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The Problem of defining Religion

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Bibliography

1. Cavanaugh, William T. 2009. *The Myth of Religious Violence. Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* . New York: Oxford University Press.
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Myth 181; Notes 231; Index 277-283.
"I have no doubt that ideologies and practices of all kinds—including, for example, Islam and Christianity—can and do promote violence under certain conditions. What I challenge as incoherent is the argument that there is something called religion—a genus of which Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and so on are species—which is necessarily more inclined toward violence than are ideologies and institutions that are identified as secular. Unlike other books on religion and violence, I do not argue that religion either does or does not promote violence, but rather I analyze the political conditions under which the very category of religion is constructed." (p. 5)
(...)
"This [second] chapter has five sections. In the first two sections, I show that religion is not a transhistorical concept. The first section is a history of ancient and medieval *religio* ; the second section is a history of the invention of the concept of religion in the modern West by such figures as Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Herbert of Cherbury, and John Locke. In the third section, I cite work by David Chidester, S. N. Balagangadhara, Timothy Fitzgerald, Tomoko Masuzawa, and others to show that religion is not a transcultural concept, but was borrowed from or imposed by Westerners in much of the rest of the world during the process of colonization. In the fourth section, I show that, even within the modern West, the religious-secular division remains a highly contestable point. In the fifth section, I conclude by arguing that what counts as religious or secular depends on what practices are being authorized. The fact that Christianity is construed as a religion, whereas nationalism is not, helps to ensure that the Christian's public and lethal loyalty belongs to the nation-state. The idea that religion has a peculiar tendency toward violence must be investigated as part of the ideological legitimation of the Western nation-state. In the West, the religious-secular distinction has been used to marginalize certain practices as inherently nonrational and potentially violent, and thus to be privatized, in order to clear the way for the more "rational" and peace-making pursuits of the state and the market. As the following two chapters show, however, the pursuits of state and market have a violence of their own which is obscured by the myth of religious violence." (pp. 9-10)

2. Červenková, Denisa. 2014. "*De religione* : how Christianity became a religion." *Theologica* no. 4:87–114.
Abstract: "Following the findings of contemporary theological and religious studies research, the present interdisciplinary study attempts to trace the process of adopting the originally Roman category of "religion" for referring to Christianity.
The text notes, in particular, the socio-political role of *religio* in classical culture and the transformations that the relationship of the society of classical antiquity and the Christian community went through in the first centuries AD, especially the first Christian attempts at communication with the late classical Latin culture and the administrative structures of the Roman Empire. The adaptation of the category is traced back to Tertullian, whose conception appears to have fundamentally influenced later generations of Christians; the second part of the study therefore devotes considerable attention to his works. It is here that justified use of the category of "religion" in connection with the Christian tradition is first encountered, as an expression encompassing the doctrinal and philosophical, as well as ethical and liturgical aspects of Christianity. Analysis of the text of Tertullian's *Apologeticum* shows how the apologetic literature of the second century AD conveys the Christian message in an exemplary and highly elaborate form, which serves the dual purpose of providing an adequate definition of the Christian religious identity and preserving it, as well as making it available to recipients of diverse contemporary cultural environments."

3. Cipriani, Robert. 2007. "Religion." In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* , edited by Ritzer, George, 3861–3872. Malden: Blackwell.
"The concept of religion is based on an idea of reality which goes back to the beginnings of humankind and provides an explanation for the existence of itself as

well as the world surrounding it. Since the beginning of history, the idea of religion has manifested itself in diverse forms, across human societies. These forms, which constitute bodies of knowledge, beliefs, and social institutions, form an ordered, operative system. In Durkheimian terms, a religion gradually emerges as the members of a particular tribe or society build a system of beliefs and rites that bind them.

From barely conceived ideas, beliefs and practice proceed toward more elaborate systems (there are many ‘‘sacred’’ scriptures or oral traditions that are accepted, orthodox, and acknowledged), and, from informal interpersonal relationships, toward collective events (ceremonies which are more or less fixed at ritual level where it is possible to experiment and to reinforce the agreement between individuals, cognitive attitudes, and subsequent behaviors)." (p. 3861)

4. Clark, Walter Houston. 1958. "How do Social Scientists Define Religion?" *The Journal of Social Psychology* no. 47:143–147.

"Pursuant to a request by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion at a recent meeting, in order to study definitions of the term “religion” among its members, a questionnaire was circulated asking two questions, as follows: (*a*) What do you study when you study religion? In other words, how do you define religion? (*b*) What propositions or values do you find most basic in your personal life experience? That is, in what do you invest your energies: on what do you “bet your life?”.

What follows immediately is an analysis of 68 replies received with respect to the first question, which was an attempt to discover the extent of agreement or disagreement about the term among social scientists and other scholars interested in studying religion by social scientific methods. The 68 comprised 23 psychologists or psychiatrists, 21 ministers or religious scholars, 13 sociologists, social workers or anthropologists, 12 philosophers, natural scientists and others.

There did not seem to be any particular pattern of replies distinguishing any one of these groups, with one exception that will be noted below. Consequently, the group will be analyzed as a whole. Since the questionnaire was completely open-ended, analysis was quite difficult. Categorization was very rough, and there is no pretense that the sampling represents a scientific cross-section scientifically analyzed. It simply gives some idea of the variety of definitions proposed among those who might suppose that they are studying the same thing and suggests difficulties that arise at the outset of any attempted “scientific” study of religion." (p. 143)

(...)

"CONCLUSIONS

The results of this aspect of the study might have been predicted in advance. Certainly it needed no ghost to come from the grave to tell us that social scientists would differ in their definitions of religion. Yet it is wholesome to have the situation spelled out. What then are the conclusions of the whole matter?

1. Social scientists may mean very different things by the term “religion.” Contrast religion as ritual with religion as interaction between man and his environment ; or religion as an experience of the supernatural with religion as whatever meaning a person might find in his life. This leads to our next conclusion as a kind of corollary.

Religion has many facets. To anyone who has reflected much on the comprehensive nature of religion, this can come as no surprise.

Since a single social scientist may include several ideas in his definition of religion, we may suspect that there is a temptation to use it in one sense at one time and in a different sense at another. The definitions we have cited as illustrations were the simplest and clearest that we could find in our samples.

