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Bibliography

1. King, Richard. 2008. "Taking on the Guild: Tomoko Masuzawa and *The Invention of World Religions* ." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 20:125–133. Abstract: "This review provides a reading of Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions* (2005) based upon the psychoanalytically-inflected, post-

structuralist approach that Masuzawa developed in her first book, *In Search of Dreamtime* (1993). It is argued that there is a tension in the book between two theses—(i) that the discourse of world religions perpetuates Christian theological universalism and (ii) that the discourse of world religions perpetuates a Eurocentric view of the world. Ambiguity about this question within Masuzawa's narrative allows those who propound a broadly secular approach to the study of religion ("the guild' to which the author aligns herself to read her work as a critique of ongoing Christian theological trends in the study of religion despite the fact that the primary narrative direction of the book offers an account that seeks to cut across the secular-theological dichotomy by challenging the Euro-(American) paradigms (whether Christian or post-Christian and secular) that continue to dominate this field of study."

2. ———, ed. 2017. *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* . New York: Columbia University Press.
"The volume is organized into sections intended to explore how the category of "the religious" has been implicated in a series of elisions (for example, religion/secular/sacred, religion/society/culture). As editor, I have chosen this approach fortwo reasons. First, to demonstrate that however one characterizes "religion," it always remains defined in relation to a series of cognate and oppositional categories that establish both its clarity and its usefulness as a conceptual placeholder within discourse.
However, in establishing the nature and identity of something called "religion," the term remains bound up not only with its cognate relatives ("the sacred," "faith," "belief," "devotion," "ritual," "myth," and the like) but also with that which it is deemed not to be ("the secular," "magic," "science," "philosophy," "society," and the like). In this sense, "religion" is a signifier that is stabilized in discourse as a meaningful conceptual placeholder through a complex network of repeated elisions and differentiations. "Religion" is not a special or unique case in this regard, though it has played a crucial role in defining and concretizing national and cultural identities across time and space and defining the relationship of "the West" to "the rest." As such, its ongoing interrogation is a crucial component of any comparative study of cultures/civilizations. Second, organizing sections according to underlying themes, elisions, and assumptions about "the religious" seeks to avoid an approach that might further entrench disciplinary differences and authority claims (from areas such as psychology of religion, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, and the like), since the process whereby these disciplinary fields become "naturalized" is itself an object of discussion and debate within this volume. Nevertheless, each respective disciplinary lens has constituted its own field of intellectual analysis and has generated a set of approaches and issues that intersect with broader concerns and methods but that also develop their own set of questions and sense of internal coherence. Consequently, contributions are organized in a way that would be recognizable to those seeking to examine the study of religions in terms of established disciplinary approaches." (*Preface* , p. XIV)

3. ———. 2017. "The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion." In *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* , edited by King, Richard, 1–20. New York: Columbia University Press.
"What we have seen in scholarship in the study of religion since the 1990s, however, is a similar "Copernican turn." Just as Kant asks us to consider that the world of objects "out there" is actually framed by certain a priori categories that determine our perception of the world, we should recognize that the study of religion as a multidisciplinary field is not concerned with the examination of a stable phenomenon "out there" called "religion," and that the object is itself constituted according to certain framing cultural assumptions. The impact of post-Kantian social constructionism and a wave of critical theories that have moved through the arts and humanities (namely, third-wave feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, queer theory, and the like) has been to highlight

the ways in which the object of study is itself constructed in the act of examination itself." (p. 5)

4. King, Winston L. 2005. "Religion [First edition] (1987)." In *Encyclopedia of Religion. Second Edition. Volume 11* , edited by Jones, Lindsay, 7692–7701. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale.
"The very attempt to define *religion* , to find some distinctive or possibly unique essence or set of qualities that distinguish the “religious” from the remainder of human life, is primarily a Western concern. The attempt is a natural consequence of the Western speculative, intellectualistic, and scientific disposition. It is also the product of the dominant Western religious mode, what is called the Judeo-Christian climate or, more accurately, the theistic inheritance from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The theistic form of belief in this tradition, even when downgraded culturally, is formative of the dichotomous Western view of religion. That is, the basic structure of theism is essentially a distinction between a transcendent deity and all else, between the creator and his creation, between God and man." (p. 7692)

5. Kishimoto, Hideo. 1961. "An operational definition of religion." *Numen* no. 8:236–240.
"For the science of religion, it is indispensable to have a definition of religion as the starting point of its study. The term science of religion may still be somewhat unfamiliar and sound strange. It only means an approach to the study of religion, using the empirical and scientific method. Basically, the science of religion is not different from any of the disciplines in the fields of natural science and behavioral science. It fulfils the basic requirements of scientific investigation.
The basic requirements for science are two, the method of study, and the object of study. As to the former, the science of religion follows the general nature of scientific method, which is to be objective, value neutral and positivistic-positivistic in the sense that all the inquiries must be based upon observable phenomena. The object of study must be open and available for observation by anybody who wants to study it." (p. 236)
(...)
"Now from this point of view I offer the following definition of religion:
"Religion is an aspect of culture centered upon activities which are taken by those who participate in them to elucidate the ultimate meaning of life and to be related to the ultimate solution of its problems. Many religious systems contain the notion of deity and/or holiness in relation with such activities."
This is to be understood as an operational definition of religion, proposed from the standpoint of the science of religion." (p. 240)

6. Krymkowski, Daniel H. 1999. "Afterword: The Quest for Theoretical Competence in the Study of Religion." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* no. 25:485–490.
"During our panel at the 1996 Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR), Luther Martin and I remarked the difficulty of positing religion as a causal variable if one lacks a working definition o of the concept. It is absurd to claim that x causes y when one has only a vague idea as to what constitutes x. However, it is difficult to develop a definition of a concept without a theory that explicates the concrete nature of the relationship between variables x and y. Why should we view x as a cause of y? What are the specific mechanisms via which changes in x come to produce changes in y? What empirically testable (and falsifiable) predictions are implied by the theory?" (p 485)
(...)
"Social-science research desperately needs more attention to theoretical development. I do not have in mind here efforts that are often included under the rubric of "theory," which are often little more than unproductive, ideological "critiques." To my mind a theory involves a precise specification of concepts and relations, preferably in mathematical form, which leads to a variety of readily testable hypotheses. The queen of the social sciences in this regard is certainly

modern economics. General Equilibrium Theory, which describes the consumption and production structure of the entire economic system, taking only a small set of economic fundamentals as inputs, is but one example of the power of a social science. Scholars of religion who want to make similar strides in understanding their phenomena of interest would do well to utilize fields like economics as exemplars." (pp. 489-490)

7. Krymokowski, Daniel H., and Martin, Luther H. 1998. "Religion as an Independent Variable: Revisiting the Weberian Hypothesis." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 10:187–198.
Abstract: "Studies in the sociology of religion generally assume "religion" to be causal with little or no attention paid to the theoretical justification or basis for such a claim.
We argue in this paper that most such studies fail to satisfy the conditions for causal inference. Further, Weber, whom sociologists of religion often cite when theoretical claims are made, at worse never proposes religion as an independent variable and, at best is very ambiguous on the issue. We suggest that recent directions in cognitive psychology might form the basis for further research concerning the social significance of religion."

