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Bibliography

1. Pailin, David A. 1994. "The Confused and Confusing Story of Natural Religion." *Religion* no. 24:199–212.
"References to 'natural religion' are often confused because those who use the term do not appreciate that they mean different things by the notion. This article

identifies eleven ways, some of which have important sub-divisions, in which the notion of 'natural religion' has been used, and gives illustrations of these uses, particularly by reference to British publications in the 17th and 18th centuries.
This paper was originally subtitled 'What all people do believe, or did believe, or ought to believe, or would believe if they understood correctly: part of the confused and confusing story of Natural Religion'. In it I seek to identify some of the various ways in which the notion of natural religion has been understood, mainly by reference to material published in Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, developing and augmenting suggestions in my *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Pailin, 1984). When these materials are scrutinized, the description 'natural religion' is found to have been used to designate at least eleven significantly different notions, some of which have significant sub-divisions.
In practice, furthermore, authors writing about what they call 'natural religion' are not infrequently found on examination to be combining elements, more or less coherently, from two or more of these distinct notions. Before, however, I turn to outlining these notions, I should add that I do not pretend that my list is exhaustive. I look forward to learning about other kinds of 'natural religion' that are to be found in the literature."
References
Pailin, David A., *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in seventeenth- and eighteenth century Britain* , Manchester, Manchester University Press 1984.

2. Pals, Daniel L. 1986. "Reductionism and Belief: An Appraisal of Recent Attacks on the Doctrine of Irreducible Religion." *The Journal of Religion* no. 66:18–36.
"We are in a position to draw some conclusions. Despite the vigor and diversity of recent attacks, there is no present cause either to discard or revise the theory of irreducible religion insisted upon by Otto, Eliade, and others. On close scrutiny, the criticism turns out to be misplaced or unconvincing. More succintly, we should note the following:
1. There is no reason to suppose, with Penner and Yonan, that opponents of reductionism are merely jousting with a phantom. To be sure, reductions are theories, but they are theories about things. Insofar
as classic reductionists traced belief exclusively to subconscious need or social circumstance, they tended to undermine those concepts of human freedom and responsibility which anchor the claims of irreducible religion. No doubt it is true that the older reductionism of Freud and Marx and Durkheim proved unsuccessful. But however that may be, the challenge of reductionism is a real one. The quarrel cannot be dismissed as illusion.
2. There is no reason to suppose, with Dudley and Segal, that irreducible religion is little more than an arbitrary and unproductive dogma.
(...)
The "results" produced by four generations of Religionswissenschaft would seem to speak for themselves.
3. There is finally no reason to suppose, with Segal, that belief is an intruder in the discussion, or that irreducible religion is a fiction because all explanations outside those furnished by belief itself turn out to be reductive.
(...)
As Nagel noted over a generation ago, there is nothing inevitable or *de jure* about recourse to reductive explanations, or for that matter irreducible ones. The case for reduction, like the case to be made against it, will have to stand on the evidence. If we judge by that standard, and by it the present state of the opposition, the doctrine of irreducible religion is in no immediate danger." (pp. 35-36)

3. ———. 1987. "Is Religion a 'sui generis' phenomenon?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 55:259–282.
"Is religion then entitled to designation as a sui generis phenomenon?
Absolutely, it would seem, if it is conceived in the same heuristic terms that apply to other disciplines and if it is employed as an axiomatic guide for research. That

modest rationale may well appear pale in comparison with speculative justifications of the sort that have been offered in the past. But modesty sometimes is a scientific virtue as well as a personal one. And in this connection it certainly offers the best antidote to the trend toward skepticism in current theory and the best prospect of insuring the rightful autonomy of the discipline. For the science of religion makes its most original contribution to understanding when it follows the lead of its own axiom and, instead of simply capitulating to other paradigms (however instructive they too may be), continues to train its inquiries on what is religious in religion." (p. 278)

4. ———. 2020. "Reductionism in Retrospect: Assessing Robert Segal's "In Defense of Reductionism" (1983) Almost Four Decades On." In *Explaining, Interpreting, and Theorizing Religion and Myth: Contributions in Honor of Robert A. Segal* , edited by Roubekas, Nickolas P. and Ryba, Thomas, 23–41. Leiden: Brill.
"In the March 1983 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* , Robert Segal published an arresting, provocative article entitled "In Defense of Reductionism" (Segal 1983)." (p. 23)
(...)
"In what follows, I offer a brief, compressed review of the main lines of argument originally pursued in the "Defense," both as a reminder of just how much Segal's article accomplished back in its day and in appreciation of certain issues it raised that are still much in play, even if less prominently noticed. In aggressively defending reductionism, Segal arguably accomplished at least five things of note.
(1) He discerned and delineated the limitations to Eliade's version of the nonreductionist precept: the claim that "religion must be studied on its own terms."
(2) He offered a pointed critique of both the comparative method and phenomenology as theoretical stances no more suited than Eliade's to offer a defense of nonreductionism.
(3) In brief strokes, he also framed an intriguing, if less developed, critique of Max Weber's "Verstehen" as a methodological principle also insufficient to the task of providing an anchor for nonreductionism.
(4) He managed further to expose as illusory the claim that reductionist explanations of religious belief and behavior raise merely verbal issues that have no consequence for the "truth claims" of religious believers.
(5) He proceeded to argue forcibly (though I think here not quite as successfully) for "the superiority of reductionism," not only as an interpretive paradigm that non-believing interpreters of religion must employ, but as a premise that imposes itself even on believing interpreters, who can escape it only by illegitimately intruding their prior theological convictions into the properly non-theological study of religion as practiced in the modern academy." (p. 25)

5. Panikkar, Raimon. 1994. "Are There Anonymous Religions? The Name and the Thing." In *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990* , edited by Bianchi, Ugo, 889–895. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
"This contribution attempts at a particular philosophical analysis of the general theme of the Congress: *The Notion of Religion in Comparative Research* . I take philosophy to be not just 'theoretical' speculation, but also practical, and thus, political wisdom(1). The thesis of this paper affinns that religion in the singular is neither a thing, an entity, nor a concept, a notion, but a name, a word. It further affirms that this affirmation becomes the most plausible one due to the crosscultural approach to the 'phenomenon religion'. And it finally suggests that the centuries-old problem of the universals plays here a fundamental role(2)." (p. 889)
(1) For the backgrotmd of these reflections cf. my previous writings: *Religione e Religioni,* Brescia: Morcelliana 1964; *Have 'Religions' the Monopoly on Religion?* Journal of Ecumenical Studies XI, 3, pp. 515-517; *The lntrareligious Dialogue,* New York: Paulist 1978; *Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion* , Man and World, XIII. n2 3/4, 1980, pp. 357-383; *The Challenge of Religious Studies to*

the Issues of Our Times , Foreword to S. Eastham, *Nucleus* (Reconnecting Science and Religion in the Nuclear Age), Santa Fe, New Mexico: Beard & Co. 1987, pp. xiii-xxxviii; *Words and Terms in Preedom, Progress and Society. Essays in llonour of Prof K.S. Murthy* , Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1987, pp. 330-350; *What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?* in G. Larson and E. Deutsch (eds.), *lnterpreting Across Boundaries* (New Essays in Comparative Philosophy), Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988, pp. 116-136; *Thinking and Being* in *Du Vrai, Du Beau, Du Bien. Etudes Philosophiques presentèes au Professeur Evanghelos A. Moutsopoulos,* Paris: Vrin 1990, pp. 39-42.
(2) From Heracleitos, as represented by Hermogenes in Plato' *Cratylus* to W. van Quine almost every philosopher has touched upon this problem, which ultimately refers to the relationship between thought, expressed in names, and reality. Indian Philosophy is equally concerned with the similar question. Cf. (because less known) Raja Ram Dravid, *The Problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy* , Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1972.