Others were even longer and more complex with the ideas sometimes well integrated and sometimes more loose. The more complicated the definition, the more difficult, we would expect, for all aspects of it to be kept clearly in mind." (p. 146)

5. Clarke, Peter B., and Byrne, Peter. 1993. *Religion Defined and Explained* . New York: St. Martin's Press.
Contents: Acknowledgements VI; Introduction VII-IX;
Part One: 1. The Definition and Essence of Religion 3; 2. The Dynamics of Explanation 28; 3. Forms of Explanation in Religion 55;
Part Two: 4. A Religious Theory of Religion 79; 5. Philosophical Theories of Religion 98; 6. Socio-economic Theories of Religion 122; 7. Sociological Theories of Religion 148; 8. Psychological Theories of Religion 173;
Conclusion 204; Bibliography 207; Index 213-215.
"In what sense does this book itself define and explain religion? It contributes to these tasks in only a modest way by defending a general approach to the enterprises of defining and explaining religion. This approach calls for tentative and cumulative explanatory knowledge of religion. This will be knowledge built up in the course of detailed study of particular religious phenomena. It will consist in knowledge of: the salient, characteristic features of religion; the detailed course of religious history; conceptual connections within the web of religious beliefs and meanings; general patterns in religious change and development; and interconnections, causal and interpretive, between religious phenomena and non-religious social and historical facts.
The grand theories of religion which illustrate our methodological discussion in Part One have a lasting importance. In many respects they have contributed to the explanatory knowledge mentioned in the previous paragraph. If we finally reject them, and the assumptions on which they rest, it is partly because we doubt whether, in this area, explanatory knowledge can ever be summed up in a theory of religion." (pp. VIII-IX)

6. Comstock, W. Richard. 1984. "Toward open definitions of religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* :499–517.
"Open Conclusion
The linguistic gap has been used to reformulate the customary way of understanding the function of definition in religious studies. New definitions of religion or tradition have not been proposed, but the understanding of definition as something self-contained has been transformed into the notion of an open process that not only allows but requires connections and clarifications with other texts to achieve specificity.
Once the usefulness of this proposal for religious studies is recognized, it becomes clear that what is needed are not new definitions of religion but a greater familiarity on the part of scholars with the notion of the open text and the open definition. But the classical notion of essence dies hard. It is possible to make obeisance to a new paradigm while continuing secretly and not so secretly to serve and advance the old. A period of discussion and investigation within the field will be required before the new model of the "open text" can be appropriated and used effectively." (p. 514)

7. Cotter, Christopher R. 2022. "Non-religion as Religion-Related Discourse: An Empirical Invitation." In *Nonreligion in Late Modern Societies: Institutional and Legal Perspectives* , edited by Zwilling, Anne-Laure and Årsheim, Helge, 229–250. Cham (Switzerland): Springer.
Abstract: "The twenty-first century has seen a marked rise in individuals across the (Western) world choosing not to identify with a ‘religion’ when prompted in various contexts, and a related rise in academic studies of what it might mean to be other than religious, which map and theorize the beliefs, identifications, values, practices, and social contexts of seemingly non-religious populations. Much of this work has a great deal to offer yet falls foul of the charge that it essentializes the differences between two constructed categories – religion and non-religion – and simultaneously reproduces and perpetuates problems associated with the category ‘religion’, and substantiates a category – ‘none’ – created for multiple choice surveys. This chapter begins by introducing the ‘critical religion’ perspective before turning this on contemporary non-religion research. In doing so, it champions a discursive approach as a way forward for the field, particularly because this enables

scholars to tackle the problem of essentialized identities – viewing them, rather, as contextual acts of identification. An extended empirical example then demonstrates the utility of such an approach, and the chapter concludes with reflections on the nature of specific discursive entanglements, on how identifying and being identified as non−/religious means more in certain circumstances than in others, and on how scholars ought to be relentlessly self-conscious in their approach to these matters."

8. Cox, James L. 1999. "Intuiting religion: A case for preliminary definitions." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 267–284. Leiden: Brill.
"In order to exemplify what I mean by a prior intuition, I want to offer my own preliminary definition of religion, which, admittedly, I have not 'invented' in my mind in isolation from the many definitions of religion which have been proposed in earlier literature. Nevertheless, the definition I am suggesting is intended to clarify my understanding of 'religion' and delimit it in advance, thereby providing for myself and for other scholars a practical guideline to engage productively with field data. In this context, I want to propose a slight variation on the working definition that I outlined originally in my book *Expressing the Sacred* , where I defined religion as 'a varied, symbolic expression of that which people (the I-We) appropriately respond to as being of unrestricted value for them'. (7) I want to amend this definition by replacing 'unrestricted value' with the concept of a 'non-falsifiable alternate reality' and emphasise in the process the central place of beliefs about, and experiences of, the postulated alternate reality. I have been helped in this reformulation by the work of the American anthropologist Felicitas Goodman in her book *Ecstasy, Ritual and Alternate Reality* (1988)." (pp. 268-269)
(7) Cox 1996: 15.
References
Cox,].L., 1996, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (2nd ed.). Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications. [revised edition: *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* , London: Continuum 2010]
Goodman, F.D., 1988, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World* . Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

9. ———. 2016. "Before the ‘After’ in ‘After World Religions’ – Wilfred Cantwell Smith on the meaning and end of religion." In *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies* , edited by Cotter, Christopher R. and Robertson, David G., XII.XVII. New York: Routledge.
"In his landmark work on theory and method in the study of religion, entitled *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1964, first published 1962), Wilfred Cantwell Smith devotes the second chapter, ‘Religion in the West’, to deconstructing the term ‘religion’ and its application to the concept of the ‘world religions’. Smith (1964, 19) suggests that the academic practice of talking about ‘religion’ and its ‘major forms’ in ‘Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on’ is so ‘fixed in our minds’ that scholars may regard his challenge to this way of thinking as ‘obstreperous’ or even ‘absurd’. But Smith (1964, 23–24) contends that the current way of conceptualizing religion has been developing since the seventeenth century under the influence of the Western Enlightenment. He argues that the term originally derives from the Latin *religio* , which when understood substantively may refer to an outside power or force, but when used adjectivally suggests a quality of life, the manner in which humans perceive the world, a sense of being religious. In other words, the adjectival use of *religio* is linked to human experience rather than regarding religion as referring to an object, such as a deity or an unseen power. Over time, the experiential meaning of religion was transformed into ‘a great objective something’ (1964, 25), so much so that religion, conceived as a ‘theoretical construct’, came to dominate how it was understood in the West, resulting in the current widespread description of religion as a ‘system of ideas’ (1964, 38). (pp. XII-XIII)
References

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. 1964 [1962]. *The Meaning and End of Religion. A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* . New York: Mentor Books.

10. ———. 2020. "The Transmission of an Authoritative Tradition. That without which Religion Is Not Religion." *Implicit Religion* no. 22:308–323.
Abstract: "Timothy Fitzgerald's critique of the category "religion" was based on two main objections: the study of religion as a distinct discipline has grown out of the historical collusion with colonial interests that has culminated in the modern division between religion and the secular; by associating the term "religion" with sacred entities, theological assumptions have been smuggled into so-called scientific studies of religion. In this paper, I offer my own non-theological, sociocultural working definition of religion in an effort to separate "the sacred" from "religion." I argue that religion consists of identifiable communities that adhere to traditions that are transmitted from generation to generation with an overwhelming authority. I conclude that Fitzgerald's critique of religion does not require scholars to abandon the category, but to re-think how they use the academic findings they have extracted from their research subjects. To advance beyond Fitzgerald's argument, I contend that academics need to work collaboratively with the religious communities they are researching by acknowledging them as the legitimate owners of the knowledge that is embedded in their authoritative traditions."

