to my own body. This is meaningful to me (I may want to catch the ball or avoid being hit) and so, as I anticipate the trajectory of the ball, my body instinctively poises itself. If I do not adopt a poise, I cannot truly have anticipated the ball. Without moving my body, I have no practical knowledge of where the ball is heading or whether it will reach me. To make this kind of prediction, I must move myself and anticipate the effects that my movement will have on my perception of the ball.

Of course, many perceived objects do not induce such a strong bodily reaction. The reverse side of a cup, for example, does not strike me as something I need to respond to or brace my body for. However, this does not undermine Todes's position. If the cup is not particularly salient or meaningful, then my poise will be one of indifference: this still reflects the intimate relationship between anticipation and poise. If the cup becomes more meaningful to me – perhaps I become curious about its reverse – then this will be reflected in my poise towards it. As Noë notes, in everyday life, 'we peer, squint, lean forward, adjust lighting, put on glasses, and we do so automatically' (Noë (2004), 58). How objects in the world appear – including the possibilities presented, as well as the apparent meaningfulness and salience of objects – is structured according to the anticipatory responsiveness of the body.

Ritual anticipation

We are now in a position to give an outline of how rituals can shape perception. A religious ritual is a deeply embodied activity in which the position and movement of the body bears a close relation to the religious or spiritual significance of the activity (Wynn (2018), 122–123). Participating in a religious ritual involves adopting a certain kind of poise with religious or spiritual significance. This might include prescribed body positions, such as *raka'ah* in Muslim *salat* or the liturgy of Catholic Mass, or more general non-prescriptive body compartments, such as the reverence shown to the Qur'an or Torah which is manifested in the body's approach to these significant objects. Since poise and anticipation are so intertwined, it follows that adopting new poises in ritual will reshape the anticipatory structure of perception. When one's body is poised in a certain way, one will begin to anticipate perceiving the world in a new way and will thus perceive the world as such.

For example, a Christian who regularly partakes in the Eucharist might perceive Christ's presence in the elements in a way that someone unfamiliar with the ritual would not. The Christian's perception is structured such that the elements are salient and appear as inherently meaningful, containing the presence of Christ. Further, this habit of perception will also restructure a Christian's perception of the world more generally. Having developed, through the ritual, a habitually informed anticipation of perceiving Christ's presence in the world, this Christian may begin to perceive Christ's presence more readily in the material world more generally.

At this point, it is worth noting one possible objection to the argument I have presented: that the examples of anticipation discussed so far – such as catching a baseball or perceiving a cup – are disanalogous to religious rituals. This is because they are relatively short-term experiences, whereas the thesis of this article is that rituals effect long-term and global changes in the structure of perception. It is one thing to say that my poise structures my anticipatory perception of a baseball flying towards me; it is quite another to say that by participating in a ritual, I experience changes in the long-term, global structure of my perception. One might worry, therefore, that the argument presented thus far cannot justify the attribution to ritual of these long-term, global structuring effects.

To answer this objection, we must consider in greater detail the role of habit in perception. Neal DeRoo argues that anticipation in perception is bound up with one's past experiences.¹⁴ For DeRoo, attention is directed by the affective pull of objects upon consciousness. When I notice something, my attention is drawn to it, pre-reflectively, as an

affective pull (DeRoo (2013), 30). Like experiences can be related to one another because of their like affective pulls. When two experiences are similar, they are passively associated through a process of reproductive association – a sense of ‘this recalls that’ (*ibid.*) – thereby allowing a present experience to be associated with a past experience (*ibid.*, 32). Reproductive association influences the anticipatory structure of perception, since perceptual anticipation is tied to my past associations of an object. If I associate a present experience with a past experience, and if that past experience tended to produce certain additional experiences, then I will expect this present experience also to produce those kinds of additional experiences (*ibid.*).