6. Pearson, Birger A. 1994. "Is Gnosticism a Religion?" In *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990* , edited by Bianchi, Ugo, 105–114. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
"My own view is that Gnosticism can be viewed as a distinct historical phenomenon; indeed, in its developed form, asa religion in its own right comparable to "Judaism" (Ἰουδαϊσμός 2 Macc 2:21) and "Christianity" (Χριστιανισμός: Ignatius Magn. l 0.1; *Phld* . 6.1; *Rom* . 3.3). (5) The term "Gnosticism", in this view (6) is just another word for "the Gnostic religion", () of vvhich the Mandaeans (="Gnostics") (8) are a special instance, still surviving in the marshlands of Iraq and Iran. (9)
In developing this argument I first want to refer to my colleague Ninian Smart's discussion of what are the concrete characteristics of "a religion." In his most recent treatment of this issue he sets forth seven "dimensions" of a religion. (10) They are (not in his order):
1. doctrinal/philosophical (beliefs, etc.)
2. mythic/narrative ("story")
3. practical/ritual (cult, etc.)
4. experiential/emotional (mysticism, etc.)
5. ethical/legal (norms of behavior)
6. social/institutional (organizational structure)
7. material (iconography, etc.) (11)
I find these categories applicable to a discussion of the Gnostic religion, and I have therefore chosen to organize my analysis of Gnosticism according to Smart's paradigm. For my source material I utilize, tacitly or explicitly, the primary Gnostic evidence, especially the Coptic texts from Nag Hammadi. (12) Limitations of space require me to restrict my discussion to the most essential points." (pp. 105-106)
(5) l argued this point briefly in the Introduction to my recent book, *Gnoslicism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* , Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, 6-9. The present paper is a development of this argument in greater detail.
(6) For a criticism of the use of this term in scholarship see Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis. The Nature and History of Gnosticism* . trans. R. McL. Wilson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark / San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983, 56.
(7) Cf. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* , 2nd ed., Boston: Beacon, 1%3.
(8) Mandaic (E. Aramaic) *manda* =γνῶσις, "knowledge".
(9) On the Mandaeans see esp. Rudolph, *Gnosis* . 343-66, and literature cited there.
(10) Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions. Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.10-21.
(11) This dimension has been added since his previous discussion of the issue. See e.g. his discussion of six dimensions of a religion in *Worldviews: Cross Cultural*

Explorations of Human Beliefs . New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1983, 7-8.

7. Penner, Hans H. 2000. "Interpretation." In *Guide to the Study of Religion* , edited by Braun, Willi and McCutcheon, Russell T., 57–71. New York: Cassell.
"Summary.
There are three fundamental assumptions in the history of hermeneutics that remain central to the study of religion.
1. Experience as lived experience (*Erlebnis*) is a unified primary interpretation of life. It is this lived experience that must be grasped by the scholar. For purposes of study we may focus on different modalities of lived experience, such as ‘‘‘poetic’’’ or ‘‘estranged” or an experience of “the sacred.” Scholars of religion have usually described the experience of the sacred as “‘a total “cosmic,” "ultimate" or ‘‘transcendental’’ experience. However, the validity of the concept of lived experience as the given and the scholar’s interpretation of that experience are left either unresolved or never raised.
Lived experience, together with consciousness and interpretation, is thoroughly and radically historical. This thesis leads us into the inescapable problems of relativism. The question of truth is either placed in “‘brackets” or dissolved into incommensurable truths of different world-views. Eliade, as you may recall, dealt with this problem by calling it a “fall into history,” "a second fall" which he thought to be the mark of modernity (Eliade 1954).
For better or for worse, interpretive theory since Dilthey views the history of science with suspicion. The debate about whether the study of religion is or is not a ‘‘science of religion’ is the best evidence for this suspicion. The contemporary emphasis on pluralism, dialogue and discourse, rather than on analysis, comparison, universal rules and unity are some of the products of the suspicion.
There is one question that remains fundamental: how would one go about confirming that the basic premise of what we could call the history of hermeneutics is true? Sellars called this basic premise ce the myth of the given” (Sellars 1997)." (pp. 65-66)
References
Eliade, Mircea 1954. *The Myth of the Eternal Return* , Willard E. Trask (trans.). Bollingen Series, vol. 46. New York: Pantheon; original French edn, 1949.
Sellars, Wilfrid 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* , With an Introduction by RichardRorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

8. ———. 2002. "You don’t read a myth for information." In *Radical Interpretation in Religion* , edited by Frankenberry, Nancy, 152–170. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
"I think the Tylorian tradition is on the right track. E. B. Tylor may have been mistaken in his stress on religion as a false science, but he was right in thinking that religion, myth, and ritual do indeed claim to provide us with information and do entail truth-conditions. I fully endorse the basic definition of religion that Tylor, Spiro, and Lawson, among others, have defended. My revised version reads as follows:
1 *Religion is a communal system of propositional attitudes and practices that are related to superhuman agents* . Explanation: “superhuman agents” refers to beings that can do things you and I cannot do. The term does not automatically refer to “God,” “theism,” the “supernatural,” or “the sacred,” still less to metaphysical or theological notions such as “the transcendent,” “the ultimate,” or “the unconditioned.”
2 *A myth is a story with a beginning, middle, and end which was or is transmitted orally about the deeds of superhuman agents* . Explanation: no story, no superhuman being(s), no myth. The salience of “oral transmission” places certain genres, such as novels and science fiction, out of bounds as myths.
3 *Ritual is a system of communal actions consisting of both verbal and non-verbal interactions with a superhuman agent or agents* . Explanation: most habits are not rituals. Ants, bees, birds, and dolphins do not perform rituals since, as far as we

know, although they can communicate, they neither interact with superhuman agents nor have a belief system. The life of an ascetic is not excluded from this definition." (pp. 168-169)

9. Penner, Hans H., and Yonan, Edward A. . 1972. "Is a Science of Religion Possible?" *The Journal of Religion* no. 52:107–133.
"Debate in the study of religion outside the social sciences continues to revolve around the meaning of *Religionswissenschaft* (1) The discussion involves a consideration of such questions as: Can religion be defined? Is religion irreducible? Can religion be explained? Is there a special method of understanding religion?(2) The discussion of these questions often appears deadlocked because of a lack of clarification concerning the exact meaning of the key terms being employed. Nevertheless, there is a recognition of the essential importance of the problems of definition, reduction, explanation, and understanding. The truth of this observation can be easily confirmed by a quick survey of books and articles dealing with the study of religion." (p. 107)
(...)
"The problems and confusions of "definition," "reduction," "explanation," and "understanding" that we have attempted to explicate deserve the highest priority for discussion in the contemporary study of religion. For we are convinced that without valid definitions and theories, a science of religion is impossible. We are fully aware that there is a prevailing point of view which argues that a science of religion is not only impossible but unnecessary. Everything we have said is obviously irrelevant to this point of view. We wish to point out, however, that our argument checks the Fabian tactic of winning a methodological battle by avoiding it."
(1) By *Religionswissenschaft* wee mean the science of religion as a discipline which restricts itself to the study of religions as such. We find the translation of the term as the "history of religions" too narrow, since it usually excludes the study of Judaism and Christianity. This science, however, is not to be confused with anthropology, psychology, or sociology, since their primary concern is not the analysis of religious data.
(2) Cf. Joachim Wach, "Introduction: The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions (*Religionswissenschaft*)," in *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 1-19; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Gibt es ein Verstehen fremder Religionen?" in *Joachim Wach-Vorlesungen* ed. Ernst Benz (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), vol. I; Erwin R. Goodenough, "Religionswissenschaft," *Numen* 6-7 (I959-6o): 77-95; Willard G. Oxtoby, " *Religionswissenschaft* Revisited," in Religions in Antiquity ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 590-608.

10. Petersmann, Hubert. 2002. "Ευσέβεια, θρησκεία and *religio* . An etymological analysis of three disputed terms." In *Lingua et Religio. Ausgewählte Kleine Schriften zur antiken Religionsgeschichte auf sprachwissenschaftlicher Grundlage* , edited by Bernd, Hessen, 177–186. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
"While extensive philological research work has made clear the usage and the semantics of the words ευσέβεια (also θεσέβεια), θρησκεία and *religio* in Greek andl Roman literature, their prehistoric meaning, whence the later sense of these terms has developed, is not transparent at all.1 This is due to the fact that one has not paid too much attention to their etymologies, and thus the problems attached have not yet been definitely solved. By renewing these highly disputed questions the following paper hopes to contribute to a more appropriate understanding of the original sense of the Greek and Latin words for religion, which beyond any doubt belonged to the most important concepts of ancient Hellas and Rome." (p. 177)
(...)
"Intensive and respectful awe for the supernatural is not only a typical feature of Roman religion - although there it is most obvious -, but it is common to man's belief in divine powers in general. It was, therefore, also an essential part of the ancient Greeks' religious feelings. This is expressed by the words ευσέβεια and θεσέβεια.

These words, however, semantically do not cover the same large scope as the Latin word *religio* does, since, as already Wilamowitz justly observed, the Greeks originally did not have a comprehensive proper term for this concept. Ευσέβεια occurs for the first tirne in Greek Tragedy, θεσέβεια, however, not before Xenophon (*Anah* . 2,6,26): the latter word in the sense of 'service or fear of God', 'religiousness', whereas ευσέβεια did not only signify the Greek's reverence towards their gods, but also towards the parents, thus being in some way an expression corresponding to Roman *pietas* (cf. *LSJ* [Liddell, Scott, Jones, *Ancient Greek Lexicon*] 731 s.v.)." (p. 180)
References

Wilamowitz-Mollendorf, U. von, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* , vol. I^3-II^3 , Darmstadt 1959.

