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STUDY OF RELIGION

History of Study

Methodological Issues

The first article provides a thorough historical survey of the development of the scholarly study of religion. It investigates the beginnings of the "disinterested" study of religion among the ancient Greeks and Romans, explores early philosophical influences, and examines the scholarly approaches to the modern study of religious phenomena. The second article focuses attention on some of the key methodological issues confronted by students of religion. The third article traces the development of religious studies as a part of the liberal arts curriculum of secular and sectarian institutions of higher learning during the latter half of the twentieth century.] History of Study.

In the study of religion, as in other studies, it is difficult to separate method from theory: the "how" of the study of religion necessarily implies something about its "what." The question arises whether religion is to be broadly defined from the start or defined gradually in the course of inquiry. A wider or narrower definition of religion (e.g., whether or not to include nontheistic or nontranscendent traditions) necessarily affects the scope and thrust of the research. Moreover, there are theoretical elements found in methodological inquiry that involve decisions as to what can and cannot be known and as to how thought and expression are to be ordered. Method involves choices as to the procedures of investigation, the scope and limits of the subject matter, and the mental faculties and conceptual tools that are involved in particular kinds of study. On all these there has been a wide variety of opinion.

Many scholars in the study of religion have viewed any deliberate concern with theory and method as a speculative matter that does not contribute to the concrete advance of knowledge. However, a silence about theoretical assumptions need not imply their nonexistence, and quite often rather astute, though unstated, methods may be discerned in the creative work of scholarly practitioners.

Morris Jastrow began his classic work, *The Study of Religion* (1901), with an insistence on the salient importance of method in the study of religion. He perceived method to be the principal protection against the "personal equation" (i. e., the assumptions and beliefs of the author) that had distorted the study of religion. He saw the dangers of such distortion coming

not only from traditional fideists, dogmatists, and apologists, but also from the "cultured despisers" of religion, who had their own subjective biases and closures. The "true believers" studied religions only to laud the superiority of their own and to depreciate those of others, while the skeptics started with the preconception that all religions were false and entertained a simpleminded theory of the nature and origin of religion. According to Jastrow, the cure for such naïveté and distortion was to adopt a historical approach. This approach consisted of gathering data from all times and places, arranging them systematically, interpreting them within a strictly natural and human framework, exploring their inner, emotional aspects, and doing a comparative study to discover the essential laws of the development of religion. All this—and only this—could, in Jastrow's view, prepare the ground for an authentic philosophy of religion. If one adds to this seemingly nineteenth-century positivistic view Jastrow's insistence on a methodological naturalism or agnosticism (i. e., a holding back of one's own views on ultimate truth and value) and on a sympathetic understanding of other faiths and ways, one has a thumbnail view of the problems and concerns of the study of religion up to the last quarter of the twentieth century. However, scholarly approaches to religion would take turns that were unimaginable at the time Jastrow's work was published.

Influences on the Modern Scholarly Study of Religion

From his vantage point Jastrow looked back on the development of the critical study of religion in the modern West. Of prime importance were the great geographical discoveries and explorations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which confronted Western man with the fact of other ways of behavior, thought, and belief and required a broadening of the Western-centered view of human nature, culture, and religion. The discovery of these alien ways and faiths, occurring at the same time as the great advancements in the natural sciences, had intellectual consequences. The terms nature and natural became honorific and normative for truth and right. As the concept of natural law became dominant in political philosophy, so the idea of natural religion became the rage in religious philosophy.

Natural Religion. This new turn rested on the idea of a common human nature from which religious beliefs arise, eliciting universal agreement. In its Deistic form natural religion was acclaimed to be independent of and superior to revealed religion, and, unlike medieval or modern notions of a natural knowledge of divine things, to be a prologue to or an alternative to revelation. The proponents of natural religion assumed

that belief in God (supreme power), divine providence, and other familiar Christian concepts were universal, but this God tended to be abstract and his governance rather remote. If the founder of the Deistic natural religious view was Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), as most surveys declare, it was David Hume (1711-1776) who was its would-be executioner. His posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779) contained vigorous arguments against the capacity of natural reason to attain truths about ultimate realities transcending sense experience. And in his *Natural History of Religion* (1757), Hume challenged the natural religionists' view of the pristine purity and nobility of primitive man, asserting that primitive (or prehistoric) religion arose out of fear, superstition, and irrationality, and that polytheism, not monotheism, was the religion of man in his crude, primeval state. Hume's basic concept was that of linear evolution from a rudimentary to a higher, more complex stage of thought and culture, an idea that was to play a dominant role in the later study of religion.

Many comparative works on the newfound multiplicity of religions were written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Alexander Ross's *The Religions of the World* (1653), Bernard Picart and J. F. Bernard's *Ceremonies and Customs of the World* (1733), and Charles Dupuis's *Origin of All Cults* (1795). The last two works were attempts to understand sympathetically non-Christian religions, but the imposition of a preconceived natural religion theory, Jastrow notes, prevented Dupuis from perceiving all the facts. It may be that the heuristic moral here is not that one should have no theories, but rather that one should have a plurality of theories from which to view the variety of religious phenomena.

The Enlightenment. While the philosophes of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in France (e.g., Voltaire) viewed religion as the invention of cunning priests to secure their rule over the ignorant masses by playing on their fears and superstitions, German philosophers were venturing toward a broad and deep understanding of the variety of religions and their historical development. Preeminent among these philosophers was J. G. Herder (1744-1803), who viewed religion within the context of the development of human culture and the history of ideas. Thus viewed, religion in all its varieties is a universal and natural expression of the human mind, and its practices are the expression of basic religious ideas. Herder's method was a genetic analysis of the development of ideas, which related early to later stages, appreciating rather than depreciating the primitive and archaic forms. He is considered the founder of the genetic method of historiography and of the historical approach to the study of religion.

His contemporary Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) also viewed religion as a constituent element in the unfolding of the human mind and lauded the contribution of all religions to human development. Another contemporary, Christopher Meiners (1747-1810), who wrote solid critical works on the general history of religions, was one of the first modern writers to assert that no people has ever existed without a religion, despite the imperfect accounts of travelers to the contrary, and he thereby implied that religion is inherent in human nature.

Although these German thinkers were men of the Enlightenment era and spoke from a basically naturalistic viewpoint, they, unlike their French confreres, were open and appreciative of the various expressions of the religious spirit. This difference lay by and large in their genuinely historical point of view and their perception and appreciation of the particularities of human culture. However, it should be noted that the French Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Voltaire, Montesquieu, Turgot, Condorcet), whatever their biases in the field of religion, were by no means nonhistorical and did substantial historical work.

Romantic Idealism. Another important German contribution to modern approaches to religion was Romantic idealism. As a reaction against Enlightenment thought, it emphasized individuality, feelings, and imagination, and it urged an openness to remote, ancient, mystical, and folk culture and religion. It included many eminent philosophers and literary figures, of whom one of the most influential for the study of religion was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a Protestant theologian who was deeply marked by his early Pietistic experience as well as by his later study of idealistic philosophy. Of the three elements that he saw as constituting human personality—thinking, doing, and feeling—he assigned religion primarily to feeling, specified originally as the immediate experience of the infinite and later as the feeling of absolute dependence. Schleiermacher emphasized the social and historical context of religion, its corporate, communal character as well as its individual aspect. He viewed language as the essential medium of thought and made a seminal contribution to the theory of hermeneutics that was influential in cultural studies down to the mid-twentieth century. [See Hermeneutics.] His theory of religion and emphasis on religious experience were also of wide influence down to that time.

A giant in post-Kantian idealism was G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), who synthesized and transcended all the currents of thought in his time, and out of whose work came salient nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical movements, such as Marxism, existentialism, and

phenomenology. From a basically historical and evolutionary stance he proceeded not only to give a general account of the development of "mind" or "spirit" to its ultimate state, but also to examine the philosophies of history and religion, including consideration of Asian and primitive cultures. In his philosophy of religion (he was the first to use the term) he proceeded from an examination of religion as a unique mode of consciousness, to an analysis of the religious consciousness (as feeling, perception, and idea) and attitude, and finally to a speculative idea of religion. He then went on to consider actual historical religions in terms of ascending stages of consciousness, from the immediacy of primal religion to the absolute religion of Christianity. For Hegel the concrete history of religions is the realization of the abstract idea of religion. His critics have held that this interpretation is wrong both in method and in content, that the right way is to proceed inductively from the historical data, and, moreover, that Hegel's interpretation is a factually incorrect view of the development of religion. Yet even his critics acknowledge his salutary inclusion of the whole world of religious phenomena in principle, and the weighty influence of his evolutionary viewpoint on nineteenth-century thought.