For example, for all of my previous experiences of cups, the cup turned out to have a solid reverse when I turned it around. If this present sensation recalls those previous experiences of cups, then I should expect *this* cup also to have a solid reverse. When I perceive and interact with this cup, I do so according to a habitual tendency of perception, a passive synthesis of the present experience with previous associated experiences, which allows me to recognize it as an object-like thing and engage practically with it (*ibid.*, 33).¹⁵ This produces a ‘horizon of expectations’: my present perception and interaction with this cup is passively shaped by my past experience of cups through the affective association of ‘this recalls that’ (*ibid.*, 37). If I am familiar with this specific cup, then I will have a more determinate anticipation of what its reverse will be like. Whereas my anticipation of a newly experienced cup will be of some as-yet undetermined solid and broadly symmetrical reverse, if I am looking at the cup on my desk, my familiarity with this object allows my anticipation greater determinacy, perhaps specifying a particular design (Ratcliffe (2020), 135). Perceptual habit is thus not a banal repeating of what has come before but the affective association of past with present experience which projects into the future.¹⁶

Perceptual habit is itself an embodied phenomenon. The habitual familiarity I develop with a perceptual object is the result of regular and varied bodily interaction with it. For example, I am familiar with the cup on my desk because I have explored its perceptual possibilities with my own body. I have picked it up, turned it around, carried it from place to place, and as a result I have a strong anticipation of what its reverse side will look like or how heavy it will feel when I pick it up. As perceptual habit develops and anticipation becomes more determinate, the body recedes into the background. Where once I needed to examine the cup with my body in order to know precisely what to expect from it, I now know this intuitively. This is not to say that my body becomes less important for perception or anticipation, but that I am less aware of it the more habituated I become to its effects.

To illustrate, returning to Todes’s example of the counterfeit dollar bill, a cashier’s ability to notice the tell-tale discrepancies will at first require specific and conscious bodily engagement with the bill. To spot a fake, he must look closely, squint, hold the bill up to the light. The more he examines the bill in this way, the more he is likely to correctly spot it as a fake. The cashier is thus making an active judgement – *this bill is fake* – by actively inspecting the bill, deliberating, and then deciding that it is in fact a counterfeit. A trained counter-fraud officer, on the other hand, will be able to spot a counterfeit immediately, without the need to engage in such deliberate bodily examination. Where the inexperienced cashier must look closely to see the markers of fraud, these jump out to the counter-fraud officer. Her habitual familiarity with counterfeit currency – built up through regular and varied bodily interaction with numerous bills – means that the relevant details of the bill are much more salient in her perception, making the bill appear to her as a *fraud*. The officer, then, does not need to make an active judgement as the cashier did: she sees the bill as a fraud because she has, through passive synthesis, constituted the bill as *fake* (DeRoo (2013), 35).

Further, perceptual habit can escape the context within which it was originally acquired. As DeRoo argues, the results of active judgements 'can themselves become fodder for passive associations' (*ibid.*). This is the process of sedimentation, whereby previous judgements are integrated into one's expectational horizon, thereby informing future passive associations (*ibid.*, 37). Thus, as the cashier becomes more familiar with counterfeit currency and makes more judgements concerning the authenticity of bills, he will become more adept at noticing fakes because his previous judgements form an increasingly sophisticated horizon of past experience. This is precisely what the counter-fraud officer has already done, which is why the bill appears to her immediately as fraud. Perception is thus structured by anticipation, and this anticipation draws upon a horizon of past experiences, or habitual tendencies. Importantly, the operation of these habitual tendencies is not restricted to their original domain. Active judgements are made in response to a specific situation. Once these judgements are sedimented through habitual familiarity, they become available to passive synthesis for experiences beyond their original context. It is precisely because of passive habitual tendencies of perception that an agent can navigate new or unfamiliar environments (*ibid.*, 33).

We can now answer the objection directly. To recall, the objection was that the examples provided (catching a baseball, perceiving a cup) are disanalogous to ritual because they concern short-term experiences, so cannot support my claim that ritual participation can effect a long-term and global restructuring of perception.