11. Peterson, Derek R., and Walhof, Darren R., eds. 2002. *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History* . New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
"The present volume traces the contested processes through which nationalists, colonial officials, and secular scholars formalized religious practices and doctrines in order to define political constituencies and claim authority. The book is organized in three sections. The first section explores the invention of religion as a strategy of marginalization, a way of hollowing out the political thought of others. Representing religious practices and ideas as otherworldly and apolitical is a useful means of truncating their political meanings and social functions, as the essays on Buddhism, African Traditional Religion, and Haredism demonstrate. But while some religions were defined as apolitical belief systems, others were made into templates for nation building. As the essays on the Ottoman Empire, Japan, and India in the second section show, the reformation of religion was often coextensive with the imagination of nationalism. Nation builders purged religions of their divisive elements in order to define religious practice as patriotic duty. The third section explores how tourists, pilgrims, and others resist elites' efforts to categorize and contain the meanings of religious symbols and ideas. In secular Turkey and in the southern United States, pilgrims and tourists deconstruct museum exhibits by turning religious displays into objects of spiritual veneration. Taken together, the essays collected in this volume reconstruct these contrary, contested genealogies of religion as a way of linking the study of religion to the study of national and colonial governmentality.(6)" (p. 2)
(6) See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* , ed. Graham Burchell et al. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 87-104.

12. Pivovarov, Daniil V. 2015. "On Universal Definition of Religion." *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences* no. 1:52–63.
Abstract: "Eclecticism, sophistry and dialectics as methods of determining the essence of religion are mutually compared. It is proved that the definition of V. S. Solovyov – "religion is a human relationship with the Absolute"- is universal and meets the requirements of dialectics. It is proposed that there are the objective and subjective levels of religiosity. With respect to the subjective religiosity the author defines religion as a form of individual and public consciousness which sacralizes the human relationship with the Absolute. The main question of any religion, based on this definition, is formulated."

13. Platvoet, Jan G. 1990. "The definers defined: Traditions in the definition of religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 2:180–212.
"This article surveys three traditions in defining religion. It proposes an operational definition in the Tylorian tradition expanded with the definer proposed by the anthropologist Jan van Baal, to wit, the non-verifiability/non-falsifiability of the addressable "meta-empirical reality." Dealing with religion as a social institution, I offer tools for the analysis of religion as postulated communicative events within

believed networks of relationships between believers and their non-verifiable/nonfalsifiable beings or (addressable) reality." (p. 180)
(...)
"In conclusion
In proposing this definer, I am aware that I am also defining myself, a Western scholar of the late 20th century. I am taking the definer which I propose to be the distinctive element of religions, holding, as I do, that the meta-empirical beings of religions, and the communication of believers with them can neither be verified nor falsified. The analysis of definitions of religion is mainly the study of the scholars who have proposed or used them. But it is more than the study of their idiosyncrasies. It reveals shifts in paradigms. The study of religions in faculties of theology and departments of religious studies was born from the momentous shift from an exclusive to an inclusive theological position. The empirical study of religions emerged after 1960 from an equally momentous shift, from an ideological or theological to a non-axiomatic use of science. It is hoped that the study of religions will flourish on it." (pp. 196-197)

14. ———. 1999. "Contexts, concepts & contests: Towards a pragmatics of defining 'religion'." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts) Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 463–516. Leiden: Brill.
"In this concluding article, I advocate a pragmatic, anti-essentialist and anti-hegemonic approach to defining 'religion' and 'religions' as the core concepts of the Science(s) of Religion(s). The reasons for this plea are several. One is that past academic research on 'the religions of humankind' has shown them to possess not only very complex, but also widely different contents, shapes and functions. They present a much too disorderly and indistinct collection of dense and diverse cultural phenomena for them to be adequately defined, for a long time from now, in any definitively 'essential'(ist), i.e., universally valid, way by a substantive definition of religion.(2) At least, not by one that has a defining trait, or difiniens, (3) which they can all be shown to have in common in a way that will convince the global community of scholars of religions." (p. 463)
(...)
"Below I present an outline of a contextual semantic history of 'religion' from ancient *religio* to modern 'religions'. It runs from the late 3rd century bce to the middle of the 18th century CE when its modern meaning seems to have been unambiguously established. I will deal successively with the Roman roots of *religio* , the patristic polemics surrounding it, its medieval meanings, its early modern shifts, and finally the transition to its modern meaning. The outline covers two millennia, from Plautus to Hume." (p. 466)
(2) On 'substantive' (versus 'functional') definitions of religions, cf. Snoek in this volume.
(3) On the *definiens* as the formal element in definitions of religions, cf. Platvoet 1990, 1994.
References
Bianchi, U., (ed.) 1994, The Notion if 'Religion' in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings if the XVIth IAHR Congress. Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.
Platvoet, J.G., 1990, 'The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion', in *Method & Theory in the Study if Religion* 2, 2: 180-212.
---, 1994, 'Defining the Definers: Non-verifiability/Non-falsifiability as a Definiens in an Operational Definition of Religion', in Bianchi 1994: 701-712.
Snoek, J.A.M. Defining 'religions' as the domain of study of the empirical sciences of religions, this volume pp. 313-333.

15. ———. 1999. "To Define or Not to Define: The Problem of the Definition of Religion." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 245–265. Leiden: Brill.
"In this contribution, I propose to deal firstly with the problem of whether 'religion' can actually be defined. Are not the religions of men so diverse, and are they not each such poly-morphic, polysemantic and poly-functional phenomena, that it is an

illusion to conceive that they will ever, collectively or singly, be adequately reflected in a definition acceptable to all scholars of religions, let alone one that is unambiguously accepted as universally valid for the whole of human religious history in the full diachronic depth of at least 100,000 years and its world wide synchronic diversity? My answer is twofold. Firstly, such a definition must indeed be deemed to be extremely unlikely, if not downright impossible. Secondly, however, definition also has more modest uses which may turn definitions of religion, that have shed this universalist ambition, into quite useful tools in the academic study of religions. In the second section, I shall address the question of why, if a definition of religion turned out to be merely is useful research tool, one should bother to define 'religion' at all. Can one not better dispense with it altogether? My answer will be that one may indeed well dispense with it, but that, despite its very modest usefulness, it would still be unwise to do so. In my third section, I shall discuss these modest uses of definitions of religion, as well as their strategic implications.
In the fourth and last section, I shall discuss the operational, or instrumental, definition of 'religion' which I have developed for my particular line of studies as an illustration of the purposes which a definition of religion may serve in the academic study of religions." (p. 247)

16. Preus, J. Samuel. 1992. "The Reified Heart in Seventeenth-century Religion." In *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality / La religion dans l'histoire. Le mot, 1'idée, la réalité* , edited by Despland, Michel and Vallée, Gérard, 45–56. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
"My focus here is English Puritans of the seventeenth century, although I think this line of inquiry could be extended to parallel inward-oriented or pietistic movements elsewhere in Europe. More particularly, I shall focus on the Puritans in their use of the Bible, because there one can watch this process —this reification of interiority —developing, exemplified in the works of Baxter and Bunyan but evidenced in thousands of seventeenth-century sermons, pamphlets and books. I am interested in discovering how, at this time and place, the great Protestant experiment of reforming individuals, as well as social and religious life in general, on the basis of a book —how that theory worked in actual use —in the lives of devout and literate Protestants — of whom there were suprisingly many at this time! In other words, my focus here is not hermeneutics, but the more unequivocally religious act of divination (cf. J. Z. Smith, and Loewe and Blacker)." (p. 46, anote omitted)
(...)
"Thus we see the term "religion" rising of necessity to describe an increasingly complex world, beginning with the internal religious rivalry among Christians (as a result of which rival forms of Christianity are referred to as "religion [s]"); added to it the growing realization that Christianity is only one among the world's religions, or possibly, one among the universe's! Bunyan's colourful recognition of this new reality (new at least to the ordinary layperson) is expressed thus: "Everyone doth think his own Religion rightest, both Jews, and Moors, and Pagans; and how if all our Faith, and Christ, and Scriptures, should be but a think-so too?" (Bunyan 1962:31).
Reification has nothing necessarily to do with alienation from religious life, with an outsider's perspective, or with attention only to externals. In fact, it is a fundamental mistake to drive a wedge between "inner" and "outer," as though the essential subject matter for the study of religion is the inner life, while externals are peripheral. This dualism accurately reflects a certain kind of theology, of course, but it radically falsifies the data of religion,(19) and tends to inject normative considerations prematurely into the study of the facts." (p. 51, two notes omitted)
References
Bunyan, John. 1962. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). Edited by Roger Sharrock. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

17. Puett, Michael. 2024. "Religion." *History of Humanities* no. 9:33–43.

Abstract: "The concept of religion has recently become an object of strong critique. As numerous studies have argued, the very concept comes from a particular reading of a particular tradition, and the attempt to build a field of study based upon such a restricted concept has resulted in, at best, a highly ethnocentric body of knowledge and, at worst, an implicitly imperialistic one. This essay attempts to respond to such critiques by arguing that instead of rejecting the concept, we need to resurrect it by building upon the indigenous understandings that emerged in other traditions to develop a more global vision."