8. Lanman, Jonathan A. 2024. "Religion: Defined." In *Encyclopedia of Religious Psychology and Behavior* , edited by Shackelford, Todd K., 1–4. Cham (Switzerland): Springer.
"Defining “Religion” continues to be a contested enterprise and, even among scholars in the human sciences, no settled definition has been reached. This entry reviews several existing definitions, discusses why a settled definition is likely impossible, and outlines some promising ways forward for scientific research on “religion.”
Defining religion is neither simple nor settled. There are many reasons for this, but one of the most important is that would-be-definers have different goals. A lawyer in the United States aiming to argue that an individual’s actions are religious and, consequently, protected under the First Amendment, will have a different set of criteria as to what constitutes an appropriate definition of religion than an evolutionary psychologist looking to explain the cross-cultural recurrence of certain types of thought and behavior. The former, for example, will need to take into account widely perceived ideas of “religion” being somehow different from “cult” and “magic,” while the latter may dismiss such popular sentiments about the meanings of these terms in the search for explanatory understanding. Indeed, scientific research may well reveal that there is little to no difference psychologically between some phenomena labeled as “cult” and those labeled as “religion” by courts in the United States. Neither the lawyer nor the psychologist would be pleased to accept the definition of the other." (p.1)

9. Larson, Gerald James. 1994. "Is South Asian *yoga* "Philosophy", "Religion", Borth or Neither?" 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, 261–270. Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider.
"Conclusion
I have been expressing what might be called an Indian axiomatic in largely negative terms, namely, the absence of categorial separations between mind and body, reason and experience, formal and applied logic, divine and human, and birth and rebirth. I chose this approach deliberately, inasmuch as what we usually mean by "religion'.' and "philosophy" in academic environments since the Enlightenment in our work as historians of religion presupposes precisely these separations. Yet in the South Asian environment, at least, within Yoga traditions (which are symptomatic to a large extent of South Asian thought generally), these separations are simply absent (at least as important categorial separations). South Asian thinking or cognizing, to move now to a positive formulation, (a) posits the presence of a contentless

consciousness that functions within a reductive materialist ontology of thought and extension (in the realist systems; or, within *māyā, sŭnyatā* , and so forth, within the non-realist traditions); (b) claims that the process of knowing is deeply embedded in material reality (or *māyā* for the Advaita Vedāntins or *sŭnyatā* . for the Madhyamika Buddhists) and, hence, is finally and always a phenomenology of error or ignorance-or put somewhat differently, there is no cognitively determinate way to describe ultimate truth; (c) focusses its attention on cultivating meditative cognitions that are true, or, if you will, awarenesses (*samādhi-s*) that are veridical, rather than sentences or propositions, which latter have nospecial status apart from other awarenesses; (d) conceives of the divine or deity in a highly polymorphous and plastic manner which is not finally separate from human being or any other kind of being - in other words, God or the gods are never transcendent in the European theological sense; and (e) defines human being as "dividual" (to use Marriott's well-known idiom)-in other words, the human is as polymorphous and plastic as the divine, so that the human being is construed not only in a larger synchronic and transactional social environment (the caste system, and so forth) but is also construed as one in a series of diachronic and iterative rebirths - what one might characterize as a fundamental South Asian intuition of the vulnerability or fluidarity of personal identity within a cosmic ecology of recursive transactions.
(...)
To answer the question of my title: ls South Asian yoga "Philosophy", "Religion ", Both or Neither? My answer is obviously "both", with the important proviso that the problem in our studies is not "yoga" but. rather, what we mean by "religion" and "philosophy" in our ongoing comparative research." (pp. 269-270)

10. Lawson, E. Thomas, and McCauley, Robert N. 1990. *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
"Many scholars (such as Goody 1961 and Spiro 1966) have argued that what is definitive of religion is commitment to the existence of culturally postulated superhuman beings. However, without exploring the theoretical underpinnings of definitions (and those theories' implications), debates about definitions never get very far. For definitions of religion that emphasize the role of culturally postulated superhuman beings, this book begins that exploration, since we maintain that what is unique to religious ritual systems is their inclusion of culturally postulated superhuman agents among the class of eligible participants.
This book is ultimately concerned with the explanation of a class of behaviors and the system of knowledge that informs it. (To repeat, the theoretical strategy we borrow from linguistics studies the latter in order to better understand the former.)
This book neither interprets religious texts nor studies religious traditions.
It is a corollary of the view we advance that neither texts nor traditions (in the sense of that term standardly associated with the most popular religions of the world) are necessary features of religious systems. Their interpretation and study may well contribute to a richer understanding of the body of phenomena in question, but both are ultimately incidental to its explanation. The insistence in the study of religion that texts and traditions are critical features of *full-fledged* religions has always served as a strategy for insulating the "'great"' world religions generally and Christianity in particular from the sort of analyses otherwise reserved for "primitives" - which is to say, all the rest of humanity.
The general theoretical principles we advance apply to *all* religious rituals.
Critical to our theoretical approach is the fact that religious rituals are actions." (*Introduction* , pp. 5-6)
References
Goody, J. 1961. Religion and Ritual: The Definition Problem. *British Journal of Sociology* 12: 143-64.
Spiro, M. 1966. Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation. *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* . M. Banton (ed.). London: Tavistock Press.

11. Lease, Gary. 1994. "The History of "Religious" Consciousness and the Diffusion of Culture: Strategies for Surviving Dissolution." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions*

Historiques no. 20:453–479.
"VII. "Religion" is perhaps best seen as the location of an identity struggle and, consequently, always as a framework of paradoxes and dissonances leading inevitably to breakdowns. In sum, the various strategies deployed by "religion" in seeking to protect its role in distributing power within a given culture and society, and thus in sustaining built-in paradoxes, lead ultimately to the inability to maintain the tension generated by those paradoxes, and therefore to a final breakdown and dissolution of consciousness. Such breakdowns result from the manifest inability to sustain the set of distinctions necessary for a consciousness which "maintains" paradoxes. These strategic devices are the mechanisms for a "natural" history of religions, i.e., an account of why they "die" and why there are constantly "new" "religions" emerging.
From beginning to end, "religion," as evolved and defined in a wide variety of human cultures, finally produces the very conditions it was designed to protect against. Instead of "salvation" or preservation of integral consciousness, it brings about the dismemberment of that very consciousness itself. "Religion," in other words, is ultimately programmed suicide." (p. 479)

12. ———. 1999. "Response: Fighting over Religion (Notes from the Front)." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* no. 25:477–484.
"What can we conclude from our conversation? Some results seem clear. For example, it is very difficult to imagine how one can continue to use any longer the term "religion" as an effective analytic category. One can describe religion, one can wrestle over its historically conditioned changes, but one cannot presume sufficient stability in the term's meaning to apply it analytically to data. In fact, one must ask, as I have elsewhere, whether a "natural history" of religion is not only necessary, but the only avenue open to us for shared discussion about religion?(12) If so, then we must ask first and together with our authors here collected, just how such a "natural history" is to be conceived and executed?
Perhaps as a form of so-called cultural studies, in which one would trace the historically contingent presence in societies and cultures of centers for the distribution of power: tracing, in other words, how what is allowed to be "religion" changes in time and place, and how the attempt to prohibit change leads to programmed (institutional) suicide." (p. 483)
(12) Gary Lease, "Rationality and Evidence: The Study of Religion as a Taxonomy of Human Natural History" in *Rationality and the Study of Religion,* Jeppe S. Jensen and Luther H. Martin, eds. (Aarhus, 1997), pp. 140-142.

13. ———. 2000. "The Definition of Religion: An Analytical or Hermeneutical Task?" In *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* , edited by Geertz, Armin W. and McCutcheon, Russell, 287–293. Leiden: Brill.
Review symposium: Benson Saler's *Conceptualizing Religion.*
"In evaluating Saler's success in promoting the formation of a shared theory of religion, it is important to focus on the role of defining more precisely what religion is, both in broad terms and within Saler's work.
Not that Saler neglects the problems of definition. While opting, at least initially, for what he terms "implicit conceptualizations" of religion, Saler does not do away altogether with the need for some sort of definitional location of the object under discussion. But he does maintain a "loose" connection, proposing that "whether or not we need an explicit definition is a situational matter" (1993: 85; see also 78-86). By that he seems to mean that the function of a definition, and therefore its importance, depends greatly on who is doing the defining, and what needs are to be met by that action. In other words, definitions according to Saler share in boundaries, indeed the delineation of such boundaries makes up the act of definition. Such boundaries, or conceptual limits that mark the differences between one notion and others, are always temporary, preliminary and tentative in nature: they are moments of functional distinction." (p. 287)
References

Saler, Benson (1993). *Conceptualizing Religion. Immanent Anthropologists: Transcendent Narratives, and Unbounded Categories* . Leiden: E. J. Brill.