11. ———. 2020. "Religion as the Transmission of An Authoritative Tradition: The Significance of Timothy Fitzgerald's Critique of Religious Studies for a Socially Embedded Definition of Religion." *Implicit Religion* no. 22:331–348.
Abstract: "Timothy Fitzgerald's critique of the category "religion" was based on two main objections: the study of religion as a distinct discipline has grown out of the historical collusion with colonial interests that has culminated in the modern division between religion and the secular; by associating the term "religion" with sacred entities, theological assumptions have been smuggled into so-called scientific studies of religion. In this paper, I offer my own non-theological, sociocultural working definition of religion in an effort to separate "the sacred" from "religion." I argue that religion consists of identifiable communities that adhere to traditions that are transmitted from generation to generation with an overwhelming authority. I conclude that Fitzgerald's critique of religion does not require scholars to abandon the category, but to re-think how they use the academic findings they have extracted from their research subjects. To advance beyond Fitzgerald's argument, I contend that academics need to work collaboratively with the religious communities they are researching by acknowledging them as the legitimate owners of the knowledge that is embedded in their authoritative traditions."

12. Crawford, Robert. 2002. *What is Religion?* New York: Routledge.
"Drawing on the definitions and what we have learned from our study, let us try a definition:
Religion is a belief in God, who is the unconditioned ground of all things, and in spiritual beings, resulting in personal experience of salvation or enlightenment, communities, scriptures, rituals, and a way of life.
It is neither too broad nor too narrow, short but inclusive, and has its basis in the religions that we have examined. Such a definition allows for a belief in a spiritual dimension under various names: God, Allah, Yahweh, Brahman, Guru, unconditioned nibbana or the Absolute. It is true that some religions do not have scriptures but the definition stems from the religions we have examined.
Philosophers continue to debate what the term God means, but since it is used extensively in religions we feel justified in retaining it. Those Buddhists who think positively of nibbana will equate it with the unconditioned and those who view it more negatively will still have the option of accepting it on the basis of spiritual beings in their religion.
The definition is not, of course, final, but we hope that it will lead to discussion and debate in an effort to understand religion which has been of such immense

importance in the history of mankind. In our final chapter we speculate about its future." (pp. 201-202)

13. Danz, Christian, and Deibl, Jakob Helmut. 2023. "Transformation of Religion: An Introduction." In *Transformation of Religion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* , edited by Danz, Christian and Deibl, Jakob Helmut, IX–XIII. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh.
"Sciences concerned with religion must be able to describe the inner workings of religion. This is only possible if religious practitioners' self-perception of their religion is included in the theoretical description. Without taking this into account, descriptions of religion tend towards functional models that assume religion even where it is not meant or intended by the participants.
It is also not enough to try to grasp religion at the content level of statements, images and symbols: Since these can also be used in a non-religious sense at any time, they do not provide sufficient information about the presence of religion. A theory of religion must therefore incorporate the knowledge of religious practitioners that they are communicating religion and nothing else.
However, the self-perception of religion is accessible to a science, which is not itself religion, only as a methodologically guided construction. No academic discipline can put itself in the place of its subject and claim a privileged access for itself. The study of religion must free itself from such notions, as well as from an understanding of religion that presupposes a common substance underlying all religions and from an ontological monism that assumes a reality that is represented merely in different ways by diverse cultural forms. The academic disciplines concerned with religion only arrive at a constructive understanding of religion when they grasp it as a form of truth-telling in its own right, alongside other forms, and analyse the conditions for the success of this truth-telling.(12) The task of religious studies would then indeed be to describe the inner workings of religion as religion." (pp. XI-XII)
(12) Cf. Latour, *Existenzweisen. ine Anthropologie der Modernen.* Berlin: Suhrkamp 2018.

14. Dawes, Gregory, and Maclaurin, James. 2013. "What is Religion?" In *A New Science of Religion* , edited by Dawes, Gregory and Maclaurin, James, 11–25. New York: Routledge.
"Conclusion
It might seem at this point that the news is mostly bad. We have after all, set out a slew of mechanisms each of which yet induce more disparity amongst religious belief and practice. And we did say that those attempting naturalistic definitions ought to be prepared to countenance pluralism or even eliminativism. Indeed, in one sense we are eliminativists. The science isn't in. The dust hasn't settled. But we know enough about what makes religions to say that no simple definition consisting of necessary and sufficient conditions will pick out all and only the religions. However, in another more liberal sense, we think that what we have set out in this chapter are the elements of a definition that is, as yet, incomplete.
The more we understand about the processes that make religion diverse the more we draw together religious traditions that seem almost unrecognisable as religions to one another. Religion is a complex and as yet only partially understood set of interrelated natural processes. The relatively limited set of processes we have discussed here unite a huge number of tremendously disparate religious beliefs and practices. To be sure, there will always be hard cases, but the new science of religion is at least explaining why those cases are hard and why they deserve to be studied by a unified science of religion." (p. 22)

15. de Vries, Hent. 2008. "Introduction: Why Still ‘‘Religion’’?" In *Religion: Beyond a Concept* , edited by de Vries, Hent, 1–98. New York: Fordham University Press.
"Conclusion
‘‘Religion,’’ in its very ‘‘concept’’ and ‘‘beyond,’’ whether defined and redefined by the state (by constitutional law and jurisprudence) or by a discipline (by expert communities of scholars whose ideological sensibilities may vary from avowed or

unavowed confessionalism to unabashed or unacknowledged naturalism and reductionism, methodological atheism, or agnosticism), still eludes classificatory regimes. They are fallible, necessarily incomplete systems of control and intellectual hegemony, ways of world making, coping with finitude, and whistling in the dark." (p. 97)
(...)
"The study and teaching of ‘‘religion’’ as a part of ‘‘culture’’—while sometimes in tune, then in adamant discord with the religious teaching of ‘‘cults,’’ that is, with being, living, and acting ‘‘religiously’’—means cultivating a sensibility to seemingly ungraspable distinctions and commonalities, which must sometimes be affirmed, sometimes denied, in rhythms whose control escapes us and for which no criteria, no rules, can (so far?) be found. What counts are minimal differences that nonetheless make maximal differences in the world, as if a certain invisibility, imperceptibility, inaudibility, even ineffectiveness could have all the greater impact. Pianissimo, as it were.
Such minimal ‘‘religion,’’ thinned out as it has become in many regions of modern life, paradoxically takes on the appearance of an increasingly vague and void ‘‘global religion.’’ ‘‘Transcendent to the point of absence,’’ it welds the retreat of its signification to a virtually immanent force field to be reckoned with, a ‘‘curvature of social space’’ (to draw once more on Levinas). Moreover, it does so nowhere more poignantly than where it seems to have no assignable discursive or institutional place. To study ‘‘religion beyond a concept,’’ then, would require a knowledge, judgment, and sensibility not governed by criteria or rules, in matters whose sense and potential non-sense may elude us at any moment, yet whose reverberations, for this very reason, carry all the more weight." (p. 98)