Vico. Another monumental figure in the development of modern thought about human culture and religion was the Italian philosopher Giovanni Battista Vico (1668-1744), who was an astoundingly early forerunner of the distinction between the natural and the human, or cultural, sciences. Vico held that we can only adequately know what we have made, and that hence human culture and history as manmade phenomena can be more certainly known than the physical world. He insisted that there is no universal human mind or nature, but a constantly changing sequence of cultural traditions, each of which has to be understood in its own terms, not in those of the culture of the inquirer. Like Schleiermacher, Vico stressed the intimate connection between thought and language, and, moreover, he emphasized myth and metaphor as expressions of the "poetic wisdom" of archaic cultures and as "imaginative universals," which stand in contrast to the abstract ideas of later ages. Vico is most famous for his view of history as a series of cyclical stages through which societies pass in all their coordinated aspects—social, political, economic, artistic, religious, and so on—from an early bestial stage to a final stage of decline and fall, after which the entire cycle is repeated. He saw the origin of religion in fear of a superior power that was imagined to be divine, and he traced the development of religion from the god of individual men to that of the family, the city-state, and, finally, the nation. He perceived this development from polytheism to a spiritual monotheism as a gradual process, ruled by divine

providence. Vico held that religion (and the fear of God) was a prerequisite for social order and the rule of law. Neglected in his own time, Vico's thought gained wide recognition in nineteenth-century Romanticism and twentieth-century historicism.

A discussion of the various turns in the development of the study of religion in modern times will follow a brief survey of the seminal, anticipatory theories and approaches of classical antiquity.

Developments in Classical Antiquity

A cue to ancient Greek approaches to the study of religion may be suggested by the terms *theoria* ("speculation") and *historie* ("learning by inquiry"). They sound the notes of critical thought and empirical inquiry that characterized the Greek intellectual response to the world. To them must be added the imaginative, or mythopoeic, response of the great poets (e.g., Homer, Hesiod) in their narrative and systematic presentations of the wide variety of gods known to the ancient Greeks, as well as the store of popular myths that provided materials for reinterpretation or criticism to poets and philosophers. Moreover, the store of religious myths, beliefs, and customs was by no means limited to Greek locales. Going back long before the flowering of Greek speculation and inquiry, Greek sailors, traders, and adventurers had reported on the religious practices and beliefs of foreign peoples and cultures. And among the materials for consideration were not only the conventional religious institutions of the Greek city-states but also the ecstasies and rites of initiation of the mystery cults, both native and imported, which provided impressive firsthand religious experiences.

Hecataeus and Herodotus. Stories that had been handed down and supplemented by firsthand travel experiences were the basis for ancient Greek writings on the myths, tales, and customs of various peoples. Among the most influential writers on these topics were Hecataeus of Miletus (fl. 500 BCE) and Herodotus (b. 484? BCE), who wrote ethnographic histories of foreign lands. The *Histories* of Herodotus provide a source (sometimes erroneous) of information on the ancient religions of western Asia and Egypt. They also provide examples of, as well as comments on, his methods of inquiry. He depends, he says, "on my own sight and judgment and inquiry," plus tales and reports he has heard about past events and about nations he has not visited. He was open and receptive to alien modes of religious experience and foreign beliefs and practices, and he was deeply interested in and admiring of the millennia-long civilizations of Eastern lands. He traced Greek cults to these alien cultures and identified Egyptian and Greek gods with one another on the basis of dubious racial, ethnic, and etymological filiations or of an analogy of divine functions, thus anticipating

modern, more precise historical methods and providing an early version of religious syncretism (the reconciliation or fusion of different religions).

Although Herodotus's account was harshly criticized in both ancient and modern times, twentieth-century scholarship has tended to support its reliability, despite the fact that Herodotus was sometimes misled by prevaricating interlocutors. The philosopher Heraclitus (b. 540? BCE) criticized both the method of using the firsthand accounts of eye- and ear-witnesses and the gathering of facts as the aim of inquiry. He voiced a vigorous demurrer, directed at Hecataeus among others, noting that eyes and ears are poor guides for men who lack reflective minds and that "the learning of many things does not teach intelligence." It is a classic critique of the method of mere fact-finding that has been repeated down to the present day.

Closer to home were the Homeric writings with their vivid descriptions and tales of the Greek gods, which had a lasting effect on the Greek mind, and the works of Hesiod, which provided a systematic account of the origin and generations of the gods and the origin of the universe. Moreover, the great tragic poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, provided profound expressions of Greek religious themes in works lending themselves to theological or philosophical interpretations.

Ionian Philosophy. Specifically philosophical consideration of these matters began as early as the seventh century BCE in the Greek colony of Ionia in Asia Minor. The first Ionian thinkers and their successors were concerned with the basic principle in or behind all perceivable reality. This they viewed variously as water, fire, the infinite or indeterminate, a cosmic logos or reason, the mathematical principle of unity, and so on. Scholars such as Werner Jaeger (1888-1961) have insisted that far from being mere natural philosophers or archaic scientists, these early thinkers were essentially theologians. "Nature" for them meant the ultimate origin of all things, a basic universal reality that they sought to grasp intellectually. Whatever it was called (e.g., the All, the Infinite), to it alone could be attributed divinity. This speculation brought early Greek thought into conflict with traditional myth and religion, of which it may be considered a reinterpretation, and led to an inquiry into the origin and nature of religion as such and to the first ventures into psychological and anthropological-sociological interpretations.

Early Greek thought attained its first systematic view of the ultimate principle behind all things in the work of Anaximander (b. 610? BCE) with his concept of the Infinite or Boundless encompassing all things, the divine ground of all entities (including the finite gods of popular religion). With

Xenophanes (b. 560? BCE) this view became the basis for scornful ridicule of the polytheistic and anthropomorphic deities of the old myths, epic poems, and popular religion as inappropriate images of the divine, which Xenophanes characterized as one eternal consciousness. Democritus (b. 460? BCE) ascribed the popular gods to personifications of impressive natural phenomena and of abstractions, such as wisdom, and also to apparitions, beheld in dreams, that inspire awe and terror. With the Sophists of the fifth century BCE came a shift of focus from the nature of the universe to that of man, and thus to human culture and society, of which religion was viewed as a salutary function (and sometimes fiction). This pragmatic stance bypassed the question of the truth of religious beliefs to concentrate on the question of how and why they originated. Hence it usually was compatible with the state religion and its observances.

Plato and Aristotle. While critical of popular religion and the poets' tales about the gods, Plato (b. 428? BCE) opposed the apparent materialism of some early Greek thinkers and the skepticism of the Sophists, seeing a divine intelligence in the order of things and viewing the "barbarians" as acuter than these thinkers in ascribing divinity to the heavenly bodies. Far from seeing religion as an expedient lie for an inferior, primitive age, as did some Sophists, he held that religion had been purer and truer in earliest times. He also held, on the basis of what was known of various peoples and times, that the belief in divinity was a universal phenomenon. His most famous student, Aristotle (b. 384 BCE), was in general agreement with him in these matters. Although neither of them engaged in a comparative study of religions in the modern sense, they did refer to materials gathered from ethnographic and historical writings, as well as to the popular religion and mystery cults of their place and time. Moreover, Aristotle was the founder of the comparative method, applied by him primarily to biological studies, but later extended to many other areas.

Quasi-Religious Communities. Philosophical schools that were quasi-religious communities, dedicated to the attainment of a certain mental state or way of life, went back as far as the community founded by Pythagoras (b. 580? BCE), in which members sought to attain a state of purity that would release their souls from the cycle of rebirths. New schools arose in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquests (334-325 BCE), which brought contacts with a wide diversity of religious beliefs and conquests in many Eastern lands. For example, Pyrrhon (b. 360? BCE), the founder of an extreme skeptical philosophy, is reported to have learned from Indian ascetics encountered on Alexander's expedition how to extinguish all desires and attain a state of total suspension of judgment and of indifference to all

things, a method that he taught to his disciples. The influential Epicurean and Stoic schools also taught various methods of contemplation and detachment to attain happiness.

Stoicism. Two main notions that affected reflections on religion in ensuing ages were contributed by Stoicism. The first was that the plurality of names for divinity express the various aspects of one divine being, leading toward a pantheistic doctrine and also to the syncretistic notion that all religions say the same thing in different terms. The second was the use of allegorical exegesis, a method of interpretation whereby the old myths and rituals were understood to be figurative expressions of Stoic philosophical doctrines.