18. Roubekas, Nickolas P. 2019. "Thrēskeia. From Etymology to Ideology and the Academic Study of Ancient Greek Religion." *Journal of Hellenic Religion* no. 12:39–59.
Abstract: "Within the last five years, two influential books on the utilization, adoption, or dismissal of the term ‘religion’ when one studies the ancient world have brought about serious questions for the overall study of ancient Mediterranean religiosity. Brent Nongbri’s *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (2013) and Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin’s *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (2016) deal with the quintessential terms that are translated as ‘religion’ from the Graeco-Roman world, that is, *religio* (Latin) and *thrēskeia* (Greek). Although the former term has been extensively discussed in various publications, the latter is hardly the topic of research. The article offers a comprehensive etymological discussion of the term *thrēskeia* (θρησκεία) as encountered in very few ancient sources (primarily in Plutarch) while then proceeding to a theoretical discussion of the perceived ‘problem’ that is identified as an issue of an ideological chasm among scholars rather than an actual existing ‘problem’ to be resolved. The article concludes with a proposal to overcome such perceived issues that will allow scholars to study the Hellenic religious practices and ideas without being obliged to also ‘justify’ their field of inquiry and research."

19. ———. 2022. *The Study of Greek and Roman Religions: Insularity and Assimilation* . New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
"Some scholars have argued that defining religion is not that much of a Sisyphean task if the definition itself will be a stipulative one, whereas others have insisted that only by defining religion substantively can scholars then proceed to the explanatory quest.(9) Below I cite three appealing, in my view, definitions that correspond to such a perspective and may function as examples to define our subject matter—religion—in a way that is applicable mutatis mutandis across time and space, allowing for the subsequent theorization of the phenomenon, including its place within the Greek and Roman cultural milieus:
1. Religion is “an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings” (Spiro 1966: 96).(10)
2. “Religion, then, consists of *beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose* ” (Bruce 2011: 112, emphasis in original).
3. “Religion is a cultural system and a social institution that governs and promotes ideal interpretations of existence and ideal praxis with reference to transempirical powers or beings” (Geertz 1997: 39).
(...)
Other scholars, of course, may adopt another or promote their own definition of religion and proceed with it in examining Greek and Roman religious ideas and practices. But rejecting, avoiding, or even scorning the need to define the very category that shapes the subfield of Greek and Roman “religion(s)” generates serious problems in deciding what is and what is not “religious” within any given cultural context—including, of course, that of the Greeks and the Romans." (p. 59)
(9) E.g., see Bruce (2011) and Jensen (2020: 6–7).
(10) This definition was also endorsed by the always skeptical Jonathan Z. Smith. See Braun and McCutcheon (2018: 52), although not without some reservations (e.g., see p. 31 in the same work).
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Geertz, Armin W. 1997. “Theory, Definition, and Typology: Reflections on Generalities and Underrepresentative Realism.” *Tememos* 33: 29–47.
Jensen, Jeppe Sinding. 2020. *What Is Religion?* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
Spiro, Melford E. 1966. “Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation.” In Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* , 85–126. London: Routledge.

20. ———. 2023. "Historicizing and Deconstructing “Religion”: A Short Overview of a Persisting Problem." In *Transformation of Religion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* , edited by Danz, Christian and Deibl, Jakob Helmut, 19–33. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh.
Abstract: "In the last decades, scholars of the academic study of religion have vigorously called for a critical study of the very subject matter of the field, viz. “religion.” As the argument goes, “religion” as a taxon is proven to be inadequate, problematic, and occasionally harmful as a scholarly classificatory tool. This essay offers a brief overview of the said problematization by focusing on some recent works by scholars primarily working within the Anglophone world – whence most such representatives come from. The essay identifies two pivots in such argumentations and debates, namely, the historicization and the deconstruction of “religion” – with some scholars calling for a possible reconstruction of the term."

21. Rüpke, Jörg 2014. *Religion: Antiquity and Its Legacy* . New York: I. B. Tauris.
"What is religion?
One cannot talk about an ancient religion in a scholarly context as something that can be either identified in its own right or found hidden beneath other cultural practices.
(...)
"It is no improvement to substitute the plural ‘religions’ for the singular ‘religion’. (7) This use of ‘religions’ (to be treated in Chapter I) goes even further in suggesting the existence of a plurality of self-contained and neatly separated religious traditions or systems on the model of early modern Christian denominations.(8) By contrast, this book aims to demonstrate both the internal pluralism and the characteristic lack of clear borders of Roman religious practices within their ancient Mediterranean context. The coexistence of private or familial religious loyalties to special groups such as Bacchanalian cults is part of a religious ‘division of labour’, and represents a range of religious options and activities on different social levels. Only the political elite identified such activities as an alternative to a so-called ‘religion of the Roman people’ (Livy 39.13). The conflict resulting from the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BC, when people engaging in a cult of Dionysus/Bacchus were persecuted as a political conspiracy, neatly illustrates how ancient religion could have a history of its own. Such a ‘history of religion’ is an idea that will be looked into further in Chapter II." (pp. 7-8)
(7) Cf. Beard, Mary, John North and Simon Price, Religions of Rome. 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1998).
(8) For a history of the term ‘religion’ see Smith, Jonathan Z., ‘Religion, religions, religious’, in C.M. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 269–84.

22. Rüpke, Jörg. 2021. "A Methodology for the Historiography of Ancient Religion." *Revista de historiografía* no. 36:13–32.
Abstract: "Starting from a discussion about the usefulness of a historical approach to ancient religion, I propose basing the historiography of ancient religion on a set of three concepts, replacing three others that have been widely used. First, I contend that we need to shift our focus from questions of identity to questions of agency, not least in the face of earlier traditions of historiography of regions outside the imperial

capitals. The application of an agentic perspective entails a further unavoidable consequence. The concept of “religions” must be replaced by that of “lived religion”, even for the past, once again shifting the focus to the local and the entire range of social agents and their cultural production. This agentic and material focus is further supplemented by a spatial one. Thus, I propose moving away from the widespread focus on civic religion in cities to embrace the perspective of urban religion. Lastly, I briefly touch upon the problem of the selection of forms of contemporary historiography of religion."

23. ———. 2021. "What Comes to an End When a “Religion” Comes to an “End”? Reflections on a Historiographical Trope and Ancient Mediterranean History of Religion." *Numen* no. 68:204–229.
Abstract: "This article argues that the neglect of narratives about the end of religious traditions is due to a complex entanglement of our positions as historical narrators and specifics of the sources for histories of religions, that is of emic and academic narrators.
Typically, academic histories are not only based on emic narratives, but also tend to accept their conceptual frameworks with regard to the unities of description. It will be shown that such an entanglement has consequences for the neglect of the end of religious practices or groups. Against this background an analytical grid for change and discontinuation of different dimensions of “religion” will be offered and exemplified in an analysis of the “end of Paganism” in the late ancient Roman Empire. The most
problematic implications of such narratives, the article will argue, are assumptions about the coherence of the religious protagonists brought center-stage."

24. Rüpke, Jörg, and Woolf, Greg. 2021. "Introduction: Living Roman Religion." In *Religion in the Roman Empire* , edited by Rüpke, Jörg and Woolf, Greg, 9–24. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.
"The Idea of Religion
Before outlining our own approach some comment is appropriate on how we use the terms Religion, Religions and Religious since there has been much discussion in recent years of how appropriate these ideas are to describe ancient and non-Christian ritual and belief in particular." (p. 11)
(...)
"But it is not the notion of religion that we have to drop. In demand is a concept of religion that enables us to describe the aforementioned changes in the social location and individual significance of religion. This can successfully be achieved by conceiving of religion from the standpoint of the individual and his or her social involvement. Only in rare instances does such lived ancient religion coalesce into networks and organized systems, to resemble what we normally categorize as religions, expressed in written texts that may then develop an enduring autonomous existence of enormous proportions.
How, then, is religion to be modelled? We understand the religion of the epoch in question as comprising the situative inclusion of agents (whether they be described as divine or gods, demons or angels, the dead or the immortal) who are in a particular respect beyond or above that situation. Above all, however, their presence, their collaboration, their significance in a particular situation is not simply an unquestioned given: other human participants in the situation might regard them as invisible, silent, inactive, or simply absent, perhaps even non-existent.
Succinctly, religious activity is present at a time and a place where, in a particular situation, at least one human individual includes such agents in his or her communication with other humans, whether by merely referring to those agents or by directly addressing them." (pp. 11.12)

25. Saler, Benson. 1977. "Supernatural as a Western Category." *Ethos* :31–53.
"The problems that arise in employing "supernatural" in highly abstract and general definitions of "religion" are complex and cannot be dealt with here. I do wish to point out, however, that more than a few anthropologists seem to rest their

definitions of "religion" on "beliefs" in "supernatural" beings or powers, and they often do so without saying very much about what they understand by either "beliefs" or "supernatural." That, I think, is doubly regrettable. Despite the attentions rendered it by powerful minds, from Saint Augustine through H. H. Price, belief remains one of the most intractable problems in philosophy (for discussions of various aspects of that problem as they relate to anthropological concerns, see Hahn 1973, Needham 1972, and Saler 1967, 1972, 1973, 1974). And supernatural, as this brief paper indicates, is itself a category of some complexity and subtlety." (p. 51)

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26. ———. 1987. "*Religio* and the Definition of Religion." *Cultural Anthropology* no. 2:395–399.