In response, we should note that the thesis of this article is not that ritual participation will always and immediately transform someone's perception. We should not expect someone new to and unfamiliar with a ritual to perceive the same structures as an adept. Long-term global change comes from repeated ritual participation, through the development of habitual familiarity. For example, to the uninitiated, the elements of the Eucharist appear to perception as just bread and wine. By contrast, the adept sees in the elements the presence of Christ. The adept's repeated practice and consistent recognition of the elements' significance gradually forms part of their expectational horizon, allowing them to passively constitute the bread and wine as the presence of Christ. Further, the adept's perceptual habits are no longer locked into the context of the ritual. Perceiving a material thing as containing the presence of Christ is now sedimented and part of the adept's horizon. Whereas it might have taken some effort at first to recognize the presence of Christ in the elements, the adept can now passively constitute additional material objects as containing the presence of Christ (perhaps in the beauty of nature or the needs of another), without the need for similar effort. This may not happen all the time, but any experiences which recall the Eucharist will be associated with Christ's presence.

There is perhaps a parallel between my argument here and Saba Mahmood's analysis of ritual practices among pious Muslim women in Egypt. To quote Mona, one of Mahmood's interviewees, 'if you say the morning prayer, it will make your daily affairs easier, and if you don't pray it will make them hard' (Mahmood (2012), 125). Mahmood observes a duality of influence between ritual practice and piety: observing rituals like the morning prayer will help one to act piously throughout the day but, at the same time, acting piously throughout the day will produce the desire to perform the morning prayer.

This leads Mahmood to adopt an Aristotelian (rather than Bourdieusian) conception of *habitus*. Habit is not just the unconscious repeating of one's situation but an active process whereby one acquires new moral dispositions by adopting new behaviours (*ibid.*, 135). Thus, 'ritual performances are . . . disciplinary practices through which pious dispositions are formed, rather than symbolic acts that have no relationship to pragmatic or utilitarian activity' (*ibid.*, 128).

The difference between Mahmood and my argument here is that I am focused exclusively on *perceptual* habit. Mahmood is right to argue that ritual activity shapes one's dispositions – and is to this extent ethical. I further argue that ritual participation can shape the habitual structure of one's perception through the effects that embodied practice has on one's poise and anticipation. Thus, humans are not just passively shaped by rituals but can reflectively choose to engage in rituals in order to change how they see the world. Hence, we can discuss rituals in terms of habit without undermining the importance of reflexivity – that is, 'the personal power to reflect subjectively upon one's circumstances and to decide what to do in them or to do about them' (Archer (2007), 11; see also Archer (2010)) – in analysing human behaviour. The classic view is that reflexivity and habit are at odds in explaining human behaviour. Margaret Archer argues that reflexivity is the far more important of the two for analysing modern society, since it can attend to how subjects actively take up and reinterpret their situation, rather than just passively (and habitually) repeating it (Archer (2007), 284). Yet, one's perceptual structures (like, as Mahmood argues, one's dispositions) cannot just be changed by conscious fiat. They change through the accumulation of fulfilled and disappointed anticipations in experience (DeRoo (2013), 37). Thus, analysing the role of habit in ritual does not underplay the importance of reflexivity. In fact, just the reverse is true: if someone, through reflexive self-talk, decides that they want to start perceiving the world in a different way, they can choose to engage in certain kinds of rituals to achieve this end. For example, a Christian may reflexively decide that they are not compassionate enough to those less fortunate than themselves. In order to correct this, they may begin to partake in the Eucharist more regularly (and more seriously) in order to help them see Christ in other people.

An objection: Marion and the saturated Eucharist

Before moving on, I shall note one further possible objection to my argument here. My mention of the Eucharist above might make some think of Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological analysis of this ritual. At first glance, it might appear that Marion offers me some support, given his intimation that the Eucharist is a different phenomenon for those who approach it from within a religious context. However, for Marion, the conditions for perceiving the Eucharist are not provided by habitual ritual practice, as I argue, but by the sacrament itself (Marion (2017), 102–115; 125–135). The Eucharist is for Marion a phenomenon *par excellence*, a 'saturated phenom[en] of the mode of revelation' (*ibid.*, 113). One characteristic of such saturated phenomena is that they escape all synthesis and overwhelm the constituting consciousness of the individual ego: 'Far from being able to constitute this phenomenon, the *I* experiences itself as constituted by it' (Marion (2000), 210). What I attribute to the habitual shaping of perceptual anticipation through embodied ritual activity, Marion would explain as the utter self-giving of the invisible which bedazzles and conditions the perceiving subject. On this view, my analysis is at best unnecessary; at worst it obscures the divine initiative in the sacrament.