A countercurrent to Stoic syncretism originated with Euhemeros (fl. 300 BCE), who wrote a fictional account of a land where sacred inscriptions provided evidence that the gods were divinized kings and heroes or courtesans (e.g., Aphrodite). This view of the origin of religious worship had been expressed before, but it became especially relevant in the context of the apotheosis of Alexander the Great and of the ruler cults of the Hellenistic world. "Euhemerism" became an accepted view among many Latin writers on religion. It later proved useful for Christian polemics against paganism and was reiterated in various ways by modern writers on religious origins. However, ancient Greek historians such as Strabo (b. 64? BCE) were sharply critical of the pseudo-historical character of Euhemeros's romance. Strabo, anticipating a nineteenth-century theory, found the explanation of the old myths in the special sites in which they originated.

Roman Writers. Among the great Roman writers on religion were Cicero and Varro. Cicero (b. 106 BCE) wrote a classic work on the various philosophical schools and on the religious beliefs and rites of the first century BCE (*On the Nature of the Gods*) as well as a work on divination, of which he had personal experience as a member of the College of Augurs. Although Cicero had a remarkable sense of the inner elements of piety and belief, his emphasis was primarily on theological matters, that is, "opinions about the nature of the gods." Varro (b. 116 BCE) wrote a monumental treatise on Roman religious personages, sites, rites, and gods, dividing theologies into three types: mythical, physical, and civil, of which the last has to do with the public cult of a city. Concerning his method, Varro stated that he wrote not as a philosopher but as a historian who was concerned with human matters before divine ones; and hence he saw the state as preceding sacred institutions, which develop to serve sociopolitical needs.

Information on foreign religions was provided by various Roman writers. Julius Caesar (b. 100? BCE) described the customs and rites of the

peoples encountered during the Gallic Wars. Tacitus (56-120) wrote an ethnographic work on the German tribes, which contrasted the purity of the barbarians with the corruption of Rome. Plutarch (b. 46?) wrote an essay that displayed considerable knowledge of Egyptian mythology and of Zoroastrianism but that ventured superficial analogies between Greek and foreign myths based on dubious etymological links. There is also an essay ascribed to Lucian of Samosata (b. 120?) that appears to provide valuable knowledge and understanding of ancient Syrian religion. Closer to home were the various Oriental mystery cults that were imported into Rome and that promised purification and redemption through ritual performances.

Thus by the first centuries of the Christian era considerable knowledge of foreign religions had become available to Greeks and Romans, as well as firsthand experience in travel or conquest or with imported cults, in addition to reflections by philosophers on the nature of divinity and critical judgments on religions of their own time and place. The critical study of religion, and particularly the comparison between various religions, had begun, though not in the self-consciously theoretical and methodological manner of modern disciplines. Granted that dubious etymological and ethnological associations were made and that quite ungrounded syncretistic fusions of historically distinct and unrelated religions were attempted, yet one should recall the old adage that fingers came before forks. Many fashionable modern concepts, such as the sociopolitical function of religion and the origin of religious beliefs in psychological needs, originated in the centuries before the Christian era. Greek ethnographic historians, such as Herodotus, provided an ancient anticipation of the anthropological approach to the study of religion.

Beginnings of the Comparative Study of Religion

It is customary to set the beginning of the comparative study of religion somewhere in the third quarter of the nineteenth century with the work of the German-British philologist F. Max Müller (1823-1900). Müller's wide knowledge of Indo-European languages, his comparative approach to philology and extension of that method to the study of religion, and his eloquent advocacy of that study as a scientific discipline prepared the way, during his lifetime, for the establishment of chairs in the new field in leading European universities. Müller postulated an inexorable dependence of thought on language and pursued an etymological search for the origin of god-names, religious beliefs, and myths. His much-criticized summation of myth as "a disease of language" insisted that myth was the result of

metaphors derived from impressive experiences of natural phenomena and then of taking the figurative for the real. [See the biography of F. Max Müller.]

Dutch School. Among other pioneers were C. P. Tiele (1830-1902) and P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848-1920), founders of the prestigious Dutch school of the history of religions. Tiele combined historical work on ancient Near Eastern religions with a systematic interest in religious phenomena and a philosophical search for the essence of religion. Chantepie, in his classic *Manual of the Science of Religion* (1887-1889), made an elaborate classification of religious phenomena (sacred stones, trees, animals, places, times, persons, writings, communities, and the like), a forerunner of later phenomenologies of religion. [See the biographies of Chantepie and Tiele.]

Auguste Comte. Scientific and intellectual developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided the model for new approaches to the study of religion. The French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) saw a progressive historical development of the sciences (from the simplest and most abstract to the most complex and concrete, from mathematics to sociology) and a corresponding development in society (from a theological-mythical stage to a positive-scientific stage). The social sciences for him are modeled on the natural sciences, though they adapt their techniques to their particular types of phenomena. They are concerned with society both as "social static" (i. e., an organic whole) and as "social dynamics" (i. e., historical development from past to present to future). Although he may seem to have relegated religion to an infantile social stage, he saw it as a progressive force in previous ages and even proposed a "religion of humanity" for the modern scientific era. Comte had a tremendous influence on nineteenth-century thought. [See the biography of Comte.]

Herbert Spencer. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was another writer of massive volumes propounding the theory of evolution from the simple to the complex in all fields of knowledge, including the biological and the sociological. Evolution for him was an "organic law," operating uniformly in all types of phenomena, so the societies could be viewed on the analogy of biological organisms. (Spencer's thought both preceded and followed the Darwinian hypothesis.) He saw the origin of religion in the belief in spirits or ghosts, which was derived from dreams and shadows, and hence in the belief in an unchangeable human soul and, later, in gods as eternal, divine personalities. From the belief in ghosts, he asserted, came ancestor-worship, the original religious cult. Although he

deplored the resultant anthropomorphic views of the divine nature, Spencer considered religion to be a valuable social force, binding human beings together and conserving traditional values. Despite his inadequate knowledge of the historical development of religions, Spencer's insistence on a scientific approach to the study of society and, above all, his proclamation of evolution as the universal law had significant effects on the study of religion. [See the biography of Spencer.]

Together with Comte, Spencer made an evolutionary approach to that study possible, and the Darwinian hypothesis of organic evolution, with its revolutionary effect on nineteenth-century thought, soon made that possibility an actuality, extending the study to the whole history of human culture, including its earliest and presumed most simple stage.

Anthropological Approaches

The anthropological approach to religion as a systematic discipline has deep roots in Western culture. One could justly trace its pedigree to the ancient Greek ethnographic historians and their Roman successors. Also important were certain currents in eighteenth-century European thought that emphasized the particularity and diversity of cultures and the progressive development of culture and religion. This philosophical developmentalism was the prelude to nineteenth-century sociological and biological evolutionism, which was to play so prominent a role in anthropological theories of religion.

English School. E. B. Tylor (1832-1917), an English ethnologist, was one of the first scholars to apply evolutionary concepts to the study of religions, and is generally regarded as the founder of the anthropological study of religion. Assuming that the customs and beliefs of modern primitive cultures, described by Western travelers, missionaries, colonial administrators, and so on, were survivals of an archaic, prehistoric era, he concluded that they provide evidence of the original stage of religion. He also assumed that the stage of spiritual culture corresponded to the crude stage of material culture in archaic or primitive societies. Tylor is most noted for his theory of animism: the earliest stage of religion, he asserted, consisted in the belief in souls, present not only in human beings but in all natural organisms and objects. Out of this came the concepts of the separable human soul, whether in sleep or in death, and of the pan-psychic aspect of the natural world, and thereby of the religious beliefs and customs associated with them. It has often been noted that this theory stresses the abstract intellectual capacities of primitive man.

Among those directly influenced by Tylor were the English anthropologist R. R. Marett (1866-1943) and the Scottish man of letters and

gentleman scholar Andrew Lang (1844-1912). Marett went beyond his master to propose a preanimistic stage of religion (later called "dynamism" or "animatism"), in which men responded with awe and wonder to an impersonal supernatural force they experienced as present in extraordinary natural phenomena, events and persons. He pointed to the worship of such a power among various nineteenth-century primitive peoples and assumed that this was the original form of religion. Marett was pronouncedly evolutionist in his outlook, hailing the Darwinian hypothesis as the foundation stone of modern anthropology. Lang, however, contrary to current evolutionist presuppositions, pointed to a belief in supreme beings or high gods among presumed primitive peoples and suggested that this may have been the earliest form of religion, a thesis that later became a full-fledged theory of primitive monotheism.