16. Derrida, Jacques. 1998. "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone." In *Religion* , edited by Derrida, Jacques and Vattimo, Gianni, 1–78. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Translated from the French by Samuel Weber.
"In any case, the history of the word 'religion' should in principle forbid every non-Christian from using the name 'religion', in order to recognize in it what 'we' would designate, identify and isolate there. Why add here this qualification of 'non-Christian'? In other words, why should the concept of religion be solely Christian? Why, in any case, does the question deserve to be posed and the hypothesis taken seriously? Benveniste also recalls that there is no 'common' Indo-European term for what we call 'religion'. The Indo-Europeans did not conceive 'as a separate institution' what Benveniste, for his part, calls 'the omnipresent reality that is religion'. Even today, wherever such a 'separate institution' is not recognized, the word 'religion' is inadequate. There has not always been, therefore, nor is there always and everywhere, nor will there always and everywhere ('with humans' or elsewhere) be *something* , a thing that is one and identifiable, identical with itself, which, whether religious or irreligious, all agree to call 'religion'. And yet, one tells oneself, one still must respond. Within the Latin sphere, the origin of *religio* was the theme of challenges that in truth were interminable. Between two readings or two lessons, therefore, two provenances: on the one hand, supported by texts of Cicero, *relegere* , what would seem to be the avowed formal and semantic filiation: bringing together in order to return and begin again; whence *religio* , scrupulous attention, respect, patience, even modesty, shame or piety - and, on the other hand (Lactantius and Tertullian) *religare* , etymology 'invented by Christians', as Benveniste says,(22) and linking religion to the link, precisely, to obligation, ligament, and hence to obligation, to debt etc., between men or between man and God." (pp. 56-57)
References
Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* , trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Faber and Faber, London, 1973)-

17. Dimock, Hedley S. 1928. "Trends in the Redefinition of Religion." *The Journal of Religion* no. 8:434–452.

"This article represents an attempt to outline a method for reaching an understanding of the nature of religion which will meet the demands of the criteria entitling it to the term "scientific."
The approach developed in this study suggests merely one of various methods that might legitimately be employed.
A working definition or understanding of religion should satisfy the criteria enumerated as follows: First, it should take into account all of the facts or data of religion.
This means that it should include all the elements-thoughtforms, customs, attitudes, and ceremonies-of all religions in the various stages of development. Secondly, the psychological and social forces which give rise to the religious thought forms and activities, the human needs, wants, motives, purposes, and interests, should be unfolded and analyzed. Further, the distinctive nature and functional significance of the religious phenomena for the individual and group should be clarified. This last criterion would yield the differentia of religious behavior. To meet the demands of these criteria calls for the synthetic employment of the genetic, psychological, social, and historical methods of analyzing and describing the inclusive data of religions.
A second promising method for achieving a tentative working hypothesis of the nature of religion would be an intensive critique of the history of the attempt to discover the nature of religion within the religious sciences. A critical analysis of representative efforts during the past few decades to unfold the nature of religion should indicate the factors making for divergency and limitations in understanding, the present trends in the interpretation of religion, and the possibility of convergence in understanding with the employment of a more adequate methodology." (pp. 434-435, a note omitted)

18. Dole, Andrew C. 2023. "The Vagueness of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 91:757–776.
Abstract: "A concept is vague if it admits of borderline cases—cases in which it is not clear whether the concept applies. Thus vague concepts are concepts without sharp boundaries. I argue that religion is vague, and I draw conclusions from this claim for both framing up conceptions of religion and studying it. One result will be to undermine arguments to the effect that any account of religion that does not sharply demarcate the religious from the nonreligious is somehow defective. Another will be that admitting the existence of borderline cases relieves us of the obligation to seek high levels of precision in our various usages of the term. And a third will be that is it not at all clear that any periods of human history can be characterized as times “before religion” on any but the narrowest of definitions."

19. Dow, James 2007. "A Scientific Definition of Religion." *Anpere* :1–15.
Reprinted in John S. Wilkins (ed.), *Intelligent Design and Religionas a Natural Phenomenon: Volume V* Aldershot: Ashgate 2010, pp. 35-49.
Abstract: "Religion is a collection of behavior that is only unified in our Western conception of it.
It need not have a natural unity. There is no reason to assume, and good reason not to assume, that all religious behavior evolved together at the same time in response to a single shift in the environment. This article does not look at the religion as a unified entity and seek a definition of its essence. Instead, it looks at what science needs to know in order to discover how and why religion came into existence as a human behavior. What does science need to know about religion, or how should religion be defined so that science can look at it? A definition that refers to observable behavior is required. Then, a preliminary hypothesis to orient observations is proposed. I suggest a preliminary hypothesis consisting of three stages in the evolution of religion: (1) a cognizer of unobservable agents, (2) a sacred category classifier, and (3) a motivator for public sacrifice. Each one of these stages is a nucleus of modern anthropological theorizing. Although they all come together in the Western folk concept of religion, this article proposes that they are

independent evolutionary complexes that should not be lumped together, but should be investigated as separate types of religious behavior."

20. Droogers, André F. 1999. "The third bank of the river: Play, methodological ludism and the definition of religion." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 285–312. Leiden: Brill.
"Summarizing the approach followed so far, religion can provisionally be defined as:
the term scholars use for the varied application-within the parameters set by the power mechanisms that correspond to the degree of institutionalization-of the human capacity for play to the articulation of the tension experienced between inexpressibility and representation, between belonging and separation, between a unifying identification and a differentiating identity, an application that adds an extra dimension to reality, which allows human beings to overcome this tension.
This definition is, of necessity, both partial and selective, because it focusses on play itself. With regard to the criteria and dichotomies mentioned in the preceding section, this focus can also be said to present religion as an etic and scholarly concept, because the emphasis is laid on its academic nature. Such a concept combines functional, substantive and experiential elements, in that it points not only to religion's role in solving existential tension, but also in introducing the idea of an extra dimension in reality. It is reductionist in focus, but leaves room for a religionist view. The definition recognizes religious variety and incorporates the power dimension of religion.
This definition must, however, be provisional, because there is a lot more to be said about the art of defining and explaining religion.
Having explored the link between play and religion, therefore, the scientific study of religion should be discussed in a 'playful' light." (pp. 303-304)

21. ———. 2009. "Defining Religion: A Social Science Approach." In *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* , edited by Clarke, Peter B., 263–279. New York: Oxford University Press.
"The inevitable conclusion is that the definition of religion cannot be isolated from the position of the definer in the context of global society, the science paradigm, and the secularization debate.
(...)
This is the ultimate consequence of viewing the concept of religion as a recent construct, a product of a world that has become one place, but also an outcome of the also recent opposition between religion and secular science. This one-field approach could be the expressed in the following definition:
Religion is the field of experiencing the sacred—a field in which both believers and scholars act, each category applying the human capacity for play, within the constraints of power mechanisms, to the articulation of basic human dichotomies, thus adding an extra dimension to their construction and view of reality. (Slightly adapted from Droogers 1999: 310)" (pp. 276-277)
References
Droogers, Andre' (1999). 'The Third Bank of the River: Play, Methodological Ludism and the Definition of Religion'. In Platvoet and Molendijk (1999), 285–312.
Platvoet, Jan G., and Molendijk, Arie L. (eds.) (1999). *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion* . Leiden: Brill.

22. Dubuisson, Daniel. 2003. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* . Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
English translation by William Sayers of *L'Occident et la religion: mythes, science et idéologie* , Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1998.
"If, instead of viewing the history of religions in Its totality, we set ourselves the question of the simple notion of religion. the alternatives would be at least as clear-cut and similarly oriented. Let us summarize: although born in the West of a culture for which It has been the unceasing symbol over these past two millennia, has this

notion nevertheless acquired, thanks to critical studies conducted by the history of religions for more than a century, an indisputable and rigorous definition, capable of aiding us in discovering and understanding the much discussed anthropological invariables evoked above - or, on the contrary, captive to Its origins and history, has it instead remained a kind of native concept, typically European, gathering and summarizing under its aegis the struggles of a Western consciousness grappling with itself?