14. Lechner, Frank J. 2003. "Defining religion: a pluralistic approach for the global age." In *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and the Secular* , edited by Greil, Arthur and Bromley, David G., 67–83. Oxford: Elsevier Science.
"What definition of religion do I use? Instead of arguing for the virtues of one definition, I advocate a pluralistic approach. Since scholars have failed for over a century to settle on a single definition of religion as a distinct phenomenon with a universal core, attempting to establish such a definition at this late date is bound to fail. In scholarly practice, different definitions operate as tools within various fruitful research ventures, so it makes pragmatic sense to examine the benefits to be gained from following different definitional strategies. From a sociological standpoint, such a pluralistic approach promises to be more useful in addressing an important contemporary problem, namely how particular groups with different traditions contribute and respond to globalization. If meaningful responses to globalization are likely to take different forms instead of crystallizing into one set of shared sacred symbols, as one influential perspective on the subject suggests, then pluralism would seem to fit the demands of the global age. At the same time, as I explain below, a fairly conventional “substantive” definition of religion offers one powerful entry point into the predicaments of the global age. This substantivist allegiance tempers my pluralism." (pp. 67-68)

15. Lehmann, Karsten. 2023. "Differentiating the Social Dimension of Religion: On the Heuristic Potential of a Three-Level Concept of Religion." In *Transformation of Religion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* , edited by Danz, Christian and Deibl, Jakob Helmut, 35–56. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh.
Abstract: "The article contributes to the discussions on the concept of religion from the point of view of Religious Studies or Religionswissenschaft and presents a two-fold argument: First, the article makes the point that the debates around the concept of religion need to differentiate three different strands of discussion – the *définition propre* of the concept of religion, the analytic potential of definitions as well as the multiple dimensions of religion. Second, the article proposes a closer look at the social dimension of religion.
It will sketch the heuristic potential of a three-level-approach (emphasizing the classic sociological distinction between the micro-, meso- and macro-level of religion) for empirical analyses in the Study of Religion."

16. Lehrich, Christopher. 2021. *Jonathan Z. Smith on Religion* . New York: Routledge.
"Definition and classification are for Smith the initial stages of a methodological armature that continues with comparison and ultimately concludes with an interpretive procedure that he will variously call rectification, redescription, or translation. To understand Smith’s overarching project, his own approach to religion and his various attempts to transform that of the discipline, we need to make sense of both definition and classification, to make sense of the processes to which he considered these terms to refer.
Scholarly criticism has identified three pieces as especially significant in this context. First, of course, there is the previously quoted *Introduction* to Imagining Religion. Second is the first chapter of that volume, “Fences and Neighbors” (Smith 1980b; also *IR* 1–18). Third, many years later, is the survey article “Religion, Religions, Religious” (Smith 1998; also *RR* 179–196). In preliminary adherence to this critical view, I begin with these articles as an initial focus. In the course of analysis, however, we shall find Smith’s work shifting far afield of the received understanding, suggesting a quite different set of interpretations and perhaps a different sort of reading of Smith’s project." (pp. 16-17)
(:..)
"The *locus classicus* for Smith on defining religion has come to be “Religion, Religions, Religious,” written for Mark C. Taylor’s volume *Critical Terms for*

Religious Studies (1998), reprinted in *Relating Religion* (*RR* 179–196). This is unfortunate, as the article, while a convenient summary, offers little for a deeper understanding of Smith's views; far more useful is the preceding article, "A Matter of Class" (Smith 1996; also *RR* 160–178). Bowing to critical preference, however, I begin with the former article.

The opening section formulates four core points about the term "religion" as it was reformulated in the sixteenth century:

1 "Religion" is not a native category. It is not a first-person term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture. It is the other, in these instances colonialists, who are solely responsible for the content of the term.

2 Even in these early formulations, there is an implicit universality. "Religion" is thought to be a ubiquitous human phenomenon; therefore, . . . its alleged absence [is] noteworthy.

3 In constructing the second-order, generic category "religion," its characteristics are those that appear natural to the other. . . .

4 "Religion" is an anthropological not a theological category. . . . It describes human thought and action, most frequently in terms of belief and norms of behavior. (Smith 1998: 269; also *RR* 179–180)" (p. 18)

References

IR = Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

RR = Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

1980b. "Fences and Neighbors: Some Contours of Early Judaism." In *Approaches to Early Judaism* , edited by William Scott Green, 2:1–25. Chico, CA and Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press. Also *IR* 1–18.

1996. "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion." *Harvard Theological Review* 89: 387–403. Also *RR* 160–178.

1998. "Religion, Religions, Religious." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* , edited by Mark Taylor, 269–284. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Also *RR* 179–196

17. Lindberg, Anette. 2009. "The Concept of Religion in Current Studies of Scandinavian Pre-Christian Religion." *Temenos* no. 45:85–119.

Abstract: "In recent Swedish studies of Scandinavian pre-Christian religion of the late Iron Age, various scholars have questioned the utility of the concept of religion in this field. According to these scholars, the concept of religion obscures the specific character of religions of the small-scale non-literate societies of the pre-Christian Age. In the article, I critically examine suggestions that we abandon the academic concept of religion and replace it with an emic concept, or a concept derived from an emic context. I further argue that this strategy implies an inappropriate dualistic opposition between Scandinavian pre-Christian religion and so-called world religions. I conclude with a critical evaluation of problematic formulations of religious change and variation, presented by the same scholars who criticize the use of the academic category of religion. I try to draw attention to certain problematic implications of these demands. I conclude that we should continue to employ the concept of religion in connection with the religious worlds of pre-Christian societies. The strategy proposed by these scholars may turn out to be merely one more way of imposing misconceptions on this period."

18. Loureiro, João Almeida. 2024. "Was There Religion Before Modernity? A Dialogue with Brent Nongbri." *Humanities Bulletin* no. 7:82–89.

Abstract: "This article aims to analyze the legitimacy of a thesis that has been gaining traction in recent decades within Religious Studies - namely, that the term religion can only be applied accurately to Protestant Christianity, and that all previous phenomena must be described using different terminology. To this end, we will take Brent Nongbri as our main interlocutor. What Nongbri advocates is simple: the term "religion" stands for the private adherence to a given set of theses;

premodern peoples did not have any concept with such or similar meaning, therefore, they did not have religion, but something different. We will postulate, on the one hand, that Nongbri's thesis is tremendously fragile, and, on the other, that we are perfectly justified in continuing to talk about religion when referring to pre-modern peoples and cultures."

19. Mach, Michael. 1994. "Philo's "Philosophical" Turn to "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, 403–413. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
"Returning to our question: What caused Philo to use these Platonic and Stoic philosophical elements to build up his own theory? Although there are some biblical traditions about the divine wisdom which is to be found in the heavenly court or with certain people as David or some of the prophets, those texts had a different kind of wisdom in mind than Philo' s. He is not simply explaining the religion of his ancestors, as has been often noted, but looks towards something new, unknown at least within Jewish religious tradition. For him the important thing is knowledge of God. This problem, it seems, did not arise in the land of Israel in Philo's days. In the religious literature of the time - that came down to us, God's existence was taken for granted without further questioning. The problem there was formulated as God's impact on history and man's appropriate reaction to it.
But Greek philosophy helped Philo to formulate his view of religion: First, because the problem of cognition had been disputed there already for a long time. Secondly, the transcendence of the truly Existent was already, as it seems, beyond discussion, at least in the Platonic tradition (and this is one of those instances where Philo quotes Plato directly). But at the end of this (theoretical) ascent Philo does not strive for the intellectual vision, but for an experience of the divine." (p. 412, two notes omitted)

20. Maltese, Giovanni, and Strube, Julian. 2021. "Global Religious History." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 33:229–257.
Abstract: "Understandings of religion have been fundamentally transformed since the nineteenth century. The respective contradictions, ambiguities, continuities, and ruptures can be most comprehensively grasped when viewed against the background of global entanglements. For this purpose, the approach of global religious history proposes a range of theoretical and methodological tools. Its theoretical repertoire is largely informed by a critical engagement with poststructuralist epistemology and postcolonial perspectives embedded in a consistent genealogical approach. At the outset, it aims at bridging divisions, including those between postcolonial and global history, between disciplines such as religious studies and history, as well as between different area studies. This implies a theoretically robust reflexion of the question of what global entanglements mean in global religious history, along with the question of how to distinguish global religious history from approaches usually qualified by the prefix trans as, for example, in "transregional." In this introduction, we offer an in-depth discussion of the theoretical foundations and methodological implications of global religious history."