Another Briton who had an immense influence on anthropological theories of religion was W. Robertson Smith (1846-1894), a Scottish scholar in Old Testament and Semitic-language studies. Departing from the individualist and intellectualist emphases of earlier theorists, his comparative study of pre-Israelite Semitic tribes maintained that primitive religion was essentially a matter of social institutions and ritual actions rather than of beliefs and doctrines. Taking up the concept of totemism—that is, the relation between a social group and an organic species—he asserted that the sacrifice of the sacred clan animal among the ancient Semites established a communion among the members of the clan and with the clan god through the consumption of the flesh and blood of the animal. Thus sacrifice was a socially integrative and conservatively traditional act. It was, in Smith's view, the basis of later Hebrew sacrifice—a much-contested thesis. Like most of his contemporaries, Smith assumed a linear evolution from crude, simple stages to higher, more complex stages of culture. [See Animism and Animatism; Evolutionism; Preanimism; and the biographies of Lang, Marett, W. Robertson Smith, and Tylor.]

French School. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), a French sociologist of great influence, followed Smith in his emphasis on the social character of religion and on totemism, the cult of the primitive clan, as the most elementary form of religious life. He further associated totemism with the distinction between the realms of the sacred and the profane. The totem is the concrete symbol of the sacrality of the group and its god and hence the focus of the group's cult. His evidence for this view was derived from the study of a single Australian Aboriginal tribe, a noncomparative procedure that he defended as indicating the most elemental form of religion in general. He proceeded from a definition of religion as a system of beliefs and

practices regarding the sacred, which unites men into a moral community, and from the conviction that the social group is the objective referent of the ideas and images of the sacred. For him religion is inherently a social reality and the social transcends the psychological (in the individualistic sense). With his nephew and favorite pupil, Marcel Mauss, he did a study of primitive systems of classification that viewed the categories by which men grasp all realms of human experience and activity, including religion and even the regions of space, as reflections of social divisions and classifications. Late twentieth-century commentators have seen Durkheim's approach as symbolic, in which the overt beliefs and rituals are "decoded" to grasp their underlying meaning in the social structure as a whole.

Also important among French anthropological-sociological students of religion was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939). Originally a philosopher, Lévy-Bruhl focused on the way primitives think rather than on their underlying social structures, and concluded that there is a distinctive "prelogical" primitive mentality, characterized by "mystical participation," as distinct from the abstract thought of modern Western man. In his last years Lévy-Bruhl modified this thesis to assert a common human mentality, in which the participative and ratiocinative factors are present for both primitives and moderns. He applied his theory to the study of myths, which he saw as the imaginative surrogate for actual mystical participation. Despite numerous objections to his dichotomy, he had great influence on later philosophical and religio-historical approaches to primitive man's mental world and religious stance.

Also notable among scholars working in the French culture sphere were N. D. Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), and Ernest Renan (1823-1892). In his famous work *La cité antique* (1864), Fustel examined the ancient Greco-Roman city, asserting that the basis of civil laws and institutions lay in the earliest religious beliefs and customs of the society, and that what these were could be discovered by a deep probe of the literature of a later period. Van Gennep, an anthropologist, folklorist, and historian of religions, is noted especially for his work on the rites of passage that mark significant transitions in human life, a work with enormous influence on later scholars as well as on imaginative literature. Renan, originally a specialist in Semitic philology, deserves mention because of his insistence on an autonomous critical study of religion, independent of traditional Western religion and theology but not thereby destructive of them. [See *Rites of Passage*, overview article; *Totemism*; and the biographies of Durkheim, Fustel, van Gennep, Lévy-Bruhl, and Renan.]

James G. Frazer. Meanwhile, in England, James G. Frazer (1854-1941) was at work on his enormous *The Golden Bough* (1890; 3d ed., 12 vols., 1911-1915), an opus that was to attain the widest fame of any work on comparative religion and that was to influence various fields of study and culture, including the design of T. S. Eliot's monumental poem *The Waste Land* (1922). Basing his work on a vast erudition in classical literature and ethnographic writings, Frazer sought through the comparative method to trace the evolution of human culture and religion through successive evolutionary stages. He affirmed that the earliest stage was a prereligious one of magical thought and practice (where the aim was to master the external environment through human powers), while the succeeding religious stage involved the propitiation and conciliation of superhuman beings upon whom man was believed to be dependent. Frazer likened magic to science, which came at a still later stage in mankind's development, because both magic and science use techniques based on a coherent worldview (conscious or not) to attain human ends; the difference between them, according to Frazer, lies in the illusory premises of magic. His view of archaic culture and religion was just as intellectualist and individualistic as Tylor's and was even more evolutionist in the unilinear sense. Later scholars criticized the way in which Frazer compared heterogeneous data, his having magic precede religion, his rigid separation of magic and religion, and his extremely evolutionary scenario. [See the biography of Frazer.]

Diffusionist School. The predominantly evolutionist stance of the English and French schools (with notable exceptions, such as Lang and Mauss) was countered by the German "diffusionist" or "culture-historical" school, which held that similarities in cultures in different regions are to be ascribed to diffusion from an original site, due to migrations or other contacts going back to primitive times. With this theory goes the notion of "culture circles" (i. e., distinctive cultural wholes) that may be found in the same geographical area, due to a variety of small-scale migrations. Diffusionists usually assumed that cultural discoveries could not be made in several places independently, and hence that diffusion from one original site was necessary for their appearance in various areas. The major German diffusionists were Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), Fritz Graebner (1877-1934), and Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954). Schmidt, the proponent of the theory of a primeval monotheism, applied the culture-circle theory to the study of religion and, labeling it "the historical method," lauded it as the only theory that could present an accurate account of the history of religions, including primitive religions. There was also an English school of diffusionists, of whom the most noteworthy are G. Elliot

Smith (1871-1937), his disciple W. J. Perry (1868-1949), and W. H. R. Rivers (1864-1922). [See *Kulturkreislehre*, and the biographies of Frobenius, Graebner, and Schmidt.]

Franz Boas. The German-American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) had an enormous influence on the development of anthropological studies through his example of careful, disciplined fieldwork and the training of eminent disciples. He insisted on painstaking description and recording of all aspects of culture, including language, arts, tales, and prayers, so that the scholar could have on hand the equivalent of written documents in the humanistic disciplines and thereby penetrate the inner life of a culture. For example, visionary experiences were related by the experiencer, recorded by the researcher, and thus stored as firsthand data for the interpretation of primitive religion. In his general views Boas held that primitive mentality was similar to civilized mentality, both in its rational and allegedly irrational aspects. On the whole, he rejected broad universal generalizations about primitive culture and religion, insisting that each culture must be considered by itself, and that the complexity of cultural phenomena is not amenable to the statement of general laws. He insisted, moreover, that each cultural item—economic, artistic, religious, magical, and so forth—must be viewed as an element in an integrated whole, and because of this insistence Boas is included in the functionalist school of anthropology. [See *Functionalism*.] He is also associated with the diffusionists in his rejection of unilinear evolution as the pattern of sociocultural development. [See the biography of Boas.]

Bronislaw Malinowski. Another eminent proponent and practitioner of firsthand observation and member of the functionalist school was the Polish-British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942). During World War I he did field studies among the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia, living with the people, learning their language, participating in their activities, getting to know the way they thought, and absorbing the intimate tone and color of their customs and ceremonies, as well as making a statistically documented analysis of their social organization and culture and recording verbatim in the original language the statements, stories, folklore, and magical formulas of his informants. The aim of recording these "documents of native mentality" was to grasp the islanders' own basic stance toward life, a project that requires from the participant-observer an open, serious, and respectful attitude toward strange ways of life and thought. Moreover, according to Malinowski, the observer must cover all aspects of a tribal culture, seeing them as parts of a coherent whole and not dwelling on

isolated interesting facts, the mere gathering of which contains nothing of scientific value.

Malinowski is noted not only for his heralding of participant observation as a key method in anthropological research but also for his theoretical generalizations on the familiar Frazerian triad of magic, science, and religion. He distinguished religious rites issuing out of pure reverence from magical acts with a purely utilitarian purpose, yet viewed both as responses to life crises that are accompanied by intense emotional stress, for which both act as relief. Viewed functionally, primitive science aims through empirical observation to control the environment and meet basic biological needs; religion serves to inculcate and preserve tribal traditions and values and to provide a positive attitude toward the trials of life and death; and magic bestows the biologically salutary gift of confidence and hope amidst the incalculable dangers and traumatic emotional maelstrom of human existence. The basic difference between religion and magic is that religion lies in the unspecified realm of faith in supernatural powers, while magic rests on specific human techniques for specific ends and relies on human powers and skills. [See the biography of Malinowski.]