By setting out the terms of these two alternatives, the central issue of this book has at least been clearly defined. With the history of religions and its central notion, religion, what is in question is, in fact, nothing more or less than certain pretensions of modern Western science to conceive of humankind and the world according to codes that it has elaborated and to points of reference that It has fixed. Or, if we prefer to turn this observation Into a blunter question, is Western anthropology, religious anthropology in particular, In its quest for the Other and for our very humanity, capable of discovering anything but Itself-that Is, anything other than Its own categories and Its own ways of conceiving the world?" (pp. 5-6)

23. ———. 2019. *The Invention of Religions* . Sheffield: Equinox.

Original edition: *L'invention des religions* , Paris: Éditions du CNRS 2019., translation by Martha Cunningham.

"Part One proposes two objectives. On the one hand, it intends to recall the history of Christian notions, but especially that of the notion of religion, with its simultaneous controversies and turbulence.

This constitutes an indispensable chapter, since too often we project retroactively upon the distant past what amounts to *post facto* clarity, since these were not our convictions at the time.

On the other hand, it will allow for the discovery of the topics that haw been circumscribed via the main questions of specialists since the mid-nineteenth century — that is, since the appearance of the History of Religions as an academic discipline. (Note that using capital letters here allows me to distinguish the academic discipline from the simple succession of historical facts.) This creation was characterized, as is proper, by the establishing of university chairs, specialized journals, and scholarly collections. For indeed, one must never assume that questions, especially in the social sciences, arise in and of themselves from how we view their importance (which is often merely the product of a retrospective illusion, tainted with ethnocentrism). In reality, these questions are always the result of a historical process, often long and complex, that has imposed itself upon the conscience of its contemporaries. That is why it will be necessary' to examine the aporias, impasses, and contradictions that the History of Religions, as an academic discipline anchored in European and Christian cultural compost, has navigated through up to now — that is, up to the appearance of this radical movement that has so profoundly secularized (or neutralized, if preferable) the study of religions.

Strengthened by this preliminary support, the first three chapters of Part Two are devoted to the presentation of the theses, authors, and methods - but also the institutions and controversies — that today form the main substance of the vast current of Critical Studies of Religion (henceforth, Critical Studies).

(...)

A fourth chapter follows immediately, containing three internally related contributions, devoted respectively to "colonialism and cultural imperialism," the "invention" of two Oriental religions (Hinduism and Shinto), and, finally, the emergence of approximately ten World Religions over the course of the nineteenth century.

Finally, in Part Three, some of the paradoxes, lacunae, and aponas of this current will be examined, as have already been collected during its brief existence, but also the fruitful paths that it has opened up for the future. In under 30 years, and while the History of Religions tended to doze in the shade of the powers who guard the defenders of *religion* (9) and The Sacred (Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade), the current has made use of a large number of ideas,

theses, and arguments that themselves are far from having passed through the crucible of meta-cnticism.
Once they have gone through this test, they will probably provide the material for major future paradigms, much needed by the discipline in order to be recast and able to pursue renewal." (pp. 2-3)
(9) Written in italics, the word "religion" allows me to designate "religion par excellence" — that is, the Christian religion as it defines itself as well as its idealized, essentialized prototype.

24. Engler, Steven. 2004. "Constructionism versus what?" *Religion* no. 34:291–313.
Abstract: "Constructionism is a theoretical perspective with great potential usefulness for the study of religion.
However, the theory is often assumed rather than clarified, and it is often reduced to its extreme relativistic versions. As a result, its value has stagnated even as talk of constructs has proliferated. Constructionism has been portrayed as the other of religion's two realisms: theological and phenomenological. It has been cast in the role of a conveniently discounted counter-position. Constructionist work in the study of religion, by failing to clarify its theoretical basis adequately and by too often accepting the role of antagonist to realism, shares responsibility for this misleading and detrimental characterisation. Lack of due attention to theory has obscured the status and claims of constructionism. This theoretical perspective is not necessarily reductionist or radically relativist, and it is not simply the opposite of realist or sui generis approaches to religion. Constructionism can help us understand how historically and culturally contingent religious phenomena arise from the raw materials of our physical and social worlds.
The first two sections of this article present a brief sketch of the development and key characteristics of constructionism, illustrating something of its breadth and variety. In the third section a consideration of constructionism in religious studies demonstrates the need to clarify three key issues. First, constructionist approaches are not necessarily anti-realist and so can be consistent with critical theological or sui generis perspectives. Second, the overwhelming lack of explicitly developed theory has obscured and obstructed the usefulness of constructionism in religious studies. Third, the relationship between constructionism and other theoretical positions needs to be clarified."

25. ———. 2005. "Two Problems with Constructionism in the Study of Religion." *Revista de Estudos da Religião* no. 4:28–34.
Abstract: "This essay examines the role of "constructionism" in the academic study of religion. It argues that the use of this theoretical perspective have had little value for three reasons. (1) Misinterpreted as necessarily relativistic, it has served as a superficial foil for theological and phenomenological realisms. (2) Instead of specifying what is constructed from what and how, the theory has been taken for granted rather than clarified. As a result, the language of "construction" adds little, given that most work in the field already places religious phenomena in their contingent social context."

26. Engler, Steven, and Miller, Dean. 2006. "Review symposium: Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion* ." *Religion* no. 36:119–178.
"Abstract: "In The Western Construction of Religion Daniel Dubuisson argues that the concept of 'religion' is too historically and culturally contingent to serve as the basis for a comparative discipline. The concept is indigenous to Western culture and is inherently theological and phenomenological. He argues for a constructionist view of the discipline and proposes the concept 'cosmographic formations' as a replacement for 'religion'. Religious phenomena should be taken as discursive constructions that link embodied individuals to the social, cultural and cosmic orders. The following reviews evaluate Dubuisson's arguments, relating them to broader currents in the theory of religion. Daniel Dubuisson responds to each of the reviews.(1)"

(1) The reviews by Engler, Hughes and Segal were presented in a session of the Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion meeting in San Antonio, Texas, in November 2005. Ann Taves' contribution is adapted from her response to these commentators at that AAR Session. An additional review from that session, by Gustavo Benavides, is not included here because portions were previously committed for publication elsewhere. Dean Miller gathered the three additional reviews. Dubuisson's responses were edited and translated by Steven Engler.
Steven Engler, *Agency, order and time in the human science of religion* , pp. 120-126.
Aaron W. Hughes, *Haven't we been here before? rehabilitating 'religion' in light of Dubuisson's critique* , pp. 127-131.
Robert A. Segal, Dubuisson's *The Western Construction of Religion* , pp. 131-138.
Ann Taves, Comments on Daniel Dubuisson's *The Western Construction of Religion* , pp. 138-140
Wilhelm Dupré, *Critique and challenge: some remarks on Daniel Dubuisson's critique of the concept of religion* , pp. 140-146.
Forrest L. Vance, *The Cosmographic Situation of Psychology* , pp. 146-153.
Russell T. McCutcheon: *The resiliency of conceptual anachronisms: on knowing the limits of 'the West' and 'religion'* , p. 154-165.
Daniel Dubuisson, Response, pp. 165-175.
References 175-178.