Marion's philosophy has at times been criticized for veering into theology (Smith (1999); Janicaud (2000); Gschwandtner (2019)). Yet, Marion will insist that in articulating the characteristics of saturated phenomena he is not making a metaphysical claim about transcendent reality but simply outlining a possible phenomenon. It is a legitimate phenomenological task to identify a space of as yet unrecognized phenomenological possibility while allowing that the identification of the source of such a phenomenon remains a theological task (Marion (2000), 211; *Idem* (2017), 104–105; Westphal (2005), 484). If we take seriously this refusal to engage in theological speculation, then we can accept the saturated phenomenon as a phenomenological possibility. This need not undermine my analysis of ritual in the main, so long as I am happy to leave open the possibility that there

may (or may not) be a phenomenon which does not behave in relation to ritual as I have outlined but rather takes its own initiative and reconstitutes the subject. This will not often come into competition with my approach: most rituals do not involve saturation – many are rather banal, such as handshakes, and so amenable to the kind of analysis I have presented here.

Although I do not think that Marion's approach needs to be in conflict with mine, I would suggest that it does not adequately grasp the important contribution made by ritual participation to religious experiences, including experiences of saturated phenomena. This partly relates to the ethical concern raised by James K. A. Smith that Marion 'effects a certain levelling of the plurivocity of (global) religious experience and forces it into a rather theistic, or at least theophanic, mold' (Smith (1999), 23). Moreover, even when one's focus is restricted to the Catholic experience of the Eucharist, Marion's approach is markedly individualistic, focused on a singular person's experience of the sacrament (Gschwandtner (2019), 51). When we widen our analysis to the experiences of a whole congregation, there is no way to tell what each person experiences – although as Bruce Lincoln surmises, we may 'guess these range from deep reflection and strong commitment to bewilderment and indifference' (Lincoln (2005), 65).¹⁷

Marion is in fact aware of this: a gift must be recognized as such in order to be a gift, otherwise it becomes a mere possession (Marion (2017), 129). Further, our ability to see the visible in the invisible (i.e. Christ in the bread and wine) 'depends on the extent of our welcome' (*ibid.*, 114). Jesus' crucifixion illustrates the extent to which a saturated phenomenon can be misrecognized and rejected by those to whom it appears. Thus, even if we follow Marion's account of the sacrament, there is still a moment of human response – and, being corporeal, affective and biological creatures, the only way we can show our welcome is through corporeal engagement. We should therefore expect the way we engage with a ritual to influence what we experience through it. As I have stated already, whether Christ is experienced in the Eucharist remains a matter for theology. However, even if we accept Marion's description of the saturated phenomenon and remain within the context of Catholic sacrament, this description will be incomplete if it does not acknowledge the contribution made to the experience by corporeal ritual activity.

Hearing the voice of God

So far, we have approached ritual from a largely theoretical perspective. Our final task will be to apply the preceding philosophical arguments to a concrete example of ritual practice. We will thus examine two case studies, drawn from T. M. Luhrmann's study of North American evangelicalism, in light of our embodied world construction conception of ritual. It is not expected that these two case studies will provide conclusive proof for the thesis outlined in this article; rather, this discussion is intended to be indicative of the kind of analysis that this model facilitates.

In *When God Talks Back*, T. M. Luhrmann describes a range of practices typical of North American evangelicalism which allow congregants to experience and engage with God in their everyday lives. These include regular moments of quiet reflective prayer, such as daily 'quiet time' with God (Luhrmann (2012), 48) or nightly prayer journaling (*ibid.*, 58), as well as more imaginatively involved and corporeally engaged practices, such as pouring a second cup of coffee to share with Jesus in the morning (*ibid.*, 74–75), or regular 'date night' with God (*ibid.*, 80–82).