21. Mandair, Arvin-Pal S. 2017. "Translation." In *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* , edited by King, Richard, 173–186. New York: Columbia University Press.
"Though not always obvious, the process of *globalatinization* repeats a mechanism —the "theology of translation"—that was put into play at the microlevel in the Anglo-Vernacular school, a mechanism variously described as the manufacture of consent, native-informancy, or mimicry. Indeed, what the term *globalatinization* highlights is the indissociability of a "fundamental translatability" between the religious and the secular, two spheres that figure prominently in the native elites' acceptance of and resistance to the colonial symbolic order. As a result of an implicit "theology of translation" the concepts of secularism and religion are

peaceably imposed (or violently *self* -imposed) on all things that remain foreign to what these words designate. This is best seen when we look at the continued translation of the concepts of religion and secularism within the South Asian context, through the medium of violence. In other words, violence mediates the movement between secularism and religion best seen in the complex relations between the secular state and nonstate actors and between state/media and the academy." (p. 183)

22. Martin, Craig. 2009. "Delimiting Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 21:157–176.
Reprinted as Chapter 1 in C. Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion and the Private Sphere* , New York: Routledge 2010, pp. 13-32.
"For the last quarter of a century a number of scholars of religion have been subjecting their own discipline to self-critique. Their pioneering question - how do we construct or invent "religion"? - and some of their answers - "there is no data for religion" J. Z. Smith [*]) or "there is no religion" (Gary Lease)- raise hackles. Although there is much to be gained from close attention to these matters, the heated debates on this subject have often created more confusion than understanding.
My purpose in this chapter is rather straightforward: I will attempt to demonstrate as clearly as possible what it means to say that "religion" is a social construction and will simultaneously respond indirectly to Gary Lease's essay on "The History of 'Religious' Consciousness and the Diffusion of Culture" by commenting on what is the most striking (and perhaps most enduring) statement in this text: "there is no religion" (Lease 1994, 472). Whether or not we take this claim to be patently absurd or necessarily true will depend, of course, on what sense we give to it. I will demonstrate that we can give a sense to it that will make it true, although in a limited way. In order to show this, it will be necessary to retrace what others before me have already said about the apparently elusive "definition of religion"; although much of what I will say on this will be rather unoriginal, it bears repeating as it has, in the past, failed to register. Following a consideration of how language works and how this bears on the definition of religion, I will show some of the strengths and weaknesses of Lease's legacy, and will suggest a new direction that social constructionist criticisms of the word "religion" could take." (p. 13 of the reprint)
[*] *Imagining Religion* , Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1982, *Introduction* , p. XI
References
Lease, Gary (1994). The History of "Religious" Consciousness and the Diffusion of Culture: Strategies for Surviving Dissolution. *Historical Reflections / Reflexions Historiques* 20 (3): 453-479.

23. ———. 2015. "Theses on the critique of ‘‘religion’’." *Critical Research on Religion* :1–6.
Abstract: "Those of us who study the history and politics of the concept of religion and its related terms often find that our peers in adjacent disciplines or subdisciplines do not take into account our findings and continue to use the terms naively and unreflexively. Perhaps this is because they are unaware of the problematic norms knotted into the history of the concept or the contested political stakes involved in its use. Or, perhaps they are engaged in just the very sort of politics our subdiscipline documents. When discussing this with one of the editors of CRR [Critical Research on Religion], he asked me to outline why those not engaged in the historicization of the concept of religion should take our work into account. How or why would a contemporary sociologist of religion benefit from reading, for example, a discourse analysis of Reformation-era theologico-political rhetoric? To that end, here I put forward the following theses on the critique of the concept of religion, making the case, as boldly and as succinctly as I can, why our work is relevant to all who write on ‘‘religion,’’ and provide references to the

essential literature on the subject for those who wish to pursue further reading on the matter."

24. Martin, Luther H. 1999. "Introduction." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* no. 25:387–389.
"Although there continues to be an absence of scholarly consensus concerning a plausible theory, and thus definition, of "religion," research in the broad areas of "religious studies" continues apace. Consequently, we organized for the 1997 meeting of the SSSR [Society for the Scientific Study of Religion] in San Diego a panel discussion on "The Definition of Religion in the Context of Social-Scientific Research". What sort of "working definition" might be appropriate for those engaged in ongoing social scientific and historical research in the field of "religion"?
The presentations to the 1997 SSSR panel by Benson Saler (Anthropology, Brandeis University), Stewart Guthrie (Anthropology, Fordham University) and Brian K. Smith (Religious Studies, University of California, Riverside), and the response to these papers by Gary Lease (History of Consciousness, University of California, Santa Cruz) are the basis for this special issue of *Historical Reflections/Reflections Historiques* .
Subsequently, Armin Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (both of the Department for the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, Denmark) agreed to contribute their papers, originally presented on this same theme of definition to the 1997 meeting of The North American Association for the Study of Religion meeting in San Francisco, to the collection. Finally, Dan Krymkowski (Sociology, University of Vermont) has contributed an "afterword" to this discussion." (pp. 388-389)

25. ———. 2010. "Religion and cognition." In *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion: Second Edition* , edited by Hinnells, John R., 526–542. New York: Routledge.
"The final preliminary definition to be considered is that of religion. This too is a contested concept, as other chapters in this volume make clear. For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to identify religion in a low-key, non-technical way through a number of generally accepted examples. Religion, it is assumed, includes such ways of shaping human life in communities and their associated traditions as are exemplified by Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. This is not an exclusive definition; it simply limits the scope of reference of this chapter, while allowing that much of what it says could be applied to other instances of religion and to traditions (such as cultures, philosophical schools, or secular worldviews and ways of living) which might not be included in a particular definition of religion. It is also a definition that does not entail any particular position on such disputed matters as the essence, origin and function of religion." (p. 94)

26. Masuzawa, Tomoko. 1998. "Culture." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* , edited by Taylor, Mark C., 70–93. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
"Few terms are more foundational to our sense of reality and more thoroughly naturalized in our everyday discourse than “culture.” It is indeed difficult for us to imagine a time when the term or the concept was not available for regular use, but the notion of culture in the sense familiar to us—like “art,” “race,” “class,” and “religion,” which are intimately related to it—is of modern origin. Having its prenatal stirring in the eighteenth century, the concept of culture was ushered to life by a series of ground-shifting transformations of the nineteenth century in the ever expanding domain of the West. According to Raymond Williams, who first brought to general attention the historical emergence of these and other related concepts, “culture” is for us one of the most important reality-constituting terms, or key words; it embodies the spectrum of intellectual responses to the “general pattern of change” (Williams 1983, xvii) that we associate with modernity, such as industrialization, democratization, and, we may add in light of the more recent works by Edward Said, Eric Wolf, Michael Taussig, and others, the forceful

globalization of “the West” in the form of colonial and postcolonial processes." (p. 70)
References
Williams, Raymond. 1983. *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* . New York: Columbia University Press.

27. ———. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions; Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
"This book concerns a particular aspect of the formation of modern European identity, a fairly recent history of how Europe came to self-consciousness: Europe as a harbinger of universal history, as a prototype of unity amid plurality.
The book finds its central question in the following historical fact. For many centuries Europeans had a well-established convention for categorizing the peoples of the world into four parts, rather unequal in size and uneven in specificity, namely, Christians, Jews, Mohammedans (as Muslims were commonly called then), and the rest. The last part, the rest, comprised those variously known as heathens, pagans, idolaters, or sometimes polytheists. This conventional ordering began to lose its ruling authority in the first half of the nineteenth century, and in the early decades of the twentieth, there suddenly appeared an entirely new system, namely, a list of roughly ten to a dozen “world religions”; the list was often accompanied by an indeterminate number of other, minor traditions. This new system of counting the religions of the world replaced the old hierarchy of nations—that is, “nations” in the archaic sense of the term, not yet construed as nation-states—and the new system has since turned into a convention, which is still regnant today. The list has not been significantly altered or seriously challenged in the past hundred years. This book is an investigation into what happened in the nineteenth century to produce this change." (*Preface* , p. XI)

28. ———. 2008. "What Do the Critics Want?—A Brief Reflection on the Difference between a Disciplinary History and a Discourse Analysis." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 20:139.149.
Abstract: "The following essay is intended to respond to my critics and their criticisms of *The Invention of World Religions* . By providing an account of the book’s pre-history, I hope to provide a framework for understanding why this particular project appealed to me in the first place. More to the point, however, I attempt to justify my sense that many of my critics have missed the point of Invention.
As I originally imagined the project, the central question was not primarily about how the field of religious studies emerged in the nineteenth century, but rather how the discourse on “religions” (in the plural) played a role in the discursive formation of “the West"."