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. The English anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) is often coupled with Malinowski as one of the chief exponents of the functionalist approach. Although he had considerable field experience in various regions, he is often more noted for his significant contributions to anthropological theory and method. He was a forerunner of prominent late twentieth-century approaches, such as structuralism and semiotic or symbolic interpretation (see below). Although originally a follower of the English diffusionist-historical school, he was deeply influenced by Durkheim, and he eventually shifted to an ahistorical, sociological approach to primitive culture and religion. Indeed, one standard history of ethnological theory lists him as a member of the French sociological school. He viewed anthropology as a "comparative sociology" that focuses on social behavior and seeks the underlying function of various acts and customs within the social whole or "system." As a good Durkheimian, he usually downgraded the individual psychological aspect, to focus on social structures and functions. In later years he modified his approach to grant importance to the psychological as well as the historical and developmental aspects of human culture. He is also noteworthy for his attempt to find the universal laws of human society through the comparative analysis of particular cultures, on the assumption that the formulation of such laws is necessary for any discipline claiming to be scientific.

An example of how Radcliffe-Brown applied this approach to the study of religion may be found in his Frazer Lecture of 1939, "Taboo." His key concept here is "ritual value," which is either positive or negative depending on a society's respect for or avoidance of the ritual object. Radcliffe-Brown views ritual value as one among many types of values that characterize a coherent social order. He grants the great diversity in ritual values among various cultures, but insists that "a natural science of society" must discern the underlying uniformities and determine "the relation of ritual and ritual values to the essential constitution of society"—their basic social function. He rejects the pragmatic interpretation of rituals as "technical acts," intended to attain or avoid certain results, as being misguided and blind to the specifically expressive and symbolic character of rituals. Hence the inquirer must seek the underlying meaning of rituals, since the terms symbol and meaning go together, and he must employ reliable methods in carrying out his research.

Thus in investigating the totemic rites and associated myths of various Australian tribes, Radcliffe-Brown finds a common "ritual idiom" and cosmology, "a body of ideas and beliefs about nature and human society" that gives the rites their meaning: the maintenance of the natural order. He also finds that the tribal social structure is maintained through the regular expression of the cosmological ideas in myth and rite: this is their social function. Similarly he finds the avoidance of names and certain foods by expectant parents and mourners for the dead among the Andaman Islanders to be the symbolic expression of an anomalous social situation and thus an affirmation of social solidarity in accordance with traditional custom. He goes beyond these particular cases to hypothesize a universal relation of ritual to "the invariant general characters" of "all human societies, past, present and future" and to speculate on the possibility that he may have arrived at the primary basis of all ritual, religion, and magic. A symbolical approach to ritual is necessary, he insists, because human societies, unlike animal societies coordinated by biological instinct, are held together by various types of symbols—a point that has often been reiterated by later scholars in the human sciences.

Despite his conceptual fertility and the fact that his early stress on symbolical expressiveness, cosmological meaning, structural function, and the linguistic analogy was pursued fruitfully by later inquirers, Radcliffe-Brown's work has been subject to a good deal of criticism. His thought seems to be rooted in nineteenth-century biological notions and in an outmoded and inappropriate view of social science as the formulator of universal laws. His generalizations are contested as unjustified by the

evidence, and it is questioned whether his comparative method is genuinely comparative, rather than merely illustrative of his general ideas. However, the charge of a radical ideological functionalism is refuted by the fact that Radcliffe-Brown explicitly noted that not every item in a culture has a social function, and religious rituals are implicitly included under this qualification. His fieldwork on kinship systems and social organization was praised as brilliantly innovative by a severe critic of his theories, the American anthropologist Robert H. Lowie (1883-1957). Moreover, the structuralist movement has restored his name and his concepts to a position of prominence. [See the biography of Radcliffe-Brown.]

American School. Among others who contributed a combination of intense fieldwork and theoretical reflection were three American scholars—all students of Boas—whose main subject was North American Indian cultures. Alexander A. Goldenweiser (1880-1940) is noted for his challenge to the Durkheimian theory of totemism, rejecting it as a universal cultural foundation and associating it with an emotional response to nature. He saw religion and magic as parts of the supernatural realm, which evoked an intense feeling, a "religious thrill." Similarly Lowie, who followed the careful empirical procedures enjoined by Boas, saw primitive religion as accompanied by "a sense of the Extraordinary, Mysterious, or Supernatural" that may or may not involve a belief in spiritual beings and that elicits a special emotional response. Paul Radin (1883-1959) saw religion as basically consisting of a feeling of exaltation or awe and of accompanying beliefs and practices directed toward powerful spirits. According to Radin, religion arises out of man's physical, physiological, and socioeconomic situation and from the pervasive fear evoked by man's painful struggle for existence, and it serves to maintain the "life values" of a culture. Thus religion is again seen as serving a biological and social function. Radin emphasizes the religious beliefs and stances of individuals at least as greatly as those of entire tribal cultures; he sees that there are, even among so-called primitives, both religious and nonreligious persons, both believers and skeptics, both religious formulators and critical philosophers. Radin insists that ethnologists must take primitive cultures with the same seriousness that humanistic scholars take the great historical civilizations and their works—as fully human. [See the biographies of Goldenweiser, Lowie, and Radin.]

Criticisms of Anthropological Approaches. Latter-day anthropologists criticized the methods of early "armchair" scholars as skewed by unreliable secondhand data, unsifted sources, inauthentic comparisons, and haphazard syntheses that stressed bizarre phenomena or that selected examples to support preconceived theories. Yet the later recourse to intimate, intensive

field-work has also been criticized as impressionistic or haphazard, or simply meaningless busywork. Even "participant observation" has been dismissed as the romantic illusion that one can get an inside view of a strange culture in a few months or years. Paul Radin, who voiced this criticism, defended the early reports of missionaries, colonial administrators, and other outsiders, which were based on lifetime experiences, as superior to the work done later by visiting professional ethnologists.

What is involved here is the problem of hermeneutic distance from remote cultures, a problem that is raised with particular acuity in the case of nonliterate peoples. But understanding has usually been viewed as a mental act concerned with what is other and hence distant to some degree. And twentieth-century theorists of hermeneutics (e.g., Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer) have viewed preconceptions, prejudices, and the cultural tradition of the interpreter as necessarily involved in understanding what is other.

Historical-Phenomenological Approaches

Like the anthropology of religion, the history and phenomenology of religion had its philosophical forerunners, especially in the work of Vico, Herder, Hegel, and Schleiermacher. From Schleiermacher a direct line can be drawn to the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and his influence on various human studies, including the history of religions. Like Vico, he made a sharp distinction between natural and human studies, in opposition to a nineteenth-century tendency to cast the latter on the model of the former. The subject matter of human studies, he affirmed, can only be "understood" in terms of the meanings intended by their human subjects, not "explained" by causal laws. "Understanding" (*Verstehen*) in the empathetic sense was the key concept that he bestowed on generations of historians of culture and religion. For Dilthey, this concept was accompanied by an emphasis on the psychological aspects of history. Emulating Schleiermacher, he also emphasized a mastery of hermeneutics, the art or science of interpretation, for historical research on written texts, and he proposed a typology of worldviews to mark out a patterned order in the various ways the world has been envisioned. [See the biographies of Dilthey, Hegel, Herder, Schleiermacher, and Vico.]

In addition to this philosophical influence, there was paradoxically a marked theological or religious influence on the development of an independent history and phenomenology of religion. In contrast to the leading scholars in modern anthropology, who for the most part were disaffiliated from institutional religion and traditional piety, many of the seminal scholars in the development of the new discipline were also

theologians and deeply pious Christians. Their emphasis on religious experience apparently was not derived merely from the reading of Schleiermacher, who was himself a Pietist and theologian and whose central focus was immediate personal experience. Many of them emphasized this experience not only as an object of study but also as a necessary element in the person and mind of the inquirer, and they regarded the study of religion as a religious vocation, contributing to the religious growth of the scholar.

Nathan Söderblom. The Swedish theologian and historian of religions Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) provides an eminent example of this new school. Originally a specialist in ancient Iranian religion, he broadened his concerns to the whole field of the history of religions and its relation to Christian revelation. He wrote a work on the development of the belief in God, considering the whole span of man's religions, including those of nonliterate peoples. Although he saw the ultimate goal and high point of this development in Christianity, he regarded all religions seriously and respectfully, viewing the whole history of religion as the history of revelation. An especially notable contribution to the study of religion was his concept of "Holiness" as the key term in religion, surpassing even the notion of God; for, he asserted, there may be religion without the concept of God, but none without the distinction between the holy and the profane. Religious experience, a unique experience marked by the presence of Holiness, was for him the heart of religion and hence the central object of its study. The emphasis of this archbishop of Uppsala and primate of the Church of Sweden was on the personal, experiential aspect of religion, an emphasis that was to have a great influence on European scholarship and was to mark particularly the Scandinavian contribution. [See the biography of Söderblom.]