"An inquiry into the history of religio is one of a multitude of inquiries that might serve to disabuse us of a longing for the authority of pedigree in the fashioning of our analytical categories. Many of the constructs and terms that we employin the study of religion are taken from cultural traditions where meanings are not only multiplied and accreted over time, but where their impacted complexities and subtleties are preserved for us by texts and by the diligent labors of generations of humanist scholars. Yet while a cultivated appreciation of their histories enlarges our understandings and heightens our sensibilities, our analytical categories must be pointed to the issues at hand. The power of religion as an analytical category, we might well affirm, depends on its instrumental value in facilitating the formulation of interesting statements about human beings, the phenomenal subjects of anthropological research. To borrow an adjective from the Romans, the anthropologist needs to be ‘‘religiosus’ ’— ‘scrupulous’, ‘conscientious’— in the shaping of cross-cultural instruments. While we should be knowledgeable about words, we must also struggle against a facile surrender to their authority, an authority that all too often turns out to be unstable or evanescent when probed." (p. 398)

27. ———. 1993. *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* . Leiden Brill.

"The general question that this work addresses is: How might we transform a folk category into an analytical category that will facilitate transcultural research and understanding?

The particular category discussed in what follows is “religion.”

The general argument, though, is probably applicable to such other categories as “kinship,” “marriage,” “law,” “the state,” and so forth, categories the suitability of which has been called into question with respect to the analysis and description of non-Western social and cultural phenomena (e.g., Needham 1971, Schneider 1984). I do not attempt, however, to extend my argument explicitly to those categories in the ensuing pages.

In posing the question above, I assume the great importance of categories in human cognizing. I also recognize the widespread use of the category term religion in the conversations of both the contemporary social sciences and humanities and the larger populations that support them. Although various scholars have questioned the analytical powers of the category religion, and some have proposed that the term

religion be dropped from research vocabularies or that employment of it be limited, many academics and the public-at-large continue to talk about religion freely. It seems that we are more or less stuck with religion, both as term and as category, at least for the foreseeable future. That confers practicality on a critical discussion of how religion has been conceptualized — and of how it might be conceptualized for certain purposes." (*Introduction* , p. 1)

References

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28. ———. 1997. "Conceptualizing Religion: The Matter of Boundaries." In *Vergleichen und Verstehen in der Religionswissenschaft* , edited by Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim, 27–35. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Reprinted in B. Saler, *Understanding Religion: Selected Essays* , Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2009, pp. 172-180.

Abstract: "This essay enriches the argument for conceptualizing religion made in the preceding essay [*Family Resemblance and the Definition of Religion*]. It does so particularly with respect to the question of bounding religion. It draws a distinction between bounded and unbounded categories, and assigns religion to the latter type. It suggests, moreover, that we may expect to find elements that we sometimes think of as „religious“ elements outside of complexes that we readily label religions. By systematically studying such elements, we may hope to extend our understandings of a religious dimension in human life while transcending the category religion."

29. ———. 1999. "Family Resemblance and the Definition of Religion." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* no. 25:391–404.

"In this article I attempt to do three things. First, to express my views about the idea of family resemblance relative to the problem of defining religion. Second, to suggest a partial answer to a question posed by Luther Martin and his fellow panelists at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion: if we assign causality to religion, to what are we assigning it? And third, to enter a caveat respecting the replacement of popular analytical categories." (p. 391)

(...)

"Substituting Categories

Finally, I want to enter a brief caveat respecting calls to do away with popular analytical categories-and perhaps the disciplines with which they are associated-because they are problem-plagued. Fitzgerald, it may be recalled, urges scholars of religion to abandon "religion" in favor of "cultural studies," the "analysis and interpretation of the values institutionalized by different societies. "(31)

I think it very likely that if we substitute one category for another, let alone one discipline for another, we will find that we have substituted one set of problems for some other. The term "value," for example, has a number of connotations; it is not easy to define in a way that elicits consensus among scholars, and values are sometimes difficult to establish in any clear way.(32) And "ideology," which is currently very fashionable, is difficult to discuss without waxing ideological. Terms such as "religion," "sacrifice," "value" and so forth are conveniences. They allow us to talk about things that interest us in more or less intelligible fashion. And we can do so even though the terms themselves are polysemous and the categories to which they pertain are organized by family resemblances. We need to be cognizant of their complexities and subtleties, however, if we are to avoid using them in rigid and otherwise nonproductive ways. And we need also to have some sense of their connotations." (p. 403)

(31) Fitzgerald, [Religion, Philosophy and Family Resemblance," *Religion* 26 (1996): 215-236] p. 232.

(32) See Ethel M. Albert, "The Classification of Values," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 221-248; Victor Ayoub, "The Study of Values" in *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology. Essays in the Scope and Methods of the Science of Man* , James A Clifton, ed. (Boston, 1968), pp. 244-272; Florence R. Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodbeck, et al. *Variations in Value Orientations* (Evanston, IL, 1961).

30. ———. 2004. "Toward a Realistic and Relevant „Science of Religion“." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 16:205–233.
Reprinted in B. Saler, *Understanding Religion: Selected Essays* , Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2009, pp. 196-223.
Abstract: "This essay sets forth the author’s opinions about how we may best work toward achieving a science of religion that is both relevant to the findings and methodologies of established sciences that deal with the human condition and realistic about what we may hope to achieve in view of the lack of full transparency in language, the deficiencies of „The Standard Social Science Model,“ and other matters. It describes and endorses some contemporary efforts to advance our understandings of religion by drawing on the cognitive and evolutionary sciences. And it relates those efforts to the author’s preferences, discussed in some of the preceding essays, for conceptualizing religion. While it repeats to some extent certain points made in those preceding essays, it introduces some new material, and it works toward a larger perspective for studying and understanding religion."

31. ———. 2008. "Conceptualizing religion: Some recent reflections." *Religion* no. 38:219–225.
Abstract: "How might we best conceptualize or define religion? Or, for that matter, should we dispense with the term religion in favor of something else? Proffered answers to those questions are not only relevant for marking out and sustaining a field of scholarship in the academy, but they relate more broadly to assumptions and theorizing about the human condition. In this paper, I first briefly describe and evaluate three advocacies respecting the conceptual problem that are not discussed in my book, *Conceptualizing Religion* (Saler, 1993, 2000). While these examples do not exhaust the diversity of available approaches to conceptualizing and defining religion, they testify to that diversity. Second, I outline my approach. Third and finally, I discuss a probable factor that works against an easy acceptance of my proposals for conceptualizing religion."
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Fitzgerald, Timothy, 2000. *The Ideology of Religious Studies* . Oxford University Press, New York.
Lawson, E. Thomas, McCauley, Robert N., 1990. *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* . Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

32. ———. 2010. "Theory and Criticism: The Cognitive Science of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 22:330–339.
Abstract: "After describing what the author regards as important and commendable characteristics of the current cognitive science of religion, the author contends that future theorizing ought to take account of mounting criticisms of cognitive-evolutionary theories of religion. That is especially so when criticism recognizes the great complexity of what we conventionally mean by the term “religion” and when it suggests that monochromatic theorizing is likely to prove inadequate for explaining the existence of polychromatic phenomena. Indeed, monochromatic perspectives tend to confine or impoverish our understandings of religion. Future theorizing about religion should aim for theories that better reflect the complexity of the phenomena that they purport to explain. One possibility, based on an analogy to epigenetic theorizing, is described by way of providing an example."

33. ———. 2015. Concept of Religion. *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion Online* : 1–8.
Abstract: "Some scholars advocate dropping the word “religion” in favor of some other term or expression. This entry begins by considering one such proposal, that of Daniel Dubuisson. Dubuisson maintains that the concept of religion commonly guiding scholarly work is so inescapably permeated by Christian sensitivities and ideational commitments that it should be jettisoned in favor of cross-cultural explorations of “cosmographic formations.” The author of this entry, in contrast, would retain the term religion, but he proposes that religion be deemed a family resemblance category, and that “religions,” the instantiations of the category, be viewed as unequal members of a fuzzy set. In advancing his argument, the author refers to some recent theorizing about religion that draws on the contemporary cognitive and evolutionary sciences and that regards doctrinal religions such as Christianity as secondary developments of a more basic and traditional religiosity."