29. McCutcheom, Russell T. 1998. "Redescribing "Religion" as Social Formation: Toward a Social Theory of Religion." In *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions and Explanations* , edited by Idinopulos, Thomas A. and Wilson, Brian C., 51–71. Leiden: Brill.
"Despite "religion" possessing some descriptive value-for even to me it makes eminent sense, at least on an initial, descriptive level, to distinguish talk of such non-obvious beings as gods or demons from talk of the family or talk of the nation state-we must confront the fact that the category "religion" has no analytic value whatsoever.
Taking religion to be a self-evident, eternally existing phenomenon of deep importance, most of our colleagues have failed to recognize just how intriguing so-called religious behaviors are; they fail to inquire as to just why it is that human beings sometimes expend such great amounts of energy in activities that engage invisible agents and immaterial states of existence. What on one level is a useful set of descriptive markers turns out, on another, to be the very problem in need of explanation. If our scholarship amounts to more than a mere collection of

descriptions (I think here of the old phenomenological handbooks), then "religion" will surely have to be redescribed for despite its apparent usefulness as a descriptive marker that designates a loosely (even arbitrarily) collected grouping of observable behaviors and institutions, it fails to offer any assistance in analyzing or explaining these behaviors.(18)

As is probably clear by now, I favor redescribing religion by means of a thoroughly social theory of religion. Despite the promise of other equally interesting theoretical frameworks, it is on the level of constructing, legitimizing, and contesting social authority and privilege that I find so-called religious systems to be of most interest. (To the obvious influence of Jonathan Z. Smith, I now add the influence of Bruce Lincoln on my thinking.)(19) Therefore, for me, on the redescriptive level what we usually term religion turns out to be but one sub-species of larger socio-historical, ideological systems.

The challenge, then, is to develop a coherent, theoretically-based vocabulary capable of placing what we generally term religion firmly within the social world, with no leftover residue that prompts supernaturalistic speculations." (pp. 56-57)

(18) See Fitzgerald, "A Critique of the Concept of Religion," [*Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* , Vol. 9, No. 2 (1997), pp. 91-110] pp. 92-93.

(19) Specifically, I have in mind Lincoln's more recent works: *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and his brief but significant "Theses on Method," *Method & Theory in the Study of religion* 8/3 (1996), pp. 225-27. See also his essay "Culture," in the forthcoming *Guide to the Study of Religion,* edited by Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell Academic Publishers [2000])

30. ———. 2003. "The category “religion” and the politics of tolerance." In *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and the Secular* , edited by Greil, Arthur and Bromley, David G., 139–162. Oxford: Elsevier Science.

"In arguing for an ill-defined engagement and an encounter that recognizes the necessity for “real commitments” that can inform action only if they happen to fall within a rather narrow party line, liberal scholars use the time honored, politically loaded technology of “religion” to fabricate a toothless Other whose seeming differences — “They call God ‘Allah’ and we call God ‘God’ ” — have already been resolved on “our” terms. There is, thus, a politics to the tolerance, civility, and commonwealth made possible by the rhetorics of privacy, subjectivity, and experience that goes by the name “religion.”

It is a politics that makes our own social world in the so-called secular, privileged West possible, but that does not prevent us from seeing the mechanisms that are at work and the price that is paid when they are smoothly operating.(19)" (p. 159)

(19) Portions of this essay rely on and elaborate work published in McCutcheon (2001a, 2003, forthcoming).

References

McCutcheon, R. T. (2001a). C*ritics not caretakers: Redescribing the public study of religion* . Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

McCutcheon, R. T. (forthcoming [2004]). Critical trends in the study of religion in the U.S. In: P. Antes, A. W. Geertz & R. Warne (Eds), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion* . Religion and Reason Series. Berlin and New York: Verlag de Gruyter.

31. ———. 2020. "Critical Thinking Begins at Home: On Making a Shift in the Study of Religion." *Implicit Religion* no. 22:349–372.

Abstract: "Using as the starting point experiences gained at the University of Alabama, this paper discusses the context and goals of developing and implementing what Tim Fitzgerald and others have called a critical study of religion program (both undergraduate and graduate) within a modern research university – an initiative that played a key role in our department’s successful reinvention, one that has been taking place over the past twenty years."

32. McCutcheon, Russell T. 1995. "The Category "Religion" in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey." *Numen* no. 42:284–309.
Reviewed works:
Tala Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* . Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1993. ISBN 0-801-84632-3
Ugo Bianchi (ed.), *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI JAHR Congres* s. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1994. ISBN 8-870-62852-3
Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* . London: Routledge, 1989. ISBN 0-415-04104-X
Peter B-Clarke / Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained.* London: St. Martin's Press 1993. ISBN 0-312-09472-8
Michel Despland / Gerard Vallée, eds.), *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality* . Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992. ISBN 0-88920-211-7
Peter Harrison, '*Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. ISBN 0-521-38530-X
Thomas Idinopulos / Edward Yonan (eds.), *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion* . Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993. ISBN 9-004-09870-4
Harjot Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. ISBN 0-226-61592-8
Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categorie* s. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993. ISBN 9-004-0
Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* . London: Routledge, 1994. ISBN 0-415-10861-6

33. ———. 2001. *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* . Albany: State University of New York Press.
"As part of our redescription of the study of religion, we must acknowledge that not just ‘experience’ but also ‘religion’ is a slippery signifier, not because, as Cantwell Smith once suggested, it is the limited, inevitably reified and insufficient manner in which outsiders signify a prior, undescribable, and interior faith (1991), but *because many of the peoples that we study by means of this category have no equivalent term or concept whatsoever* . “Religion” is an emic folk category scholars acquire from a rather limited number of linguistic/cultural families, a category that we simply take up for the sake of etic analysis and use as if it were a cross-cultural universal.(9) So, right off the bat, we must recognize that, in using this Latin-derived term as a technical, comparative category, even the most ardently sympathetic religious pluralist is, from the outset, deeply embedded in the act of intellectual, if not cultural, imperialism or theoretical reduction. (Although we disagree on most matters, see Griffiths [2000] for a useful survey of the Latin origins of “religion.”)" (p. 10)
(...)
"In a word, we manufacture zones of significance and value in the so- called real world by means of our label religion; moreover, depending on the definition and theory of religion we employ, we often manufacture goods of questionable value. It is little wonder, then, that our field continually suffers from a lack of identity and is so often misunderstood by our colleagues in the university: we lack agreement concerning the general theoretical parameters that enable us to make claims about this thing religion in the first place; and, more daunting than anything else, we attempt to engage in a theoretically precise analysis of human social life from within the very social worlds we seek to understand. These are important points, I think; at the root of the problem of definition is the fact that many in the field avoid the requirements of explicit theory building, testing, and public critique, and instead opt for simply repeating folk understandings by means of nuanced description and

reporting. However, as I have already suggested, this latter sort of scholarship—if indeed it constitutes scholarship as opposed to mere color commentary—forgoes critical analysis and thereby fails to ask what Smith has simply referred to as the "So what?" question (1990a: 10)." (p. 12)

References

Griffiths, Paul J. (2000). "The Very Idea of Religion," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 83 (May): 30-35.

Smith, Jonathan Z. (1990a). "Connections," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58/1: 1-15.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell (1991) [1963]. *The Meaning and End of Religion.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

34. ———. 2003. *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* . New York: Routledge.

"Although my own conclusion to the preceding eleven chapters could profitably cite the words from Harrison's own concluding chapter – "I hope that this study has highlighted the need to revise some cherished assumptions about the constructs 'religion' and 'the religions' " (175) – the future of the study of "religion" (and, as Foucault said above, "the quotation marks have a certain importance") [1985, p. 3] does not lie in the direction of searching for a more adequate or accurate definition of religion that accords with, protects, or recovers the interior and prior zone called faith. Neither does he share the presumption that a homogeneously sacred sphere or zone of faith lies in the historical background of the sadly limited, modernist, and disillusioned sacred/secular dichotomy. Instead, it lies in the direction of thoroughly historicizing the private/public, belief/practice, Church/State, and sacred/secular binaries, scrutinizing their historical development, their rhetorical deployment, questioning the narrative widely accepted by historians that the engine of secularization drives European history, and asking what is entailed in presuming that any moment of human praxis – including the praxis of discourses on privacy, intuition, feeling, piety, and faith – somehow escapes the uncharted ebb and flow of contingent and thus contestable social history. It lies in the direction of taking seriously Jonathan Smith's position that "[r]eligion is not a native category. It is not a first person term of self-categorization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture" (1998: 269)." (p. 259)

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Smith, Jonathan Z. (1998). "Religion, Religions, Religious." In Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* 269–284. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

35. ———. 2015. "The Category "Religion" in Recent Publications: Twenty Years Later." *Numen* no. 62:119–141.

Reviewed works:

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Dressler, Markus and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair. (eds.). 2011. *Secularism & Religion-Making* . New York: Oxford University Press.

Fitzgerald, Timothy. 2011. *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth* . London: Continuum.

Hughes, Aaron. 2012. *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* . New York: Oxford University Press.