Through these regular practices, evangelicals experience God's friend-like presence in their everyday lives. For these congregants, God is understood to be present like a friend, interested in the minutiae of everyday life, and available for a chat, a laugh, or to talk through a difficult situation. By regularly pouring a second cup of coffee for Jesus in

the morning, congregants set aside time to interact with God in this familiar, relational way. Through this playful practice,¹⁸ congregants learn to recognize the voice and presence of God in their everyday lives. Belief is decidedly unimportant here – no one seriously expects Jesus to drink his coffee, nor are participants concerned by the potential for heresy (*ibid.*, 80–84).

We might interpret these as expressive rituals, yet this underestimates what they do for congregants. Certainly, by chatting with Jesus over coffee, congregants can express their concerns, fears, or desires. Yet it would be misleading to conclude that these rituals are just forms of expression. Significantly, these rituals do not come naturally, even for evangelical believers. Engaging with God like this is the result of a ‘deliberate, conscious choice’ (*ibid.*, 76), which congregants make in the expectation that it will lead them to perceive God more regularly in their day-to-day life. Many of the congregants Luhrmann interviewed reported having to learn how to listen and speak to God – rituals like date night or the second cup of coffee are practical ways to do this. Many reported finding this kind of practice unnatural or awkward at first, before beginning to experience God’s voice and presence in daily life more naturally as these practices became more familiar. Clearly, then, these rituals do not just allow congregants to express themselves but play an active role in reconstituting the structure of perception.

To see the effect of these and related rituals in restructuring perception, we will consider two examples of congregants experiencing the voice of God in their lives. Hearing God is a diverse experience in evangelical communities which can be manifested in many ways. For many, God spoke through circumstances; others would perceive God’s voice as they read the Bible. As an example of the former, Luhrmann recounts the story of Madeline. Madeline and her husband had been trying to get pregnant without success and one evening in desperation Madeline prayed to God. As she was praying, Madeline saw a large full moon which she immediately took to be God’s answer. Later, Madeline had a positive pregnancy test but there was a risk that the test had delivered a false positive as a result of medication she had been taking. Dejected, she prayed again and saw through a small window another enormous full moon: ‘And I knew I was pregnant. I just knew. I just started laughing, God’s really funny. I mean, we have full moons every month. But I knew. I knew that God had answered me. And it was true. I was pregnant’ (*ibid.*, 57). Luhrmann correctly notes that, had Madeline not been pregnant, this moment would have lost its meaning for her (*ibid.*, 58). However, in this vignette we see how an experience that others might just regard as coincidence is interpreted as a deeply meaningful and spiritual experience conveying a message of hope and comfort from God.

The fact that Madeline perceived this experience as meaningful – indeed, as a message from God – demonstrates that Madeline’s perception of the world is structured by the anticipation of perceiving God’s voice in mundane or everyday experiences. Someone like Madeline is thus able to perceive divine communication in an event which, to someone whose world was not so structured, would not have the same significance. We might note here that these structuring effects do not influence *what* Madeline perceives but *how* she perceives it. The moon does not look physically different for Madeline but it now has a new salience and meaning – it looms larger in perception and presents new interpretative possibilities unavailable to others.

As Luhrmann observes, many North Americans do not naturally experience the world in this way: such a perspective is built over time through practices designed to help individuals hear God’s voice.¹⁹ Madeline anticipates hearing God speak through everyday circumstances because she has regularly engaged in ritual practices – such as date night or coffee with Jesus – which restructure the world into one in which God actively listens to our prayers and often speaks back, if only we can learn to understand him. This reformulated anticipatory perceptual structure is generated through embodied practices which

prepare the participant for a social engagement, in which one would normally expect to engage in a two-way conversation. The presence of a communicating other is imaginatively incarnated through a physical ritual of social contact. By pouring Jesus a cup of coffee and talking to him as one would a friend or partner, one acts out a world in which Jesus is present to hear and respond. One begins to anticipate Jesus speaking and this reframes the conceptual structure through which one interprets the world. For Madeline, this meant that, when she most needed to hear God's voice, she could find it in the way the world appeared to her.