34. Sauchelli, Andrea. 2016. "The Definition of Religion, Super-empirical Realities and Mathematics." *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* no. 58:67–75.
Summary: "Providing a precise definition of “religion” – or an analysis in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions of the concept of religion – has proven to be a difficult task, more so in light of the diverse types of practices considered religious by scholars. Here, I discuss Kevin Schilbrack’s recent definition of “religion”, elaborate it and raise several objections, one of which is based on a specific theory in philosophy of mathematics: mathematical realism."

35. Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, Caroline. 2014. "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* no. 82:495–520.
Abstract: "This article counters the widespread view within the study of religion that a real definition of religion should be avoided. It argues that an essentialist approach is not necessarily as contentious as is often assumed and that alternatives to essentialist definitions are less well-founded than they may appear. The article opens with an outline of different types of definitions and a discussion of common concerns. It goes on to present a starting point for providing a real definition and ends with the suggestion that areal definition would be a valuable tool both academically and practically."

36. Schiffers, Norbert. 1970. "Religion - Concept of Religion." In *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology. l. 5: Philosophy - Salvation* , edited by Rahner, Karl, 246–287. New York: Herder and Herder.
Contents: 1. Concept of Religion: A. Religion in General. B. Critique of Religion. C. Philosophy of Religion. IL Science of Religion: A. Introduction. B. History of Religion. C. Phenomenology of Religion. D. Psychology of Religion. E. Sociology of Religion. III. Theology of Religions: A. The Plurality of Religions. B. Theological Synthesis.
"There can be no easy-going approach to the subject of religion today, above all if one considers it the quintessence of one’s relationship to God. The word religion seems to have fallen into discredit. But if one refuses to accept this devaluation, one must analyse the difficulties involved in the term and then offer philosophical and theological reasons for continuing to use it." (p. 245)
(...)
"b) This survey of the various methods used to determine the notion of religion shows that it is not enough to produce formal criteria. This may be why the etymological interpretation of the word religion still enjoys a certain favour. “Religion” comes from the Latin *religio* , which describes the religious act, the three verbs *relegere, religari* and *re-eligere* being possible derivations. The fluidity of the derivation need not cause misgivings. Since *relegere* means “constantly turn to” or “conscientiously observe”, the object of concern must merit and indeed demand man’s careful attention. This claim brings up automatically the second derivation, since *religari* can mean “binding oneself (back)” to one’s origin and goal. Finally,

since man can live in culpable oblivion of his origin and goal, he can then "choose again" (see *Metanoia, Conversion I, Contrition*) to live religiously by his origin and goal (*reeligere*). The possible derivation from the three verbs thus offers converging perspectives, which are more than an etymology, since they describe possibly religious attitudes. But this etymological approach to the phenomenon of religion is unsatisfactory. It is only possible in Latin, and it is impossible to overlook the fact that the religious phenomenon appears in widely different linguistic dress. Thus we have the paradox that the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* does not contain the word "religion" in the index. And the absence is justified inasmuch as Judaistic thinking cannot attain the pregnancy of the comprehensive *religio* but can only describe the phenomenon in a series of approaches." (p. 247)

37. Schilbrack, Kevin. 2010. "Religions: Are There Any?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 78:1112–1138.
Abstract: "Several scholars have recently argued that the concept of "religion" is manufactured, constructed, invented, or imagined, but does not correspond to an objective reality, "out there" in the world. This paper seeks to evaluate that critique. I argue that the critique is composed of three levels or threads: that "religion" is a social construction, that the term distorts one's perceptions of the reality it seeks to name, and that it is ideologically poisonous. Granting the partial truth of these three arguments, the paper agrees with the critics that a naive realism about religion is indefensible.
However, some of the critics draw the conclusion that "there is no such thing as religion" or "there are no religions," but I reject this conclusion.
I seek, instead, to develop a critical realist view of the concept of religion that is able both to take into account the history of the semantics of the concept and, nevertheless, to see the study of religion as the study of patterns of behavior which are independent of the scholar."

38. ———. 2012. "The Social Construction of "Religion" and Its Limits: A Critical Reading of Timothy Fitzgerald." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 24:97–117.
Abstract: "Several theorists argue that the concept of "religion" is not a cultural universal but rather emerged under particular historical and political conditions in the modern post-Reformation west. "Religion," they say, is a social construction. What are the implications of this view of the ontology of religion? My aim in this paper is to critically engage the arguments of Timothy Fitzgerald—a social constructionist about religion who combines, in my judgment, insight and confusion on the issue—in order to trace out the values and the limits of this approach."

39. ———. 2013. "After We Deconstruct 'Religion' Then What? A Case for Critical Realism." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 25:107–112.
Abstract: "Some scholars of religion have turned their attention from religion to "religion" and have then deconstructed the conceptual category, arguing that the concept of religion is an invention of the scholar that corresponds to nothing. In Schilbrack (2012), I used the work of Tim Fitzgerald to identify what such arguments get right and what they get wrong. In the present reply to Fitzgerald, I make a case for critical realism as a methodological stance for the study of religion that can learn from deconstructive approaches without abandoning the concept."
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40. ———. 2013. "What *Isn't* Religion?" *The Journal of Religion* no. 93:291–318.
"This article is motivated by the sense that the category of religion has become sprawling, overly inclusive, and unwieldy. This problem is partly because the multiple definitions of religion in play today are so various and divergent, but it is also because some of those definitions are so capacious that the term "religion" loses its analytic usefulness. The study of religions will be helped, I judge, by a principled recommendation about what to exclude from the category." (p. 291)

(...)
"Either way, to locate religion in terms of its pragmatic function is to define religion as offering to its members a normative path: religion is composed of practices that teach people how to act wisely, properly, or best. Religion is therefore here defined not simply as a set of beliefs about religious realities but also as a set of practices that promise right living. Some scholars of religions have spent a great deal of energy distinguishing between religious practices that teach one how to act properly in ethical senses what to do if one's ox gores one's neighbor or how to cultivate filial piety, in ceremonial senses what to do to honor the dead or to marry two people, and in magical senses what to do to curse an enemy or to protect one's crops. But I do not separate these purposes; I am content to stop with the general point that religion, by definition, consists in normative social practices that are said to solve problems for people." (p. 300)

41. ———. 2018. "Mathematics and the definitions of religion." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* no. 83:145–160.
Abstract: "In 2014, I published a proposal for a definition of ‘‘religion’’. My goal was to offer a definition of this contentious term that would include Buddhism, Daoism, and other non-theistic forms of life widely considered religions in the contemporary world. That proposal suggested necessary and sufficient conditions for treating a form of life as a religious one. It was critiqued as too broad, however, on the grounds that it would include the study of math as a religion. How can one include forms of life based on non-theistic realities without including math? In this paper, I show the flaw in the previous definition and the weaknesses of two attempts to evade that flaw, before recommending a shift, first, to a Wittgenstein-inspired polythetic definition of ‘‘religion’’ and, second, to a certain kind of polythetic definition that I call ‘‘anchored’’."
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Schilbrack, K. (2014). *Philosophy and the study of religion* . Oxford: Wiley.

42. ———. 2024. "The Concept of “Religion” as a Heuristic Device." *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* no. 100:225–249.
Summary: "Scholars are increasingly recognizing that the concept of "religion" has evolved in its meanings over the centuries and that its contemporary use as a means of sorting cultures around the world is a product of relatively recent European interests. One response to this issue has been to propose that scholars should understand "religion" as a heuristic device, that is, as a tool invented in western modernity but not as a concept that names a transhistorical and transcultural reality that has existed "out there" in the world before the term was invented. In this paper, I clarify and critique the heuristic sense of the term. I argue that the costs of a heuristic understanding are severe and that an alternative, realist understanding of the concept is better. On this realist view, a "religion" names a form of life based on belief in superempirical realities, whether or not the term "religion" was known to those practicing it."

43. ———. 2024. *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* . Malden: Wiley Blackwell.
"Chapter 4: Do Religions Exist?
Several scholars have recently argued that the concept of "religion" is manufactured, constructed, invented, or imagined, but does not correspond to an objective reality, "out there" in the world. If one thinks of deconstruction in a nontechnical sense as an approach which takes meanings that are unreflectively taken as real and seeks to reveal them as conceptually unstable, historically emergent, and ideologically motivated, then these critics are pursuing the deconstruction of the concept of religion. In this chapter, I evaluate that critique and seek to defend the reality of religion. In the next chapter, I propose my own definition of religion." (p. 85)
(,,,)
"Chapter 5: What *Isn't* Religion?