Josephson, Jason Ānanda. 2012. *The Invention of Religion in Japan* . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nongbri, Brent. 2013. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* . New Haven: Yale University Press.

Revised reprint in: R. McCutcheon, *Fabricating Religion: Fanfare for the Common e.g* ., Berlin: de Gruyter 2018, pp. 11-31.

36. ———. 2021. *On Making a Shift in the Study of Religion and Other Essays* . Berlin: de Gruyter.
Chapter 2: *Classification Matters or, Why You Should Care About Scholarship on the Category Religion* , pp. 63-75.
"I'll therefore take the occasion of this chapter as an opportunity not just to summarize some of these more recent debates in the field but also to translate their significance to readers who, not unlike many of our colleagues, may assume that the study of religion is, predictably perhaps, all about studying religion (by which I mean describing the worldwide diversity and similarities among people's beliefs and practices). What I hope will become apparent throughout is that, at least for some of us, an important shift over the last decade or two has been the realization that *the study of religion isn't really about religion at all,* whatever that may or may not be defined as being (since there are almost as many definitions of religion as there are definers, no?). Instead, freed initially by a strong critique of what we used to call *sui generis* religion (that old but powerful idea that religion was utterly unique and therefore couldn't be understood correctly as *anything but religion*), some have now concluded that the study of the things designated as religion is but an example—an e. g., citing the late Jonathan Z. Smith's preferred phrasing—useful in studying people: what they say, what they do, how they organize, and what they leave behind after they're done saying and doing and organizing.
(...)
And so, with all of that having been said, I would hope that this chapter's title now makes just a little more sense, for not only do I think that classification systems matter—that is, have practical consequences, making them far more than just mere names that we only later attach to things—but also that those who are not deeply immersed in at least some current developments in the study of religion may come to see it as a particularly good place to illustrate and explore this point, making plain, once again, that the study of religion isn't really about religion." (pp. 64-65)

37. ———. 2024. "Three Decades of *Manufacturing Religion* ." *Religion & Theology* :1–10.
Abstract: "This essay introduces the theme issue, "Manufacturing Religion: From Christian Origins to Classical Islam." It emphasizes the enduring relevance of paying attention to matters of classification and definition in the study of religion. The article highlights how the institutionalization and operationalization of understandings of "religion" have social effects, and thus, that the study of religion investigates nothing transcendental or sui generis, but rather ordinary human social actions and events."

38. ———. 2026. *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia. Second edition* . New York: Oxford University Press.
First edition 1997.
Chapter 7: *The Category Religion in Recent Scholarship - Again* pp- 261-286; *Afterword: Thirty Years of "Manufacting Religion"* , pp. 287-302.
"And that's just what this book *is* about: how people often go about using this word [religion], doing so *as if* it names something incomprehensible and thus incomparable to the rest of human culture—a usage that certainly brings benefits to those who employ it in this way. And so, a critical reading of the work of Mircea Eliade opens the book's first few chapters, for he was once well known for claiming that, as a historian of religions, he studied something original and unique in religious symbols—"I will not attempt to discuss their psychological, sociological, or even political contexts, meanings, or functions" (1976: 47). That I find this scholarly approach to be rather problematic, in that it assumes there to be some magical distillate that remains once something is studied as a historical, cultural, human act—a view not alien to scholarship as carried out today—is something of which I hope to persuade readers. If successful, then they may also come to agree

that identifying these past and present problems is rather more central to our work than just a scholarly cottage industry, as it was represented not so long ago (Fisher 2010: 262)." (*Forerword* , pp. XII-XIII)
(...)
"The final chapter [7], though new to this edition, largely shares the title but not the rationale of its predecessor; for Chapter 7 here updates the original edition's examination of recent scholarly works outside of just textbooks and finds that now, three decades after this critique was first being mounted, there's at least some work challenging the discourse on sui generis religion. Accordingly, unlike the version of the chapter that appeared in the first edition, this chapter can now register the existence of an increasing number of scholars who oppose representing religion and religious experiences as essentially autonomous and therefore apolitical; given this development in the field, reproducing the previous version here, which mainly documented yet more difficulties in scholarship, would inaccurately represent where at least part of the field has been going since the early 1990s. And so, despite what I still see as the continued dominance of this one troublesome discourse, this new chapter is now able to outline a coherent oppositional discourse on religion that, though still marginal, is today increasingly evident within the academy." (pp. 17-18)
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Eliade, Mircea. 1976. *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Fisher, Elaine. 2010. "Fascist Scholars, Fascist Scholarship: The Quest for Ur-Fascism and the Study of Religion." In *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade.* Edited by Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 261–284.

39. Moberg, Marcus. 2025. "The Discursive Study of Religion, Critical Realism, and the Social Reality of "Religion"." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 37:398–423.
Abstract: "This article expands on the recently started debate in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* (2024) on the relationship between discursive and critical realist approaches in the study of religion. It aims to steer future debates on this topic in more concrete directions by focusing on four interrelated themes worthy of further attention: 1) how to approach "discourse," the analysis of discourse, and relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive; 2) how to approach the relationship between "word and world"; 3) how discursive approaches would position themselves towards critical realist claims about the ability of generic definitions of religion to "accurately" describe "ontic" actual social realities; 4) and how the "social reality" of religion could be approached and studied from the perspective of a textual approach in the discursive study of religion."

40. Molendijk, Arie L. 1999. "In defence of pragmatism." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 3–19. Leiden: Brill.
"In Conclusion
Where has this interdisciplinary venture brought us? Are there any lines to be drawn, or do we just have to accept the plurality of approaches and opinions voiced in this volume? The proposed contextual and pragmatic view, however, is not necessarily identical with 'anything goes'. However broad the concept of religion may be, in fact, there is still a critical discussion possible about its limits, and that, after all, is what 'definition' is all about. One thing is certain, however, this volume presents not only (and not primarily) the varieties of religious phenomena, but also a variety of the ways in which they may be approached. William James linked these two elements, when he wrote: 'Meanwhile the very fact that they [= the definitions of religion, ALM] are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word 'religion' cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name'.(28)

What is meant by 'a collective name' is not specified in this context, but it surely suggests that we take pragmatical routes in studying religions and leave behind us the ever-slumbering conviction that we shall ultimately reach the True Definition of Religion. As concepts are constructed by human beings and all knowledge is based on concepts, all we can hope for is piecemeal progress, rather than ultimate knowledge." (p. 17)
(28) James 1902, 26.
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James, W., 1902, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Stu4y in Human Nature* . New York, etc.: Longmans, Green (1903[5]).

41. Molnár, K. Attila. 2002. "The construction of the notion of religion in early modern Europe." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 14:47–60.
Abstract: "This article traces the construction and use of the notion of "religion" in early modem Europe.
The argument is that the concept of "religion" evolved from the medieval ideas of *universitas fidealismcconscientious* A look at the writings of Machiavelli and Bodin as well as the ideas of the English Latitudinarians, reveals that they used the word without reference to theological content and with indifference to theological differences, but, instead, to convey ideas of a common morality for the building of a civil society and a functional statehood."

42. Momen, Moojan. 1999. *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach* . Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
"Religion is thus a phenomenon that is difficult to define. Most of us would agree that we recognize it when we come across it but It is present in so many different forms that it is hard to pin down a definition. In this, religion is no different to many other human activities, for example art. Given that there are great variations. among the different religious systems, can we find a core that is common to all of them? One approach would be to say that religion consists of three interdependent aspects (each of which forms the subject of the following three parts of this book):
▪ The first, at the Individual level. is religious experience. It is what was described at the beginning of this chapter, as being the experience of the 'holy' or the 'sacred'. It is the personal. experiential aspect of religion.
▪ The second, at the conceptual level, is the universal idea that there is some Ultimate Reality, and that the most important activity for human beings is to establish and clarify their relationship with this Reality. This is the conceptual and doctrinal aspect of religion.
▪ The third, at the social level, is the fact that all religions are too a greater or lesser extent involved in creating social cohesion and the integration of the individual into society. All of them have created some form of social and institutional order. From this, the ethical and social aspect of religion is derived.
The various approaches to the definition of religion can be regarded as being associated with these three aspects of religion." (p. 27)

43. Monroe, M. Willis, and al., et. 2023. "On the Category of *Religion* : A Taxonomic Analysis of a Large-Scale Database." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 91:257–282.
Abstract: "The Database of Religious History is a large-scale digital humanities project dedicated to capturing scholarly perspectives on the history of religious groups across the globe. Analysis of the current state of the data shows a remarkable consistency between a taxonomic tree generated from the entries submitted by our expert contributors and larger assumptions within religious studies as they pertain to the similarities and differences between religious groups. Additionally, there is broad agreement between how experts answer questions and the tags they use to categorize their own entries, demonstrating a consistency between topdown and bottom-up approaches to describing religious groups. We see both of these results as affirming a commensurable understanding of the category of religion while

demonstrating the value of these types of large-scale quantitative analyses for answering larger questions within the field."