27. Engler, Steven, and Stausberg, Michael. 2024. "*Religion* in changing times: an overview of the journal in its comparative scholarly and publishing contexts." *Religion* no. 54:371–395.
Abstract: "This article offers an overview of the history and current status of the journal *Religion* (Routledge). Its authors have co-edited the journal since 2008. It reviews aspects of the journal's history and its profile as a generalist, international disciplinary journal in the study of religion/s. It offers bibliometric overview of the journal, in comparison with 49 other SoR [Study of Religion] journals, followed by a discussion of journals as business venues and of changes brought about by Open Access, including challenges posed by new publishers and new types of (mega) journals. The article concludes with reflection on the peer review process."

28. Feil, Ernst. 1992. "From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern Religion: Elements of a Transformation between 1550 and 1650." 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, 31–43. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
"As far as conclusions are concerned, the main difference between me and Michel Despland is that I find, up to the middle of the sixteenth century, which is as far as my first volume goes, an astonishingly strong attachment to a classical and Roman concept of *religio* . I am therefore unable to discover different understandings of *religio* in the more than thousand-year history of the concept up to this point. Religio means the careful and even fearful fulfilment of all that man owes to God or to the gods. In this sense, *religio* means something very neccessary to man. It is by no means that which very generally lies at the bottom of all different opinions and persuasions, but on the contrary, something very concrete. It involves the careful enacting of rituals before political and military action, as well as, in fear and trembling, attending to every sacrifice and to other demands, handed down from the past to be passed on to future generations. Therefore, I will use the Latin word *religio* without translating it whenever it occurs in the original Latin text and meaning.
We can add, completely within this framework of meaning, that quite early (according to my research, already in the 7th century) *religio* became a designation for the communities of those people who dedicated their whole lives to the scrupulous and withdrawn service of God, the *religiosi* , which gave rise, of course,

to the English expression "religious" for one belonging to such an order (R 76f.)." (p. 32)

References

R = *Religio* . Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Fruhchristentum bis ztir Reformation (= Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 36), Gottingen 1986.

29. ———. 1999. "'Religio' and 'religion' in the 18th century: The contrasting views of Wolff and Edelmann." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 125–148. Leiden: Brill.

"The initial aim of my research project was to clarify the relationships between 'faith-reason-religion'. It would, I hoped, contribute to the current attempts at examining the basis of social and political realities, which are often related to 'religion' (cf. 'civil religion').

I soon realised that the history of the meaning of 'religion' was particularly unclear and I assumed that I would quickly find the needed clarity when I embarked on a study of the history of the term *religio* from early Christianity onwards. Having published the first(20) and the second parts(21) of my study, I am now trying to explore the period up to 1830. Because my studies have shown that there was no continuous development in the meaning of the word 'religion' from the classical Roman and Christian religio to modern, specifically Protestant 'religion', my concern now is to discover how this transformation, or change, in the meaning of the term actually occurred.

On the basis of the results which this project has delivered so far, the views of two authors on 'religion' will now be presented, to wit those of Christian Wolff and Johann Christian Edelmann. If I am not mistaken, it is precisely these two scholars who occupied such prominent positions in terms of our problem, in the first half of the 18th century. This contribution will be concluded by presenting some conclusions that may justifiably be drawn from my analyses of Wolff's and Edelmann's views on 'religion'." (pp. 129-130)

(20) Feil 1986.

(21) Feil 1997.

References

Feil, E. 1986, Religio: *Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriff vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation* . Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (= Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, 36)

--~ 1997, Religio II: *Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriff zwischen Reformation und Rationalismus (ca. 1540-1620)* . Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (= Forschungen zur Kirchen- und ogmengeschichte, 70).

---, forthcoming/a, Religio III. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. [Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert. 2001]

--~, forthcoming/b, Religio IV Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. [Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffsim 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert. 2007]

30. ———, ed. 2000. *On the Concept of Religion* . Albany: State University of New York Press.

First published as a fascicle of the periodical *Ethik und Sozialwissenschaften: Streitforum für Erwägungskultur* (1995), Heft 4). Translated from Brian Mc Neil.

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Part III: Response
Ernst Feil, On the historicization of more than only modern “religion” 161;
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"Intensive discussions in recent years have been devoted to the question whether “religion” has a future. Many answer this question in the affirmative, pointing in justification to many kinds of signs of religion, new religions, interest in the world religions, psychological groups, etc.
Behind all this, however, there lies the more difficult question: what is meant by “religion” in the first place? The answers given here are so various that it is no longer possible to arrive at a definition that is even roughly satisfactory.
Distinguished authors such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith or Franz Tenbruck draw the conclusion that one should therefore abandon this concept completely, whereas others plead that one should retain it as an umbrella term. The problem remains that it is no longer possible to tie down a meaning that can be stated with any degree of precision.
Against the background of these problems, a conference was held in the “House of World Cultures” in Berlin in July 1996.
(...)
"Above all, however, I am profoundly grateful to Jacob Neusner, who suggested the translation and accepted it for the series which he edits. I am grateful to Scholars Press, and especially to Leigh Andersen, for their competent cooperation in the process of publication." (*Introduction* , pp. VII-VIII)
"When I make a theological evaluation of “religion” as negative, it is in the sense of a replacement of faith by “religion.” This can justifiably be called a secularization process, as some scholars have done. Thus, with all respect, I make a theological criticism of Ernst Troeltsch, and I hold that it is mistaken to attempt to carry out the philosophy of religion today (I deliberately use this term, rather than “theology”) on the basis of Troeltsch’s conception. Such a basis also leads to disqualifying Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as “anti-modem”—and all this in the interest and service of the individual (cf. Wagner, 2)." (*Response* , p. 168)
References
Wagbìner, P. *Was ist Religion? Studien zu ihrem Begriff und Thema in Geschichte und Gegenwart* , Gütersloh 1986.

31. ———. 2000. "The problem of defining and demarcating “religion”." In *On the Concept of Religion* , edited by Feil, Ernst, 1–35. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Summary: "The thesis is that the Latin word *religio* meant something quite different from any modem understanding of the word “religion,” and that the latter had kept its specific ancient meaning practically unchanged until it underwent an epochal change in the eighteenth century; furthermore, this new (modem Protestant) “religion” was a part of human experience up to the middle of the twentieth century. Consequently, we can no longer speak of "religion” as it was understood in the past. To verify the thesis, important issues of the present are outlined, and the results of historical inquiries undertaken for systematic purposes are also presented with sufficient fullness to establish that a new modem notion of “religion” came into being after 1700, and to show its subsequent demise. The conclusion is that, historically and systematically, the modem notion of “religion” must be seen as an historical one, so that we can no longer work in systematic theology with the presupposition that “religion” is an anthropological constant found among all peoples at all times. Religion as situated essentially in feeling or at least in the inner dimension of the human person seems to have come to an end."