A second example concerns hearing God speak through scripture. This experience is more than just the belief that the Bible contains the word of God: when evangelicals experience God's voice in scripture, 'they will have a physical, emotional response to a passage' (*ibid.*, 58). Phenomenologically, we might say that a certain passage takes on a particular salience which is felt affectively as it is read. Jane, another congregant, recounts reading the Book of Judges during her regular devotional Bible reading.

There's a part where God talks about raising up elders in the church to pray for the church. And I remember, it just stuck in my head and I knew that the verse was applicable to me. I didn't know why. It was one of those, let me put it in my pocket and figure it out later. [. . .] And a couple of days later a friend asked me to be on the prayer team, and it was like, wow, that's what it was. (*ibid.*, 58–59)

We might note here that Jane is already interpreting the Book of Judges to be about the church, despite being written centuries before the birth of Christ. Yet, for Jane, the story in Judges is not just about the church – it applies to Jane personally and directs her to a certain course of action. For this to be possible, Jane must live in a perceptual world in which God can use stories from Ancient Israel to speak to individuals such as herself in twenty-first-century America. Without this framing, the story could not have had such personal import.

A person like Jane does not have this perceptual framework innately but develops it through ritual practices such as Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. These are a set of practices in which one will imaginatively place oneself into the world of the Bible, to experience the stories as if one were physically present. For example, participants are encouraged to imagine how Jesus might have felt in the Garden of Gethsemane – what sights, sounds, and smells he might have experienced, the fear and anxiety he might have felt. In so doing, participants begin to recreate in their bodies the material reality of the Bible stories.²⁰ Such practices restructure the anticipatory horizon of the Bible, which is no longer perceived as just a text, or even as containing the word of God, but becomes a locus of possibility for directly and personally hearing God's voice. Through Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, the Bible is no longer just read or interpreted but felt – and the more these kinds of exercises are practised, the more one will begin to anticipate perceiving oneself within the story. Jane's perception of the Bible has thus been restructured through regular ritual participation in such a way that she now anticipates the Bible to speak to her directly in a way that is relevant to her present circumstances.

We might note here that this second example of perceptual restructuring is not as immediately connected to bodily ritual practice. Whereas coffee with Jesus or date night are visceral, physical practices which anticipate a communicative God by materially acting out a social encounter, Ignatian Spiritual Exercises appear to be much more imaginative – and less physical – rituals. However, this interpretation would underplay the physicality involved in the kind of imaginative practice demanded by the exercises. Although practised in the imagination, they involve a deeply corporeal engagement with the biblical text. By imagining various sensory experiences and emotional states,

the text becomes something which can be felt through the body, and one can feel oneself materially present in the text. To use Todes's language, engaging in such spiritual exercises involves adopting a certain kind of poise towards the biblical text which shapes the anticipatory structure of its perceptual appearance. It is thus no surprise that someone like Jane responds affectively to the Book of Judges and interprets it as relevant for her personally. As a result of regular ritual participation, Jane has developed a perceptual framework according to which the Bible is experienced as an affective and corporeal reality through which God regularly speaks to her personally. The Bible becomes a locus of potentially infinite meaning, through which new experiences and revelations can constantly be perceived.

As noted at the start of this section, the conclusions that we can draw from one study must remain limited. There is need for further philosophical engagement with ethnographic studies of ritual – preferably from a range of cultural, geographical, and religious contexts.²¹ Nevertheless, the analysis in this section should offer some support to the thesis outlined in this article. Ritual practice can restructure the perceptual world of participants, effecting a long-term and global transformation in how they perceive the world.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to present a positive account of ritual which challenges the idea that rituals are essentially or predominantly about either belief or expression. While it is true that rituals can involve the expression of beliefs or values, this is not exhaustive of their role in human life and not even their most important function. Rituals engage in world construction. As embodied habit-forming practices, rituals can modify the anticipatory structure of perception for individuals, thereby changing the appearance of their world. We must, therefore, conclude that religious rituals are not just reflective of a religious attitude but constructive of it. Rather than simply expressing values and beliefs already held by the ritual participant, rituals have a formative role in constructing the world in which these beliefs and values are formed, and thus are (at least partly) constructive of religious attitudes, identities, and practices.