44. Moore, Peter 1994. "Religions as Systems." In *Aspects of Religion: Essays in Honour of Ninian Smart* , edited by Masefield, Peter and Wiebe, Donald, 39–56. New York: Peter Lang.
"In this paper I suggest ways in which ideas about religion may be illuminated by the concept of 'system,' taking my cue from some of the methods and insights found in the work of Ninian Smart. I distinguish three levels of analysis at which the concept of system seems relevant to the understanding of religion. The discussion will be fairly schematic, and limitations of space preclude more than a few brief examples.
The first and most basic level of analysis is where concepts and categories are systematically applied to religions, and more abstractly religion, for the purpose of individual exegesis or comparative study.
(...)
At a second level one can view religions themselves as systems, in so far as they are historical entities embodying a complex of interdependent elements each only fully comprehensible in relation to the other elements. Viewing religions as systems is one way of asking questions about the nature and functions of the entities called religions, if entities indeed they be. This approach, especially when it leads to the claim that religions actually are systems, naturally requires some consideration of what is meant by the term 'system.' An inevitable question here is whether the perception of religions as systems reflects their inherently systemic nature or represents instead an illegitimate product of their systematic study.
At a third level it is possible to apply the systems model to the ways in which religions (or at least some religions) represent and interpret their own functions and purposes. But one is talking here not just about religions as functionally systemic (as at the second level of analysis) but also about them as teleologically systemic; that is, religions are understood by their own adherents, or at least by their theorists and apologists, as having a soteriological purpose which is realized through the fulfilment of certain more or less specifiable conditions.
Important considerations here are the relationship between the functional and the teleological aspects of religions, and the extent to which a scientific analysis of the 'teleological systematics' of a religion can or should connect with the kind of analysis given within the soteriology itself." (pp. 39-40)

45. Morgan, David. 2023. "Religion." In *Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion: A Critical Exploration* , edited by Chryssides, George D. and Whitehead, Amy R., 105–110. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
"How the concept of religion is utilized may depend on what the academic analyst or interpreter wants to believe about religion. Scholars choose the definition that suits their intellectual purpose. If the point is to defend religion against critique by a cultural elite (such as intellectuals), then one's task is well served by choosing the *sui generis* model. If one is inclined to regard religion as inextricable from other social forces and the discourses that convey ideological commitments, the naturalistic view will be compelling. For those who want to use religion as a tool to understand how societies tend to resist change as a way of maintaining order, functionalism will do nicely. And for those who understand religion as a personal preference obeying a neoliberal logic of self-interest in which religious opinion is insulated from coercion by the state and left to sink or swim in the supermarket of religious ideas, religion as a cognitive system of beliefs works best. What is certain is that none will command an unchallenged privilege.
And rightly so since a fundamental truth about studying religion is that we are to some extent always also studying ourselves." (p. 110)

46. Myhre, Paul O. 2009. "What Is Religion?" In *Introduction to Religious Studies* , edited by Myhre, Paul O. Winona, MN Anselm Academic.
"Preface

What is religion? Some argue that religion is best understood as a construction of Western European scholars who sought to categorize the beliefs and practices of the peoples they encountered during the colonization period of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries.
Others contend religion is a system of culturally conditioned lived practices. Still others say it is a human construct rooted in a longing to extend life beyond death. And some maintain religion is a gift from deities or spirits for the well-being of humans. Whatever the answer, no simple, single definition will suffice. It might be helpful to hold a group of definitions loosely so as to begin to sense this diversity. It is part of our human experience to engage in religious ideas and practices that change in subtle and significant ways over time. This chapter aims to disturb the calm waters of settled opinions on religion and to explore basic ideas about what religion is and
is not from different vantage points and to offer alternatives for the study of religion." (p. 3)

47. Nash, Henry S. 1913. "The Nature and Definition of Religion." *The Harvard Theological Review* no. 6:1–30.
"To attempt in these days a definition of religion may seem like taking a wanton risk of intellectual confusion. Even a rough classification of religions is difficult. The mass of data is so vast, the varieties of religion so manifold, that no sooner has a scheme of classification established itself than it begins to sag under the weight of material thrown upon it." (p. 1)
(...)
"Before we study the history of religion at large, it seems advisable to review briefly both the definitions which we have inherited and the ones now current. The review may prepare us for deeper insight into history." (p. 4)
(...)
"Thus equipped, we take on ourselves the risk of a definition perhaps it would be more safe to say, a description. Religion is that form of common consciousness through which the friendly relationship between the seen and the unseen, between human consciousness and purpose on the one side and the higher powers and deepest tendencies on the other, is authoritatively disclosed and assented to. The unvarying quality of this consciousness is a sense of finality. Illusion and error are a necessary part of religious feeling. But the illusion and the error are held within a larger process, illusion breaking only to uncover a surer reality, and error, when it is detected, becoming a door opened into wider truth; so that the sense of finality, checked and chastened, goes from strength to strength. The known and the unknown are felt to be parts of a single and unbroken context of meaning and value." (pp. 27-28)

48. Nemec, John. 2020. "Toward a Volitional Definition of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 20:1–29.
Abstract: "This article advocates for the production of stipulative definitions of religion, a type of nominal definition that articulates new ways of applying a word to a thing. I propose that scholars look to sites where phenomena historically have been labeled “religion” on lexical or real understandings of the term, this to query how religious agents there chose, implicitly or explicitly, to systematize thought, speech, emotion, and action. Such self-consciously ordered systems, I argue, may properly be labeled “religion.”
Next, I apply this method to premodern South Asia, suggesting “religion” refers to the second-order structuring there that links normative social relations to normative states of subjectivity, any innovation in the one demanding innovation in the other. I conclude by inviting other efforts at stipulative definition, all with an eye toward an inductive approach, allowing that the myriad locations of religion present mutually distinguishable systems that may all properly be so labeled."

49. Neville, Robert Cummings. 2018. *Defining Religion: Essays in Philosophy of Religion* . Albany: State University of New York Press.

Chapter One: *Problems of Definition* 3; Chapter Two: *A Heuristic Definition of Religion* 19-36.
"Now suppose we define religion as *human engagement of ultimacy expressed in cognitive articulations, existential responses to ultimacy that give ultimate definition to the individual, and patterns of life and ritual in the face of ultimacy* . This is the definition that will be developed in the essays in this book. In a preliminary way, we can say what some of its components are.
I will mention them here and develop them systematically later, especially in chapter 2. There are five main kinds of components.
First are the components having to do with the worship of whatever is taken to be ultimate.
(...)
Second are the components that concern the aesthetic grasp of things as having beauty or the special integrity of a harmony.
(..:)
Third are the components that concern the self, its integration of disparate elements, its overcoming of brokenness with wholeness, with practices of spiritual development, with psychological states. These psychological or spiritual components are often those that function as essential components to integrate the larger aspect of a person's or groups' religious harmony.
Fourth are the components that concern the social and environmental contexts within which religion takes place.
(...)
The social arrangements within which human engagement of ultimacy can take place vary tremendously, and different arrangements condition those engagements differently.
Fifth are the components that concern the cultures, traditions, and historical trajectories that supply the terms within which religious interpretations take place. Religion as the engagement of ultimacy cannot take place without symbolic signs for imagination and interpretation, whether or not a religious person embraces or attempts to transcend, reject, or revolutionize the semiotic systems at hand.
As a preliminary hypothesis, let me suggest that there are these five kinds of components of religion, to give them handy names: worshipful, aesthetic, psychological, social/environmental, and semiotic." (pp. 9-10)

50. Nongbri, Brent. 2008. "Dislodging "Embedded" Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope." *Numen* no. 55:240–260.
Abstract: "Scholars of ancient cultures are increasingly speaking of the "embeddedness" of ancient religion — arguing that the practices modern investigators group under the heading of "religion" did not compose a well-defined category in antiquity; instead, they claim that "religion was embedded" in other aspects of ancient culture. These writers use this notion of "embeddedness" to help us see that categories post-Enlightenment thinkers often regard as distinct (such as politics, economics, and religion) largely overlapped in antiquity. The trope of "embedded religion" can, however, also produce the false impression that religion is a descriptive concept rather than a redescriptive concept for ancient cultures (i.e., that there really is something "out there" in antiquity called "Roman religion" or "Mesopotamian religion," which scholars are simply describing rather than creating).
By allowing this slippage between descriptive and redescriptive uses of "religion," the rhetoric of "embedded religion" exacerbates the very problem it is meant to solve."