32. Ferré, Frederick. 1970. "The Definition of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 38:3–16.
"In what follows three sections correspond to my three primary aims for this occasion. First, I have an *apologetic* aim: to defend the very enterprise of definition-making, particularly the enterprise of defining *religion* , against several significant criticisms. Second, I have a *constructive* and *critical* aim to sketch out a definition of religion, briefly explain it, test it, and show some of its uses. And third, I have a frankly *hortatory* aim: I want what I say to make a fruitful difference, both among inquirers in the fields concerned with religion and outside them. I intend, therefore, to close with an appeal to this body to take a vitally required initiative in ending the present state of conceptual chaos engulfing studies about religion." (p. 3)

33. Finn, Gerldine. 2015. "Interrogating the Categories: Of Religion, Politics and the Space Between." In *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* , edited by Strack, Trevor, Goldenberg, Naomi R. and Fitzgerald, Timothy, 293–308. Leiden: Brill.
"I have come to the conclusion (provisional, of course) that Religion (what is called Religion and propagated and practised in its name) is a symptom of patriarchy, and attachment *to* Religion a symptom of the subjectivism (of modernity) outlined (all too schematically) above.(8) I offer this not as a definition of Religion, or even a description, but as a *diagnosis* of a pathology, a weakness or wound, a logos of suffering and disease, which is intrinsic to patriarchy where patriarchy means the law of the Father. For what is a Father if not the father of (a) law which legislates paternity? A *status* which is determined and conferred collectively according to local and historical rules and not a directly experienced reality or relation. And which is, as such, contingent and contestable, unstable and insecure, and subject to the paranoia which produces spectacular effects of self-affirmation and confirmation such as those described above." (pp. 306-307)
(8) “Symptoms register not only past failed revolutionary attempts but, more modestly, past failures to respond to calls for action or even for empathy on behalf of those whose suffering in some sense belongs to the form of life of which one is a part. They hold the place of something that is there, that insists in our life, though it has never achieved full ontological consistency.
Symptoms are thus in some sense the virtual archives of voids–or, perhaps, better, defenses against voids–that persist in historical experience” (Zizek: 23).
References
Zizek, Slavoj (2002). *Welcome to the Desert of the Real. Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* . London & New York: Verso.

34. FItzgerald, Timothy. 1997. "A Critique of ‘Religion’ as a Cross-Cultural Category." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 9:91–110.
Abstract: "This article has three related purposes. One is to argue the inadequacy of the concept of religion as an analytical concept. I point to vagueness and

imprecision in the use of the notion of religion in religious studies texts and I also refer to my own research in India and Japan to substantiate my claim that religion is virtually useless as a cross-cultural analytical concept. The second purpose is to suggest ways of representing and re-representing the extensive and important work which is being produced by scholars who work in religion departments. I also try to place my argument in a wider context of western ideology. I conclude that the confusion generated by the concept of religion cannot be explained only as a category mistake. Instead, it is better understood as a form of mystification generated by its disguised ideological function."

35. ———. 2017. "“Religion” Is Not a Stand-Alone Category." In *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* , edited by King, Richard, 435–454. New York: Columbia University Press.
"I use the term “critical religion” as shorthand for the critical study of the category “religion” and its discursive formations in relation to other categories, such as “pagan” in the older discourse and the nonreligious secular in the prevailing dominant mode. Clearly, if religion is not a stand-alone category but wedded inescapably to the nonreligious secular, then critical religion amounts to a project for bringing to light the interlinked ideological functions of the so-called nonreligious domains that are parasitic on the invention of religion for their conceptualization. The categories with which “religion” has historically and significantly been linked in various ways can be discovered through the analysis of texts and other discursive media." (p. 437)

36. ———. 2017. "Critical Religion: “Religion” Is Not a Stand-Alone Category." In *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* , edited by King, Richard, 435–454. New York: Columbia University Press.
"I use the term “critical religion” as shorthand for the critical study of the category “religion” and its discursive formations in relation to other categories, such as “pagan” in the older discourse and the nonreligious secular in the prevailing dominant mode. Clearly, if religion is not a stand-alone category but wedded inescapably to the nonreligious secular, then critical religion amounts to a project for bringing to light the interlinked ideological functions of the so-called nonreligious domains that are parasitic on the invention of religion for their conceptualization. The categories with which “religion” has historically and significantly been linked in various ways can be discovered through the analysis of texts and other discursive media." (p. 437)

37. ———. 2020. "The Ideology of Religious Studies Then and Now." *Implicit Religion* no. 22:268–290.
Abstract: "I have found it challenging and productive to revisit *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (IRS) twenty years after its publication. This article outlines the background to, and motivations for, writing IRS. IRS contains various arguments aimed against a complex target: liberal capitalism and agencies that serve to normalise its precepts and practices, particularly religious studies and the social sciences more widely. IRS was an early stage in a longer-term project – critical religion – that is still evolving. A core part of the argument was and is that the invention of generic religion and its binary opposite the non-religious secular operates rhetorically to make capitalism and liberal Individualism seem “natural,” with a mask of scientific objectivity, normality and respectability. However, I see retrospectively that there are two potentially antagonistic projects in IRS – limited critique and extended critique – which need to be analytically distinguished. This distinction may help to explain some differences in the responses of contributors."

38. Flood, Gavin. 2006. "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* no. 74:47–58.
Abstract: "In recent years questions about the coherence of Religious Studies have been raised, responses to which have important implications within both the politics of institutions and broader cultural politics. As specializations deepen, some

fragmentation in the field of Religious Studies is inevitable and a welcome antidote to earlier universalising claims. But we need to overcome the inadequate choice of using either problematic general categories or a relativistic reversion to purely area-specific study which relegates the study of 'religions' to departments of anthropology, sociology, or other splintered fields, and excludes theologies of traditions from the secular academy. This paper argues for Religious Studies not only as the social scientific study of religion but as an arena that gives hospitality to traditions' self-inquiry within a framework of rational discourse."

39. ———. 2012. *The Importance of Religion: Meaning and Action in Our Strange World* . Malden: Wiley Blackwell.
Introduction: Religion and the Human Condition , pp. 1-33.
"Religion and Religions
The reader will have noticed that sometimes I refer to “religion” and sometimes to “religions,” thereby apparently gliding over an issue about he very category “religion” and how it is defined. Are the many “religions,” species of the single genus “religion?” Can we speak about an essence of religion? Or is talk about “religions” simply a way of speaking about the diversity of human cultures? Must we restrict the category “religion,” which some argue arose between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to a particular historical development in the history of the West linked to the development of the private realm in contrast to secular governance? Is religion a social construct or a natural category? Are there any more difficulties in defining or isolating “religion” from other spheres of human activity such as “art,” “music,” “politics,” or “economics?”(36) All of our European categories or abstractions are the product of secularization and what Derrida refers to as our “theologico-political heritage.”(37) Can we speak of religion in the singular or must we speak of religions? Indeed, can we only speak of religion in the singular because religion is only the product of western thinking? The general thrust of much scholarship has been in this direction although we would do well to remember, as Stroumsa shows, that religions in the plural was used as early as 1508 by Catholics to refer to systems of belief and behavior.(38) Wilfred Cantwell-Smith many years ago argued that the idea of religion was a European construction that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as “a concept of polemics and apologetics,”(39) an abstraction or reification of piety and faith. Others have followed this trend, skeptical of the category and its universal application." (p. 12)
(36) See the comments by Tweed, Thomas A., *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 30.
(37) Derrida is citing Carl Schmitt, the German political philosopher who recognizes the secular origin of categories in his critique of the attempt to neutralize politics in his time. Derrida, J., “Faith and Knowledge,” p. 26, in J. Derrida and G. Vattimo (eds), *Religion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 1–78.
(38) Stroumsa, Guy G., *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 27.
(39) Cantwell-Smith, Wilfred, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 43.