Rudolf Otto. Similarly, Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), a German theologian and specialist in Hinduism, worked out a systematic relation between Christian theology and the whole world of religious experience, which he insisted possessed a unique quality irreducible to nonreligious categories (anthropological, sociological, economic, etc.). He found clues to this irreducible quality in the idea of "the Holy," an a priori category of meaning and value, and in the sense of "the numinous," that is, of an awesome, extraordinary, mysterious, "wholly other" presence that evokes feelings of both fascination and fear. He used a highly rational Neo-Kantian method to validate the idea of the Holy, but he stressed its nonrational, numinous aspect over its rational, ethical aspect, viewing the numinous aspect as primary (as evidenced in the religious experience of nonliterate peoples). This idea bears a striking similarity to views of anthropologists

such as Marett and North American Indian specialists such as Goldenweiser, Lowie, and Radin. Radin, however, saw the "awesome" feelings described by Otto as arising from economic and psychic insecurity and claimed that Otto's failure to grasp this was due to his being a theologian and mystic. Other commentators, more positively, have emphasized that Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) is basically a theological work or an inquiry into the psychology of religion rather than a work in the history of religions. Otto's book has come, however, to be recognized as a great founding work in twentieth-century phenomenology of religion, to which Otto's personal religious experience, as well as his marked systematic capacities and wide knowledge of living world religions, contributed. [See the biography of Rudolf Otto.]

Friedrich Heiler. A disciple of Söderblom and Otto, Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) was another German theologian and historian of religions of a mystical temperament, who developed an impressive phenomenology of religion that was linked with his theological concerns. He is most famous for his works on prayer and on the phenomena and essence of religion. Regarding the whole world of religion as a unity in which religious truths are revealed, he asserted that all religions are directed toward the Holy. These conclusions, he held, can be derived from a study of religious phenomena by an inquirer who is inwardly attuned to their specific nature. [See the biography of Heiler.]

Edvard Lehmann and W. Brede Kristensen. Besides Söderblom, two other Scandinavian scholars are important in the development of a phenomenology of religion: Edvard Lehmann (1862-1930) and W. Brede Kristensen (1884-1953). Lehmann, a Danish scholar, is noted for a little book in Swedish on the science of religion that contains a phenomenological section with an elaborate, systematic coverage of religious phenomena pervaded by Söderblom's concept of Holiness. He also contributed a notable new phenomenological section to a revised edition (1925) of Chantepie's *Manual*, which is frequently referred to by scholars in religious studies. Kristensen, a Norwegian-Dutch scholar, emphasized the alien religious believer's own belief as the central object of study, discerned by the sympathetic understanding of an inquirer predisposed by personal religious experience. However, such knowledge can only be approximate, he cautioned, since one can never fully reexperience the faith of others. He saw phenomenology as a descriptive-typological discipline, distinct from the descriptive-factual discipline of history and the normative discipline of philosophy—the three divisions of the general science of religion. [See the biographies of Kristensen and Lehmann.]

Gerardus van der Leeuw. Kristensen's student Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) produced the most massive, richest, and most enigmatic work in the phenomenology of religion, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (1933). Like Söderblom, van der Leeuw was a Christian theologian and churchman, aware of the deeply personal aspect of religion, and sensitive to wide ranges of art and culture. Although he insisted on the autonomy of phenomenology of religion as an independent discipline, he also viewed it as necessarily involved with theological concerns and as "loving knowledge." He saw the phenomenologist of religion as having both a believing and a cognitive stance, an awareness that is both subjective and objective. Going beyond the admittedly valuable systematic cataloging and classification of religious phenomena by Chantepie and Lehmann, he sought a deep introspection that would enable the inquirer to reexperience the inner life of alien phenomena in a systematic manner. He focused on a wholly other "Power" as the object of religious experience—equivalent to Söderblom's "Holiness" and Otto's "the Holy"—manifested in various types of objective forms and subjective responses. Van der Leeuw saw the work of the phenomenologist as "understanding" in Dilthey's sense, an understanding that could be accomplished by careful, open reexperiencing and the suspension of normative judgment. Van der Leeuw's phenomenology had an obvious and avowedly psychological emphasis, but this was a philosophical psychology that owed much to the work of Eduard Spranger (1882-1963), a student of Dilthey, as well as to that of the existential psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966). His exact debt to Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of twentieth-century philosophical phenomenology, is hard to determine, although he made frequent use of Husserlian terms.

Van der Leeuw loomed like a colossus in the path of later historians and phenomenologists of religion as a scholar whose work was imposing but bewildering. He insisted on an autonomous phenomenological discipline and method and yet asserted that it could and must be accompanied by a specific theological stance, which in his case was that of a devout Protestant. Although he maintained that phenomenology of religion must start from and continually return to historical and philological research, he was seemingly uninterested in historical origins and development and devoted most of his efforts to the discernment and presentation of timeless types, structures, and essences. He propounded an intuitive method for arriving at his types and structures, far removed from the empirical procedures practiced by modern science and scholarship. His "phenomena" were not the objects of empirical observation and verification; rather, they were essences, or general characteristics, arrived at, as in philosophical phenomenology, by an

intuitive act of vision. Although the breadth and depth of his erudition and the richness of his presentation were widely recognized, many scholars were disturbed by what they considered an academically unreliable procedure, which they pejoratively labeled "speculative" or "philosophical." [See the biography of van der Leeuw.]

Joachim Wach. With Joachim Wach (1898-1955), the German-American historian of religions and sociologist of religion, the method that combined religious concerns with a descriptive-intuitive science of religion was fully realized. A scion of the distinguished German-Jewish Mendelssohn family, Wach was a devout Protestant layman who had a broad background in philosophical, theological, historical, and philological studies and who was strongly influenced by Dilthey's "understanding" approach to the human disciplines and his emphasis on the cultural "expressions" of human experience. Moreover, Wach learned firsthand about phenomenology from Husserl's lectures. Quite early he produced an incisive little work presenting the structure and agenda for a nonnormative discipline of religious studies, independent of theology and philosophy, that would do justice on the descriptive level to the whole religious experience of mankind (*Religionswissenschaft*, 1924). Also in this early period he published a monumental study of hermeneutics (*Das Verstehen*, 3 vols., 1926-1933), as well as an introduction to the sociology of religion (*Einführung in die Religionssoziologie*, 1931), which was the basis for his later, expanded *Sociology of Religion* (1944). In a posthumously published work, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (1958), he summed up his most mature considerations on the nature and requirements of the critical study of religion. His major contributions to that study were the application of his architectonic mind to a heterogeneous variety of materials and disciplines and his training of a generation of American scholars in the history of religions from his chair at the University of Chicago. He made the history and phenomenology of religion a recognized field of study in American universities.

Wach's major concern was worldwide in its scope, for he sought an understanding of the practices and beliefs of all other cultures and religions. He assumed that this project could be accomplished because of his belief in a common human nature (and mind) that includes a universally inherent religious dimension. Although he emphasized strict scholarly procedures and urged the development of a methodical hermeneutic approach to the study of religion, he also insisted on the necessity of some personal religious predisposition in the inquirer, insisting that mere cool objectivity could not grasp the religious experience of other persons. Not only sympathetic but

also hostile attitudes could stir the mind to perceive otherness. Like his immediate predecessors, Wach insisted that the scholar must grow in his religious dimension (that is, in his stance toward "ultimate reality"). Moving from the distinctly descriptive stress of his early Religionswissenschaft, he later proposed a discipline somewhere between the normative and descriptive disciplines. This later development evoked criticism from scholars who accused him of blotting out the distinction between an empirical, descriptive discipline and theology and of imposing a personal Christian theological stamp on the history and phenomenology of religion. What is clear is that in the work of Wach and his predecessors there had been a movement from purely historical considerations of the various religions to a concentration on the structures of religious experience.