Consequently, we should avoid thinking that religious rituals are just for the religious. Because rituals are formative, rather than just expressive, of beliefs and values, it follows that a religious ritual can be meaningful for someone who does not at the outset hold the beliefs and values inscribed in the ritual. Of course, the importance of habit and repeated practice means that one who partakes in a ritual for the first time will have a different experience from someone who has done so all their life. However, it does not follow that the uninitiated is necessarily excluded from meaningfully participating in the ritual. This perhaps challenges prevailing assumptions in philosophy of religion. Bennett-Hunter, for example, suggests that the practical uselessness of a religious ritual prohibits an atheist from meaningfully engaging with it (Bennet-Hunter (2017), 59). This is misleading: while an atheist will probably engage differently with a religious ritual (and it is by no means guaranteed that they will have a meaningful experience), being an atheist does not preclude one by default from authentic ritual participation.²² Thus, a phenomenology of ritual helps to connect cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of religion. A change in the appearance of the world, precipitated by ritual participation, is not strictly a cognitive experience – yet it is deeply interrelated with processes of belief formation and retention.

It should not be thought that our conclusions must remain limited to the religious sphere. Rituals pervade human life and, to the extent that they do, shape how we perceive the world. Hence, understanding the world-building capacity of rituals provides a further tool of analysis for understanding the relationships between religion, ritual, and power. As

our examples of monarchist rituals demonstrated, rituals can be employed by powerful individuals and institutions to shape not only what people do or believe but how they perceive the world, themselves, and others. It has been known since Foucault that rulers can use rituals as dramatic displays of power to reinforce their authority. What my analysis suggests is that rituals not only function to display power but also can shape the perceptual world in which individuals live. Thus, my approach can help to explain how the powerful can use rituals to make themselves appear as authoritative, make a situation appear as the norm, or close down opportunities for resistance.²³

While the foregoing might suggest that rituals are malign tools used to manipulate and coerce, we should also recognize the positive and life-affirming role that rituals can play in human life. Because of their world-building capacity, rituals can be used by individuals and groups to affirm their identities or bring restoration and healing. Grief researchers often describe the effect of bereavement as the destabilization or destruction of an individual's world, following the loss of a loved one around whom that world was structured (Attig (2010); Fuchs (2018); Ratcliffe (2020)). If the work of grief is the rebuilding or restructuring of a world, then rituals would seem to be indispensable to that process, and further research into their role in this process necessary.

A related point can be made regarding the function of rituals to construct and validate one's identity, especially in contexts where that identity is contested. For example, Ladelle McWhorter describes her own experience of planning a same-sex commitment ceremony in Richmond, VA in 2002: 'at times we suddenly saw something in an entirely new way, in new relation to other things. And consequently the world we live in changed' (McWhorter (2004), 91). McWhorter and her partner created their own same-sex commitment ceremony in a context where traditional rituals such as marriage were unavailable (and perhaps undesirable). By drawing upon and reimagining existing rituals, they constructed their own rite, which allowed them to perceive the world in new ways, and through which they could therefore affirm and further discover their identities.

For good or for ill, human beings deploy rituals to shape how they and others perceive the world. A phenomenological analysis of embodiment and perceptual habit can shed light on this deeply human activity and open up avenues for future research.