Religious communities are those that adopt values that they do not believe depend on human or other empirical form of agency. I will call those nonempirical aspects of reality whose existence allegedly does not depend on empirical sources: superempirical. Thus religion are composed of those social practice authorized by reference to a superempirical reality, that is, a reference to the character of the Gods, the will of the supreme Being, the metaphysical nature of things, or the like. In short. I define religion a form of life predicated upon the reality of the superempirical.
This proposal for a more inclusive understanding of the substantive aspect of religion is intended to include everything in the previous version. Augustine's Christian definition, Herbert's broader theistic definition, and Tylor's even broader animistic definition all ought to define religion in terms of a reality or realities that are superempirical. Those substantive approaches are therefore not replaced by but rather nested in this one." (p. 135)

44. Schilderman, Hans. 2014. "Religion as Concept and Measure." *Journal of Empirical Theology* no. 27:1–16.
Reprinted in H. Schildeman (ed.). The Concept of Religion: Defining and Measuring Contemporary Beliefs and Practices, Leiden: Brill 2014, pp. 1-16.
Abstract: "This contribution offers an introduction to the volume. The definition and operationalisation of religion is described as a multidisciplinary issue in the changing landscape of academia. One of the problems that theology is confronted with, concerns the fact that religion is being studied from various universes of interpretation that result in a variety of definitions with strong historical roots. While this offers a rich palette for research, it also questions the contemporary identity of empirical research in theology.
The contributing authors are being introduced with reference to their respective empirical studies, while pointing at a concluding essay that addresses the theological identity of empirical research."

45. ———. 2014. "Defining Religion. A Humanities Perspective." *Journal of Empirical Theology* no. 27:176–198.
Reprinted in H. Schildeman (ed.). The Concept of Religion: Defining and Measuring Contemporary Beliefs and Practices, Leiden: Brill 2014, pp. 176-198.
Abstract: "This contribution aims to address the opportunities for empirical theologians to deal with the definitions of religious texts, beliefs, and practices from a humanities perspective.
After pinpointing the issue of definition as one, in which interpretation is constitutive, three paragraphs elaborate the discussion of such a humanities approach to religion. Firstly, it is made clear that semiotic analysis offers a method to clarify the significance of religious texts, beliefs, and rituals at three elementary levels of meaning exchange. Secondly, it is demonstrated that discourse-analysis offers a proper method to clarify how various owners of religious definitions interact in pursuit of their interests.
Thirdly, attention is drawn to the exigency of studying justification claims in religion, which is crucial in demonstrating the relevance and significance of empirical research to society. In looking back, it is argued that the indicated humanities perspective is able to avoid the many pitfalls in defining religion, and contributes to the development of empirical theology and is relevant to current and forthcoming opportunities for research in religion."

46. Schmidt, Karl Ludwig. 1966. "*thréskeia, thréskos, ethelothréskeia* ." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume 3* , edited by Kittel, Gerhard, 155–159. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
"The data are as follows. There is only sparse attestation in the New Testament, θρησκεία 4 times (2 in the same passage), θρησκος once, and εθελοθρησκια once. This paucity is quite striking in relation to the whole sphere of Greek literature. For elsewhere words with the stem θρησκ are fairly common. Thus we never find the verb θρησκεον in the NT, though it comes twice in rapid succession in the LXX.

The LXX does not have θρησκος, but θρησκος occurs 4 times, twice in the same passage." (p. 155)
(...)
"We noted at the outset that the rare occurrence of θρησκεία in the NT is at a first glance surprising. It is particularly surprising for those who try to understand early Christianity as a cult. No matter what term we might prefer for “cult,” it can and must be stated that none of the possible alternatives is particularly emphasised in the NT or the Bible generally." (p. 158)

47. Schulz, Michael. 2019. "Religion." In *The Bonn Handbook of Globality: Volume 2* , edited by Kühnhardt, Ludger and Mayer, Tilman, 1353–1365. Cham (Switzerland): Springer.
"In the Vulgate the Latin concept of *religio* does not play a substantial role. The nine references in the Old Testament refer to cult praxis. The underlying Hebrew equivalent (especially *ḥuqqat*) strongly emphasizes legal status, which obligates one to the cult. The four instances in the New Testament refer to *thrēskeía* (Acts 26:5; Colossians 2:18), which describe rather unspecific actions in the church service." (p. 1353)
(...)
"The decisive turn is marked by English Deism’s first proponent, Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648).(22) He places the concept of religion over and above confessional disputes; its content should be determined entirely by reason: the existence of God, worship of God, morality, repentance, judgment in the hereafter. Christianity is deemed the best realization of this religion.(23)" (p.. 1357)
(...)
"After general religion had become a topic of reason, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) inaugurated the new discipline of philosophy of religion, which was independent of metaphysics.
He developed it from the implications and postulations of practical reason, that is, as the outcome of moral philosophy.(26) Thereby, universal *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (A published in 1793, B published in 1794) determines the quality and scope of the historical religions outside of reason." (p. 1357-1358)
(...)
"Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768–1834) concern was to free universal religion both from the metaphysical justification in thought (the project of natural religion) and from the moral philosophy of action and place it on its own feet—on feeling, intuition. On this basis he defines religion as “the feeling of ultimate dependence.”(29) Such a substantial definition of religion, which generalizes a fundamental aspect of religions, symbolizes further approaches in philosophy of religion up to the present." (p. 1358)
(22) Heinrich M. Schmidinger, Religion II. Anthropologisch-philosophisch, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* . Vol. 8, Freiburg: Herder, 1999, p. 1037
(23) Ernst Feil, *Religio* [4 Volumes, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, 1997, 2001, 2007], Vol. 3, 2001, pp. 189–205
(26) Immanuel Kant, *Critique of practical reason* [1788], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, A219–238.
(29) Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith 1830/31,* §9, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, p. 40.

48. Schüssler Fiorenza, Francis. 2000. "Religion: A Contested Site in Theology and the Study of Religion." *The Harvard Theological Review* no. 93:7–34.
"I shall begin by showing how religion, which was a contested site in theology when Richard Niebuhr wrote his book on Schleiermacher, has once again become controversial, not only in theology, but also in the study of religion. The differences between then and now will be analyzed in relation to three distinct contestations of the category of religion within theology and the study of religion. Since Schleiermacher's theology is often identified as the historical root, if not the cause, of the problem concerning the category of religion, I then analyze Schleiermacher's position in regard to these three criticisms. I hope thereby to show not only that

Schleiermacher is not guilty as charged, but also that his theological and philosophical position offers a way to appropriate the category of religion within theology and the study of religion. In advancing this systematic claim, I shall inquire about the relation between the categories of "religion" and "revelation." I shall then explore the development of an understanding of religion that explicates the historical particularity and individuality of religion without making the category either a sui generis one or an exclusive and imperialistic one." (pp. 7-8)
References
Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).
Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lucke* (ed. and trans. F. S. Fiorenza and J. Duke; AAR Texts and Translations 3; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981).

49. Segal, Robert A. 1983. "In Defense of Reductionism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 1:97–124.
Reprinted as Chapter 1 in R. A. Segal, *Religion and the Social Sciences* , Atlanta: Scholars Press 1989, pp. 5-36.
"It is surely not coincidental that Eliade is widely regarded as at once the leading contemporary scholar of religion and the leading defender of its irreducibility. For by its irreducibility he means the inability to analyze religion from other than the standpoint of believers themselves. According to Eliade, religion is analyzable in only religious rather than, say, psychological or sociological terms because for believers it is.(2) To be sure, not all of those who seek the believer's point of view deem it irreducibly religious. In fact, I argue elsewhere that the contemporary social scientists often considered kindred souls of Eliade because they, too, seek the participant's point of view nevertheless analyze religion nonreligiously.(3) Still, Eliade's popularity surely reflects in part the popularity of the quest for the participant's point of view." (p. 6 of the reprint)
(...)
"There are several issues which it is not the purpose of this essay to consider.
First, it is not the purpose here to consider whether reductive analyses of religion are adequate. The purpose is to argue only that their adequacy is an open rather than closed question, an empirical rather than a priori one. Whether or not reductive analyses ultimately prove adequate, they are not, it has been argued, inadequate *a priori* .
Second, it is not the purpose of this essay to consider whether nonbelievers can become believers or vice versa. To deny that nonbelievers can accept the believer's view of religion because they do not accept the reality of the sacred is not to deny that they can change their minds.
(...)
Third, it is most certainly not the purpose of this essay to argue that believers alone can analyze religion. On the contrary, it is the purpose of the first part of this essay to argue that believers, like other humans, have no automatic, privileged, incorrigible entrée to the true nature of their behavior.
(...)
The purpose of the second part of this essay is to argue that, in the case of religion in particular and not of human behavior in general, believers alone can accept their own analyses of it. If their own analyses were the only permissible ones, all analyses of religion would be confessional. Because analyses askew and even contrary to theirs are permissible as well, analyses of religion can be social scientific as well." (pp. 24-25)
(2) Since writing this essay I have come to realize that Eliade is not identifying the irreducibility of religion with its irreducibility for believers, in whom Eliade is in fact interested only secondarily. Eliade is primarily interested in the irreducibility of religion in and of itself: see Segal (n. d.).
(3) See Segal (1985a).
References

Segal, Robert A. 1985a "Have the Social Sciences Been Converted?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (September): 321-24. Reprinted in revised form in the present book as ch. 4.
n.d. "How Historical Is the History of Religions?"