Mircea Eliade. Wach's successor at Chicago, Mircea Eliade, a Romanian-born historian of religions and man of letters, fostered a new generation of American scholars and encountered a similar opposition to his intuitive approach. Far less explicit and much more reticent than Wach in his basic theory and methods, he produced a richly creative corpus of works on concrete subjects in the history of religions, such as Yoga and shamanism, and on the morphology or general patterns of religious experience, which culminated in an ambitious multivolume history of religious beliefs and ideas and in the present encyclopedia of religion. Somewhat like the early anthropologists, who sought the arche, or essential structure, of religion in its prehistoric and primitive forms, Eliade dwelt on the archaic expressions of religious experience. He saw these expressions as archetypal responses to the presence of the sacred in this-worldly objects and in events that are regularly repeated within a time frame that is cyclic rather than sequential. These events have provided man with an ontologically rooted model for his works and days. Eliade hoped that such a study would help modern man to cope with the chaotic flow of events and the "terror of history" experienced so traumatically in the twentieth century. In contrast to discrete historical phenomena, Eliade's emphasis was on the general patterns that he discerned. He examined, for example, whole systems of plant, or water, or moon symbols; only within the contexts of such systems, he claimed, can the meanings of individual symbols be grasped. This can be, and has been, challenged as a flagrantly ahistorical and speculative procedure, because, critics charge, Eliade took materials from various unconnected sites, eras, and cultural stages and put them under a single general rubric. (This criticism is similar to that earlier leveled against armchair anthropologists such as Frazer.) The question as to whether one can go from various archaeological, historical, philological, and ethnographic materials to

postulate general structures and patterns is, of course, a serious epistemological and metaphysical problem, to which more than one answer is possible. [See also Anthropology, Ethnology, and Religion; Phenomenology of Religion; and the biography of Eliade.]

Psychological Approaches

Psychological approaches—often of a reductive kind—to the origin and nature of religion go back as far as the ancient Greeks. The Roman poet Lucretius put into immortal Latin verse the idea of religion's birth in fear. There is an obvious psychological component in hermeneutic and phenomenological thought, going back to Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence" and culminating in Otto's "sense of the numinous." Moreover, the above survey of anthropological theories of religion should have made it evident that they comprise psychological as well as sociological viewpoints.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard. In the sprightly and sometimes caustic discussion of psychological theories that appears in his book *Theories of Primitive Religion* (1965), the English anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) takes us from the nature-myth theory of F. Max Müller and others, which claimed that the idea of the infinite or divine was derived from the sensory experience of natural phenomena, down to the theories of latter-day anthropologists who ascribe religious experience to feelings of awe, excitement, stress, and so on. The intellectualist theories of primitive religion propounded by nineteenth-century scholars such as Tylor and Spencer, which view primitive religion as the product of essentially rational, if mistaken, human minds, were influenced by the fashionable association-of-ideas psychology of the time. Beliefs in spirits, souls, and gods were explained psychologically, as was the distinction between religion and magic (e.g., in the contrast drawn between dependent submission and independent activity).

With a fuller, more complex psychology, including the affective, emotional, and appetitive aspects of mind, came theories of religion (e.g., Marett's) that had religion originating in a sense of awe before what was experienced as sacred, mysterious power, an experience that Evans-Pritchard described as "a compound of fear, wonder, admiration, interest, respect, perhaps even love." Ernest Crawley focused on the element of fear, a response to physiological and psychological stress, as the functional stimulus to religion and its positive attitude to life. Malinowski, as noted above, also viewed religion and magic as cathartic responses to stressful situations. North American Indian specialists such as Lowie ascribed the origin of religion to "amazement and awe" in the presence of "the

Extraordinary, Mysterious, or Supernatural." And Sigmund Freud (discussed below) emphasized "the omnipotence of thought" fallacy in primitive mentality as accounting for the belief in magic. Freud viewed religion as well as magic as an illusion, analogous to the neurotic patterns of psychopathology. He interpreted reverence for God the Father as a sublimation of the primeval guilt of parricide as well as an exercise in wishful thinking. [See the biography of Evans-Pritchard.]

Emergence of the Scientific Discipline. In addition to psychological approaches that have been undertaken by thinkers in all sorts of disciplines, there developed in the late nineteenth century a specific discipline or subdiscipline that was devoted to the study of the psychology of religion. It accompanied the general development of psychology as an independent scientific discipline and was characterized by somewhat the same conflicts of doctrines as those that occurred in its mother discipline, for example, between quantitative, natural science approaches and intuitive, introspective approaches. However, Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), the great German pioneer of experimental psychology, combined laboratory experimentation with introspection, attempting nothing less than a scientific study of human consciousness in its immediacy and venturing to produce a stage-by-stage development of social and cultural consciousness, including religion. Thus this founder of experimental psychology was also a forerunner of phenomenological and social psychology as well as of the psychology of religion.

Wundt had a great influence on the development of experimental psychology and the psychology of religion in the United States through his student G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) and Hall's students James H. Leuba (1868-1946) and E. D. Starbuck (1866-1947), and through George A. Coe (1862-1951). These scholars emphasized the study of experiences such as conversion, prayer, and mystical states, using such methods as questionnaires, personal interviews, autobiographies, and other empirical data that could be analyzed, classified, and statistically weighed. Whether or not religious beliefs and actions were regarded as rationally justified by these investigators, their theoretical tendency was to view religion in its pragmatic function as operating to stabilize or develop personality. With the work of Edward S. Ames (1870-1958) and, particularly, James B. Pratt (1875-1944) American psychology of religion moved beyond a concern with individual American Protestant experiences to worldwide religious experience and gained a social as well as an individualistic emphasis. [See the biographies of Hall, Leuba, Pratt, Starbuck, and Wundt.]

William James. The great name in the psychology of religion in the United States is William James (1842-1910); the great book is his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James, originally a laboratory psychologist and a biological naturalist and functionalist, approached religion from a basically pragmatic view-point. To find this he focused on a descriptive survey and typology of personal experience, in keeping with his general view of the primacy of experience over reflective thought, and of the personal over the institutional. He held that religious experience arises from the same general psychological makeup as all human experience but that it differs in its intended object. He viewed religious experience as involving intense human emotions and feelings directed toward some unseen order, reality, or power "out there," to which the personal stance is adjustment and surrender. His most famous typology is the distinction he made in the *Varieties* between the religion of "once-born" healthy souls and "twice-born" sick souls, a difference reflected in their respective attitudes toward suffering and evil. Although constantly evolutionary, functional, and pragmatic in his account of religious experience, he warned against "the genetic fallacy" of going from the origin of religious experiences in psychological states to negative conclusions as to their value and meaning. And despite his concentration on conscious states, James referred to their eruption from the "subconsciousness" and emphasized the continuity of the conscious person with a wider self through which saving experiences come. [See the biography of William James.]

Depth Psychology. Focus on the unconscious and its relation to religious states came later with the development of depth psychology. This school of psychology originated in the researches of two French psychologists, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) and his student Pierre-Marie-Félix Janet (1859-1947). Charcot's emphasis on hypnosis and the study of the unconscious mind in the cure of psychoneuroses was developed further by Janet, who, moreover, produced a psychological analysis of various religious states and beliefs and their function in human life. It was another student of Charcot's—the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)—who was to make the unconscious mind and its relation to religious phenomena the center of worldwide attention. Freud paid far more attention to anthropological materials (particularly the works of Frazer and Robertson Smith) than most contemporary psychologists of religion. The resultant account in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) of a "primal horde," the killing of the primeval father, and the subsequent repressed guilt and Oedipus complex buried in the unconscious of the whole human race, has been labeled a completely ahistorical fabrication without evidential

foundation. What is important, however, is Freud's attempt to account for religious beliefs and actions in terms of psychoneurotic symptoms and patterns that arise from unresolved infantile fixations. His basic normative assumption is that religion is an illusion whose deceptive solace is to be forgone in the present mature stage of human development—a familiar assumption in the history of social thought.

Freud's apparent reduction of spiritual life to underlying biological instincts and drives aroused hostility in religious and academic circles that sometimes obscured the richness of his creative contributions to the understanding of human culture. For example, in his interpretation of dreams and other mental phenomena, Freud broke down once and for all the conventional hermeneutical restriction of interpretation to fixed forms, such as literary texts, a restriction that had excluded transient mental states. Moreover, traditional religious institutions, while rejecting Freud's biological reductionism, took seriously his discernment of pathological sources for religious expressions in certain individuals and used this discernment in selecting personnel and in judging saintliness.

C. G. Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and for a time a colleague of Freud, developed a far more positive psychoanalytic view of religion. His studies of images in classical mythology, gnosticism, and alchemy and his observation of similar images in the dreams of his patients led him to the concept of a "collective unconscious" underlying individual consciousness. He concluded that the similar (or identical) themes and symbols expressed in ancient myths and doctrines and in twentieth-century dreams were to be ascribed to "archetypes" in the collective unconscious of the human race. Further studies in Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism confirmed him in these conclusions and in his emphasis on myth and symbol as functionally necessary for the health and wholeness of the human psyche. Hence, he held that religious expression of some sort is necessary for mental integrity and that its repression leads to traumatic symptoms. He stated, however, that his analyses and conclusions were purely phenomenological, having to do solely with psychic states and processes, and that they make no assertions as to extra-psychic validity. Jung himself did not engage in the comparative history of religions, but he influenced many scholars in the study of myth and religion, becoming, for example, the dominant influence in the Eranos Conferences, which have been held at Ascona, Switzerland, since 1933. Like Freud he was vigorously criticized by conventional psychologists for concocting a farrago of fantastic, academically unreliable theories and conclusions and for being obscurantistically opaque and unsystematic in his presentation. His critical admirers stressed his focus on

the present-day human mind and his engagement in what might be called an archaeology or speleology of immediately present mentality. [See the biography of Jung.]