51. ———. 2013. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* . New Haven: Yale University Press.
"For much of the past two centuries, both popular and academic thought has assumed that religion is a universal human phenomenon, a part of the "natural" human experience that is essentially the sameacross cultures and throughout history. Individual religions may vary through time and geographically, so the story goes,

but there is an element that we call religion to be found in all cultures in all time periods. Introductory textbooks supply us with competing definitions of religion ranging from simple, confessional definitions (belief in God or belief in the supernatural) to more universal- sounding definitions (belief in an Ultimate Concern), but regardless of how they define religion, these books assure us that the institution of religion is ubiquitous." (pp. 1-2)
(...)
"The anthropologist Talal Asad has characterized the modernity of religion in a way I find much more helpful than that of [Wilfred Cantwell] Smith: “I would urge that ‘religion’ is a modern concept not because it is reified but because it has been linked to its Siamese twin ‘secularism.’ ”(8) It is this simultaneous birth of religion and secularism that merits attention."
(...)
"This book thus provides a (not the) history of that concept, drawing together the results of diverse fields of research to show, first and foremost, that religion does indeed have a history: it is not a native category to ancient cultures. The idea of religion as a sphere of life separate from politics, economics, and science is a recent development in Europe an history, one that has been projected outward in space and backwards in time with the result that religion appears now to be a natural and necessary part of our world. This appearance, however, turns out to be a surprisingly thin veneer that dissipates under close historical scrutiny. The following chapters are an attempt to offer such scrutiny." (p. 7)
(8) Talal Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion* ,” *History of Religions* 40 (2001): 205–22.

52. ———. 2024. "Imagining Science: Ancient Religion, Modern Science, and How We Talk About History." *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* no. 100:199–224.
Summary: "Disagreement about the trans-cultural applicability of the concept of religion has been a feature of the academic study of religion for decades. In a series of recent essays, Kevin Schilbrack has powerfully reframed these discussions as a debate between realist and antirealist philosophical orientations.
Aligning himself with Critical Realism, Schilbrack argues that religion is a transcultural and transhistorical reality and that those who deny this are antirealists. As my own work is among his targets, this article engages Schilbrack's critique. The first part of the article challenges some of Schilbrack's readings of *Before Religion* . The second part queries Schilbrack's use of examples from the physical sciences as analogies for the relationship between concepts and the real things they are said to designate.
The third part models an alternative use of examples from the natural sciences to think about historiography, concluding that the realist/antirealist dichotomy is not a useful tool. The physics of the last 150 years has shown that our most fundamental ideas about the universe – what we think the "real" character of the world might be – can change radically in short intervals of time. Historians should take heed and approach their own engagement with the traces of the past with due humility."

53. Olson, Carl. 2011. *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts* . New York: Routledge.
"Types of definition of religion
In summary, definitions of religion manifest five general types: experiential, substantive, functionalist, family resemblance, and postmodern. The experiential definition attempts to isolate a primary religious experience and construct a theory around it (Otto’s idea of the holy and cognitive science are good examples). The substantive definition seeks to identify a central belief, such as a belief in spiritual beings, as the basis of a definition.
A functionalist position seeks to discern how religion operates in the life of a society, whereas the family resemblance position looks for overlapping similarities, such as theoretical (beliefs, myths, and doctrines), practical (rites and moral codes), social (institutions, social behavior, and sacred personages), and experiential (emotions, visions, or trances) aspects. The postmodern position stresses the unstable and ambiguous nature of religion.

Another way to classify these various definitions is through the distinction between polythetic and monothetical approaches. The former views no particular aspect of religion as necessary and considers several features as sufficient for the inclusion of a particular aspect to become a member of what is called religion. A good example of the polythetic definition is the family resemblance approach. The monothetical represents a traditional approach to the subject that insists that all characteristics are necessary for a particular aspect to be included as part of religion by insisting on its substantive nature. By describing what religions do, this type reflects a functionalist position." (pp. 11-12)

54. Oman, Doug. 2013. "Defining Religion and Spirituality." In *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. Second Edition* , edited by In Paloutzian, Raymond and Park, Crystal L, 23–47. New York: Guilford.
"This chapter's purpose is threefold: (1) to describe major issues and considerations related to selecting and using definitions of spirituality and religion; (2) to characterize some of the most influential current definitional approaches; and (3) to describe major strengths and weaknesses of each approach. We do not advocate for any single definition, usable on all occasions, that could be supposed to capture the "essence" of spirituality or religion. Instead, we urge that religion and spirituality be considered as likely prototype or family resemblance concepts, an influential perspective that has been largely neglected in the psychology of religion and spirituality (Rosch, 1973, 1975; Saler, 2000).
(....)
"In the next section, we sketch the history and major meanings carried by the terms religion and spirituality. The extensive third section offers a detailed pragmatics, surveying considerations for selecting definitions for particular purposes. The fourth section highlights three influential definitional approaches, and the fifth highlights emerging substantive topics. Major ideas are then summarized and final considerations offered." (pp. 2-26)
References
Rosch, E. H. (1973). Natural categories. *Cognitive Psychology,* 4, 328–350.
Rosch, E. (1975). Cognitive representations of semantic categories. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 104, 192–233.
Saler, B. (2000). *Conceptualizing religion: Immanent anthropologists, transcendent natives, and unbounded categories* . New York: Berghahn.

55. Oostveen, Daan F. 2018. "Multiple Religious Belonging and the 'Deconstruction' of Religion." *Exchange* no. 47:39–52.
Abstract: "In this article I briefly survey the meaning of 'religion' in the context of multiple religious belonging and the consequences of the so-called deconstruction of religion to it.
I argue that we can distinguish three hermeneutics on religion and religious diversity in theology and religious studies: a hermeneutics of multiple religions, a hermeneutics of hybrid religiosity and a hermeneutics of deconstruction. Both a hermeneutics of hybrid religiosity and a hermeneutics of deconstruction challenge the common understanding of multiple religious belonging as belonging to multiple religious traditions.
Following Wouter Hanegraaff and Paul Hedges, I will argue that the deconstruction of religion could make us aware that the idea of religious traditions are ultimately reified imaginative formations, which give rise to the so-called 'World Religions' paradigm.
Following from this, we can learn how the imagination of multiple religions to which an individual can belong is always in interaction with the imagination of a hybrid or dynamic religious belonging."

56. Orsi, Robert A. 2008. "The "So-Called History" of the Study of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 20:134–138.
"While it is the case that Christian values and priorities (in particular, Protestant Christian ones) were fundamental in the making of the modern discipline of

religious studies, scholars of religion have struggled within and against this inheritance over the past two centuries in their work of understanding other religions. Western religious scholarship developed in a worldwide circulation of comparisons and commentaries that even within discrepancies imperial power included interlocutors from elsewhere. Nor was the “West” itself singular. Religious studies practitioners today inherit a polyvalent tradition of scholarship that offers rich theoretical possibilities amid its ironies."

57. Owen, Suzanne. 2020. "The End of Religious Studies (as we knew it)." *Implicit Religion* no. 22:319–330.
Abstract: "Fitzgerald’s *The Ideology of Religious Studies* was published the year before I started my Master’s degree at the University of Edinburgh and was brought to my attention by James Cox, my supervisor. It led me to question everything I had learned as a Religious Studies undergraduate and sparked my first essay (in 2001), titled “Religious Studies: What is it?” In it, I had seen the problem of “what is it?” as a methodological issue as well as a definitional one and predicted an expansion of Religious Studies along phenomenological lines. Today, while still recognising colleagues’ fears that Fitzgerald’s book undermines the study of religion, I rather see his critique as making the study of religion more important than ever, though not in the way I had described in my 2001 essay. My paper will revisit those early responses to the book (mine and others’), asking if we are indeed seeing the end of Religious Studies (as we knew it), and show how Fitzgerald’s critique has instead opened up and transformed the study of religion, at least in my own research and teaching."