50. ———. 2008. "*The Invention of World Religions* : The Critics." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 20:111–113.
"A panel discussion of Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005) was held at the November 2005 annual meeting of the AAR [American Academy of Religion] in Philadelphia.
The panel was jointly sponsored by the Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group and the Theology and Religious Reflection Section. I was chair of the panel and am pleased to introduce the published results of that discussion. Professor Masuzawa provides a vigorous response to the papers, and especially seeks to make clear what she is and is not claiming." (p. 111)

51. ———. 2010. "Theories of religion." In *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion: Second Edition* , edited by Hinnells, John R., 75–92. New York: Routledge.
"'Religious studies': a summary and proposal The term 'religious studies' it appears from this discussion, is used in two quite different yet not wholly unconnected ways. In one sense, as the state-of-the-art reviews of 'religious studies' in universities around the world suggest, the term includes whatever study of religion and religions is undertaken in any post-secondary institution of education, whether religious or secular, and regardless of the methodology adopted. Here the term is often taken to be commensurate with 'the academic study of religion' and 'the scholarly study of religion,' which notions themselves are often used synonymously. (...)
The second, more common use of the term, however, is as a designation for a particular kind of approach to the study of religion with a particular aim, methodology, or style that distinguishes it from the type of (religious/confessional) study of religion antedating it. And when used in this sense, it still refers to the study of religion undertaken in the academy, but now designates an enterprise legitimated by the academy – in this case the modern research university – because it measures up to the received criteria of scientific study in the other university disciplines. Identification of religious studies with the academic study of religion in this instance, therefore, does not apply to all post-secondary research carried out under that rubric. 'Religious studies' as an academic undertaking, therefore, ought to connote a scientific enterprise even though it does not, as some would argue, constitute a scientific discipline (see, for example, Pye 1991).
I use the notion of 'enterprise' here as defined by Robert A. McCaughey (1984) as 'any organized understanding of sufficient magnitude and duration to permit its participants to derive a measure of identity from it' (xiii)."
References
McCaughey, Robert A., 1984 *International Studies and Academic Enterprises: A Chapter in the Enclosure of American Learning* , New York: Columbia University Press.
Pye, Michael, 1991 'Religious Studies in Europe: Structures and Desiderate,' in Klaus K. Klostermaier and Larry W. Hurtado (eds), *Religious Studies: Issues, Prospects and Proposals* , Winnipeg: University of Manitoba and Scholars Press, pp. 39–55.

52. ———. 2017. "Diagnosis Rather than Dialogue as the Best Way to Study Religion." In *The Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith* , edited by Aitken, Ellen Bradshaw and Sharma, Arvind, 173–182. Albany: State University of New York Press.
"Long before it became de rigueur, Wilfred Cantwell Smith challenged the appropriateness of the term religion. He maintained that the term fits only the modern West and is ethnocentric when applied elsewhere.(1)

His objection was not political, the way the standard objection has since become, but theological. For him, religion refers to outer, formal trappings. Faith, his preferred term for his preferred focus, refers to inner conviction. Somehow the way to study faith is through dialogue, or conversation.
Smith proposes that the term religion “be dropped—at least in all but the . . . personalistic sense,”(2) which means in all but the sense of religion as faith." (p. 173)
(...)
"For my part, I take religion to be an acquired taste, but not thereby an insignificant or unfortunate one. Like disease, religion has a cause, and the social sciences strive to find out what it is. The pervasiveness of religion is not the issue. Religiosity is not innate even if it turns out to be universal. The definition of religion must be narrow enough for the spread of religion across humanity to be unclear until measured—that is, measured rather than known a priori by a definition like Tillich’s “ultimate concern.” A disease that afflicted every human being would not somehow be in less need of a diagnosis.
Like the explanation of disease, the explanation of religion should be comparative. Far from treating the patient as an individual, the doctor puts the patient in the category of all those with the illness. Studies of other patients with the illness dictate the treatment of the patient at hand. Smith himself definitely wants the study of religion to be comparative, but he deems comparison optional and at most beneficial, but never mandatory." (p. 178)
(1) On the term religion, see, for example, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: New York American Library, 1964), pp. 21–22, 23–49, 109–38; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 51–52.
(2) Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion,* p. 48.

53. Sharma, Arvind. 1994. "The Bearing of the Different Understandings of the Words *Religion, Dharma* and *Din* on Religious Study and Research." In *The Notion of “Religion” in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990* , edited by Bianchi, Ugo, 591–602. Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider.
"Although the term religion is applied to the various religions of the world, the various religions of the world have - or sometimes do not have - their own word for religion.
A consideration of how the study of religion - and research within it - would be affected if we substituted these words for religion will impart greater depth to our discussion.
To keep our discussion within manageable limits we shall illustrate these implications with the help of only two cases - those of Hinduism and Isiam.
Let us take up the case of Hinduism for consideration first.
If one, is asked to provide a synonym for the English word religion from among the Indian languages, the word most likely to be suggested is *dharma* from among the various possible terms." (p. 596)
(...)
"It is now time to draw attention to the fact that the use of the word *dharma* for religion and vice versa possesses not merely nominal but also cultural implications in the study of religion. The depths to which the concepts the word *dharma* stands for have percolated in tlfe Hindu psyche cannot be plumbed by the English word religion. This becomes evident from the following anecdote narrated by S. Radhakrishnan(21):
It is related of an Indian Christian convert who attended the church on Sunday and the Kali temple on Friday, that when the missionary gentleman asked him whether he was itot a Christian, he replied, 'Yes, I am, but does it mean that I have changed my religion?'." (p. 597)
(...)

"Just as the word *dharma* can be brought in relation to the word religion from Hinduism, the word *din* can similarly be placed in apposition to it from Islam, wherein the word is "employed to mean a religion together with its practices in general"(26). It seems that behind this word lie three separate words. There is
(i) an Aramaic-Hebrew loanword meaning 'judgement';
(ii) a genuine Arabic word meaning 'custom', 'usage' which is cognate to (i);
(iii) an entirely distinct Persian word meaning 'religion'(27)
.
Here we are only concerned with the use of the word in the last sense which possesses a long history(28) and which appears in a celebrated passage in the Qur'an when God declares:(29)
Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you. and I have approved Islam for your religion'." (pp. 598-599)
(21) Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of life* , New York The Macmillan Company 1927, p. 39.
(27) H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers. *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* , Leiden: E.J. Brill 1953, 77.
(28) Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* , New York: The Macmillan Company 1963, 98-102. 286-289.
(29) A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* , New York: The Macmillan Company 1955, voll.2, I 128.

54. Smart, Ninian. 1996. *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* . Berkeley: University of California Press.
"The dominance of the English tongue in cross-cultural comparisons is no accident. It is largely a product of colonialism and therefore of unequal cultural power relationships. Moreover, British and American scholars played an important role in developing the subject. There was often the tacit assumption that Christianity was normal religion, and that it was against this norm that the primary comparisons were to be launched. English is fast becoming the major global tongue and is therefore a proper vehicle for such explorations, but there is no reason why we should not employ a range of cross- cultural terms to further comparisons. I shall in this book make use of a number of crucial expressions, including bhakti (devotion), dhyana (meditation) and li (appropriate behaviour). Sometimes distinctions and nuances are clearer and richer in other languages than English. There may be differing ways of carving up the territory. Sometimes this may justify us in creating neologisms. In the West it has often been assumed that God and gods are normal: a system is either theistic or polytheistic. But what about the Theravada? Its Ultimate is not God or the gods, but nirvana. Should we then see Christianity and Judaism as major non-nirvanistic religions?
In affirming that phenomenology should be conducted on a cross-cultural basis, I am saying two things: that its findings should make use of cross-cultural terminology and sensitivity; and that there should be no assumption of the priority of one tradition as the norm. This is where informed empathy has another role, in creating the sensitivity to allow me (a Westerner, a Scot, a male, an Episcopalian, albeit with Buddhist leanings) to enter into other cultures' attitudes (Smart, 1973). But in thinking about the cross-cultural we need to reflect on what the boundaries of cultures are." (pp. 3-4)
References
Smart, Ninian. *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge* (Princeton, 1973)