Notes

1. As Kevin Schilbrack argues, the concept of belief is necessary to ascribe rational agency to an individual and so cannot be entirely jettisoned from the study of religion (Schilbrack (2014), 57–58).
2. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.
3. As Wittgenstein notes, 'man is a ceremonial animal' (RFGB, 42). See also Gschwandtner (2019), 56.
4. Or consider James K. A. Smith's description of visiting a shopping mall as a liturgical, or ritual, experience (Smith (2009), 21–27).
5. Brian Clack (1996, 47–61) rightly notes that Wittgenstein is not properly described as an expressivist. However, the expressivist interpretation of Wittgenstein has strong currency and it will suffice for our purposes to take such a position as representative of a common approach to ritual.
6. Similarly, Gordon Graham argues that when I welcome you with a handshake, there is not a real welcome hidden in my mind which I try to communicate through the handshake. Rather, 'the handshake is the welcome' (Graham (2014), 163).
7. There have been some recent attempts to argue that rituals provide new kinds of knowledge for participants, such as ritual know-how (Cuneo (2014)) or experiential knowledge (Scrutton (2018)). While I support these efforts, it remains to be explained *how* rituals are capable of providing new knowledge.
8. It is worth noting that C. Jouco Bleeker thought that the use of Husserlian terms such as *epoché* or *eidos* in phenomenology of religion was no more than figurative (Cox (2006), 128).
9. Not all phenomenologists subscribed to this supernaturalism – Smart (1973) is a prime example. However, as Fitzgerald (2000, 54–71) argues, even the attempt to establish religion as an autonomous domain implicitly smuggles theological assumptions into the study of religions.

10. The method of *epoché*, understood here as the suspension of judgement and bias, has itself been criticized as an impossible task (Segal (1985), 108) and one which overlooks the situatedness of the observer (Flood (1999), 144), thereby obscuring power relations in research (Cox (2006), 215). Unfortunately, this is not a critique to which Blum attends.
11. This critique of belief is not universal – see, for example, Schilbrack (2014) and Blum (2018). However, even these advocates of religious belief accept that a certain Christian-influenced conception of propositional belief is not a cross-cultural category. My point here is that my argument (unlike Pascal's) is applicable to contexts where this Christian-influenced conception of propositional belief is not applicable.
12. Noë would contest this language of 'filling in', arguing instead that the errors are not perceptually present at all – so there is nothing to fill in (Noë (2004), 68–69).
13. In this sense, a ritual could be considered a kind of access condition for perceiving spiritual or divine realities. See Cottingham (2005), 12; Sherman (2014), 251–52.
14. I should note here that DeRoo uses the word expectation for this phenomenon, reserving the word anticipation to describe the active intending of a future event (DeRoo (2013), 41–53). Since my argument in this article does not engage with DeRoo's account of anticipation, and for the sake of consistency, I will use the terms anticipation and expectation interchangeably – the use of either term should be read as referring to what DeRoo calls expectation.
15. Since this remains a passive synthesis, the cup remains object-like, rather than a 'fully-fledged' object (DeRoo (2013), 32).
16. Further support for the importance of habit in perception can be found in Noë's analysis of various kinds of sensory manipulations and prostheses (Noë (2004), 26–28).
17. Strictly speaking, Lincoln makes this comment in reference to the communal recitation of the Nicene Creed, but the sentiment is equally applicable here.
18. I have written previously on the playfulness of rituals such as these in Williams (2018).
19. As Luhrmann notes, there are many books and training courses available for congregants to develop their ability to heed God's voice (Luhrmann (2012), 85).
20. Readers may note that there are differences between Ignatian exercises as practised by Jesuits and what is described here. The (not uncontroversial) evangelical appropriation and adaption of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises reflects certain priorities of North American evangelicalism. The history of the exercises and the subsequent development within evangelicalism can be found in Luhrmann (2012), 172–84.
21. To this end, I support Mikel Burley's argument that philosophers of religion would benefit by drawing upon existing ethnographic studies of religion in their work (Burley (2018), 11).
22. Indeed, empirical work on conversion shows that community participation tends to precede the adoption of a group's beliefs and values (Lofland and Stark (1965); Gallagher (1993); Hermansen (2014)).
23. I write this not long after the death of Elizabeth II and accession of Charles III. Where previously some commentators wondered whether Elizabeth's death would inaugurate a national conversation about whether the United Kingdom should become a republic, carefully choreographed rituals following the queen's death closed down even the possibility of this conversion. Charles's accession was a *fait accompli*, a done deal, and he was from then on to be perceived as king.

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