40. Ford, David F. 2010. "Theology." In *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion: Second Edition* , edited by Hinnells, John R., 93–110. 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)

41. Forward, Martin. 2001. *Religion: A Beginner's Guide* . Oxford: Oneworld.
"Chapter 1 asks 'What is religion?'. Chapter 2, 'Is anyone or something there?', explores the deep-rooted notion in the human heart, mind and spirit that there is more to life than meets the eye.
What is that more? How have humans described it? Is it totally other than and different from humans, or somehow, even if elusively, located within this world of the senses? Chapter 3, 'How the Transcendent sees us and we see the Transcendent', illustrates how people throughout the centuries have attempted to respond to that dimension to life that is, in some ways, more than meets the eyes. So it discusses what has come to be termed 'spirituality' by many in the West. Chapter 4 is entitled 'The Good Life'. It describes what religions demand of their adherents in terms of an orientation towards the world. Is this life an end in itself, or simply one stage of a journey? What should our attitude be to the world of the senses that we inhabit here and now? What should we do in this life, and why? How far should our goodwill extend? Chapter 5, 'Religion in the New Millennium', looks at the challenges facing religion in the contemporary world, and hazards a few guesses about its future importance." (*Introduction* , p. XIII)
(,,,)
"Members of some religions claim that that nomenclature is inappropriate for the system to which they belong. It is not uncommon to hear Hindus and Muslims claim that they belong to a way of life. Yet often, what these people are denying is the Western compartmentalisation of religion, reducing it to one (sometimes unimportant and optional) branch of life. Or else there is a polemical edge to their claim: you belong to a religion, they seem to be affirming, whereas I follow the way of truth, salvation, liberation or enlightenment." (pp. 28-29)

42. Fowler, William Warde. 1908. "The Latin History of the Word 'Religio'."
Transactions of the Third Congress for the History of Religion :169–175.
Reprinted in W. W. Fowler, *Roman Essays and Interpretations* , Oxford: Clarendond Press 1920, pp. 7-15.
"This word, which in its modern form is in use all over Europe, had a remarkable history in its own Latin speech and literature. That history seems to me to have more than a mere linguistic interest, and I propose in this paper to indicate in outline where that interest lies."
(...)
"But there was to be a real change in the meaning of the word, the last but one in its history. The second century a. d. was that in which the competition was keenest between various religious creeds and forms, each with its own vitality, and each clearly marked off from the others. It is no longer a question of religion as a whole contemplated by a critical or a sympathetic philosophy: the question is, which creed and which form is to be the true and the victorious religion. Our wonderful word again adapts itself to the situation. Each separate religious system can now be called a *religio* .(4) The old polytheistic system can now be called *religio Deorum* by the Christian, while his own creed is *religio Dei* . In the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, written probably in the first half of the second century a. d., the word is already used in this sense.
(...)
Thus the word has meant successively (1) the natural fear and awe which semi-civilized man feels in the presence of what he cannot explain ; (2) the cult by which he strives to propitiate the unseen Powers, together with the scruple he feels if the propitiation is in the least degree imperfect; (3) the whole sphere of worship, together with all belief in the supernatural, as viewed from the standpoint of the philosopher; (4) the competing divisions of that sphere of worship and belief, each being now a *religio* , and the Christian faith being for the Christian the vera *religio* .
There is one later stage in the history of the word, which I can only mention here. It

suffered a degradation when it was made to mean the monastic life: the life of men who withdrew themselves from a world in which true religion was not. But even in this degraded form it reveals once more its wonderful capacity to express the varying attitude of humanity towards the supernatural. Outside the monasteries—the homes of the *religiosi* —were a thousand fears, fancies, superstitions, which the old Roman might have summed up by his word *religio* , the anxious fear of the supernatural: inside them, for many ages at least, was still something of the *vera religio* of the early Fathers, the devotion and the ritual combined, the pure life and training, *religio Dei* ." (pp. 13-15)
(4) 'e cohorte religionis unus,' *Apul.* xi. 14, of Isis.

43. Frankenberry, Nancy. 2014. "The Study of Religion after Davidson and Rorty." *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* no. 35:195–210.
"In sum, I reject the idea that we can explain religion by grounding irrational beliefs in prerational needs. I also reject any equivalence between need fulfillment and wish fulfillment. A theory of religion that involves wish fulfillment, as one part, differs from functionalist theories that involve need fulfillment, in a way similar to how fantasy's reference to merely possible events differs from biology's to actual events. And a theory of religion that incorporates beliefs about "superhuman agents" can also stress that (a) claims about superhuman beings are capable of being true or false, (b) they are false, (c) but this does not make religion, on the whole, liable to old secularist-Enlightenment prejudices about "illusion" and "superstition." Illusion is only detectible against a background of more widespread nonillusion; superstition is only discerned against a background of more widespread nonsuperstition; and irrationality is possible only on the condition that it is dwarfed by rationality." (p. 206)

44. Friess, Horace L. 1962. "Comments [on J. Paul Williams, *The Nature of Religion*]." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* :15–17.
"These remarks have their bearing upon a type of definition which Professor Williams seems to dismiss with little more than a shrug. I refer to what he calls "the adoption of some type of Platonism, of the belief that true religion is one of the eternal ideas, or perhaps that it was created by Almighty God and that every- thing else claiming to be religion is false." The trouble with this type of approach, in relation to scientific study, is not just the divine privilege claimed for some specific religion. The trouble is that the grounds upon which a privileged status is claimed are not sufficiently open to empirical examination and human criticism. But those who work within the boundaries of such a "Platonic" or revelational framework can also participate in scientific discovery in the domain of religion, if they care to take the required pains." (p. 17)

45. Fujda, Milan. 2020. "Connecting Fitzgerald and Latour for the Sake of Democratic Religious Studies." *Implicit Religion* no. 22:391–412.
Abstract: "There is a theoretical and methodological toolbox for postcolonial, i.e. truly democratic, religious studies which is available and ready for use. Through it, the discipline can drop the analytical categories of "religion" and "belief " completely from its vocabulary. Timothy Fitzgerald's criticism of the colonising rhetorical structure of "religion" can thus be carried into completion. This was made possible by redesigning a social science methodology within the study of science and technology. Bruno Latour and his colleagues refined it by employing approaches from ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. This paper demonstrates how to transplant this symmetrical approach to religious studies. The distinctiveness of the discipline won't be lost if religion remains in the background as a completely vague horizon-idea arranging the range of heterogeneous interests of various scholars in the field together. Its etic (theoretical) use, however, must be strictly prohibited in order to foster the elaboration of precise descriptive language capturing the exact components operating in the ordering processes under scrutiny."