Both Freud and Jung have had their followers and revisionists. Erich Fromm (1900-1980) and Erik H. Erikson, who emphasized character and personality development as well as societal factors, have viewed certain aspects of religion positively from a humanistic standpoint. Existential psychiatrists, such as Victor Frankl, also have perceived religion favorably. A radically contrasting and opposing approach to depth psychology has come from behaviorists, such as B. F. Skinner, who view consciousness as a derivative of physiological states and external stimuli, and have hence held a fully reductive view of religious beliefs and acts. A repudiation of the emphasis on religious experience has come from pro-religious scholars such as Evans-Pritchard, who considered it wrongheaded to focus on the emotional accompaniments of religious life, which, he held, was better approached from an institutional and societal perspective. [For more detailed treatment of issues discussed in this section, see Psychology.]

Sociological Approaches

As with psychological approaches to religion, thoughtful considerations of the relation between religion and society go back to the ancient Greeks. Eminent Christian thinkers, concerned both with the shaping role of religion on society and with religion's response to growing secular power and influence, continued these reflections. Modern secular philosophers carried on the study of the relation from a strictly secular viewpoint, as evident in the thought of Comte and Spencer, noted above. Also, the marked societal focus in modern anthropologists of religion such as W. Robertson Smith and Durkheim has already been observed. This section will deal with a few major critical approaches prevalent in modern times. [For more detailed treatment of writers and issues discussed below, see Society and Religion and Sociology.]

Karl Marx. Among philosophers who may very broadly be termed naturalistic humanists, the sociology of religion has been perceived as an aspect of the sociology of consciousness and culture. This is obvious in the thought of Karl Marx (1818-1883), who declared that men's consciousness is determined by socioeconomic relations; this claim applies particularly to religious consciousness and institutions. For Marx human oppression, deprivation, and "alienation" are not only political, social, and economic, but also spiritual. It is man's violated and distorted consciousness as well as his productive labor that must be uplifted and purified in a perfected humanity,

which is to be made whole in a classless social order. In this secular eschatological vision, religion would be one of the traditional ideologies and institutions from which human consciousness would be freed. Obviously this is no merely descriptive analysis of historical actuality but a prophetic affirmation of man's realizable potential and destiny. In this sense Marxism belongs to the category of secular religions, no matter how scathing Marx's remarks about Judaism and Christianity and no matter how much, like other eschatological visions, it seems to have been refuted by historical developments. [See Marxism and the biography of Marx.]

Various revisions and critiques of the Marxist view followed its formulation by Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). Prominent in these were the opposition to the reduction of human culture and spirituality to their socioeconomic determinants and to the emphasis on class conflict, as against the view of religion as consensual, stabilizing, and integrative that has been held by a long line of sociologists from Durkheim to Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). Attempts at viewing religion as playing a positive role in the life of a people have come from Marxist theoreticians such as the Italian Communist leader Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), and attempts to find common ground with Marxism have been made by Christian thinkers such as the "liberation theologians" in Latin America. [See Political Theology.]

German School. Very rich conceptual and methodological contributions to the sociological approach to religion were made by German scholars, of whom the most influential was Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber emphasized the mutual influence of the economic and social spheres upon one another; he discerned a tripartite typology of authority (traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational) in both spheres; and he made sociological studies of specific historical religions (Chinese and Indian religion and ancient Judaism). A follower of Dilthey in the application of the intuitive method of *Verstehen*, he differed from Dilthey in believing in the possibility of general causal explanations of cultural phenomena arrived at through comparative and typological methods. Although Weber was an exponent of a "value free" approach to social phenomena, his central focus was on the values, including especially religious values, that are the dominant norms of social structures. [See the biography of Weber.]

Also important are the contributions of German theologians such as Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) and Joachim Wach (already mentioned as a historian and phenomenologist). Like Wach, Troeltsch was concerned with the development of a scientific study of religion and, like Weber, with the mutual influence of religion and society upon one another. He is notable for

a monumental work on Christian social doctrines and for his tripartite typology of church, sect, and mysticism. The tension between the historical relativism assumed in his approach and the theological assumption of the absoluteness of Christianity was for him the subject of deep concern. [See the biography of Troeltsch.]

Wach won early fame not only for his works on Religionswissenschaft and hermeneutics but also for his works on the sociology of religion, a discipline that he regarded as essential in the study of religion. The social for him is one of the three basic expressions of religious experience (the theoretical and the practical are the others) and focuses on the relation of the religious community to "ultimate reality." Wach's work systematically and elaborately investigated the various types of religious communities, authorities, and symbols, as well as the mutual relation between religion and society. He insisted on the distinctive character of religious groups as against other social forms, because of their essential focus on transcendent reality or "the numinous." Due primarily to what seems to be a theological emphasis in an avowedly nonnormative study, Wach's work has tended to be neglected by secular sociologists of religion.

Also important among German contributors is Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936). Tönnies is especially noted for his distinction between *Gemeinschaft*, the organic social group guided by tradition, custom, and religion, and *Gesellschaft*, "society" in the modern sense of a rationalized organization ruled by law and contract. The idea of *Gemeinschaft* influenced Wach, van der Leeuw, and many social thinkers, although it was criticized by some as a romantic notion. Troeltsch's inquiry into the typology of religious institutions was further developed by H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), an American theologian, in his *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929), a study of church, denomination, and sect in relation to ethnicity, class, and other social factors. Although based on careful scholarship, his work goes far beyond sociological description and analysis to a prophetic condemnation of the compromise and collaboration of ecclesiastical bodies with an oppressive society ruled by the rich and educated classes. His approach has been criticized by secular sociologists of the value-free school for its judgmental Christian emphasis and for its imprecise definitions and analyses. [See the biography of Tönnies.]

Various attempts have been made to find a middle path between studies under the aegis of Christian social ethics and positivistic studies that view religion as a quantifiable social variable. The phenomenological method, with its suspension of normative judgments, naturally lent itself to such attempts. Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), an Austrian-American social

philosopher, had the greatest influence on the development of this approach in the study of society, and disciples such as Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann have applied it to the study of religion, especially in modern secularized society.

The Current Situation

By the last quarter of the twentieth century various new approaches in the social sciences and humanities had become the center of attention and inevitably influenced the study of religion. The new approaches may be summed up by the terms structure, symbol (or sign), and system. These terms had played a role in previous generations in human studies, but they assumed a different tone and direction in a new age characterized by such new disciplines as structural linguistics, semiotics, and cybernetics, and the advent of the digital computer with its binary code. The notions of structure and system, for example, had previously been modeled on the biological concept of organism, whereas now they arose from linguistics, with a corresponding shift from the generally biological to the specifically human, and hence to the operations of the human mind. Although these notions had also been significant in the phenomenological hermeneutics of scholars such as Mircea Eliade, the new "structuralism" usually rejected phenomenology of religion's stress on sympathetic understanding and its openness to a transcendent, spiritual realm.

Claude Lévi-Strauss. The central figure in this development has been the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. He sees human culture, myth, and religion as basically sign-systems whose deep structures, embedded in the human unconscious, can be discerned through systematic analysis. He seeks order in the great variety and heterogeneity of myths, rites, and kinship systems, asserting the fundamental rationality of primitive thought, to which he ascribes a fully systematic "science of the concrete." Unlike Durkheim and Mauss, who derived primitive classification from the primitive social order, he finds the basis of social patterns in the structures of the human mind.

This mentalistic emphasis is accompanied by an apparent downgrading of empirical data about primitive customs, rites, and the like, which play so large a role in fieldwork anthropology. For Lévi-Strauss the basic meaning of a myth cannot be found in such background material, but only in a paradigm obtained through a study of other myths and mental creations, and thus ultimately in the structures of the human mind. This involves a study of logical processes, of the "codes" by which the mind grasps concrete experience, and hence the "decoding" of particular myths. Furthermore, the codes for the various aspects of the experienced world are

mutually convertible or translatable, as are the myths they explain. To illustrate this convertibility, Lévi-Strauss uses an analogy from music: a melody can be converted from one key to another. The stress is on formal structure, not on manifest content. Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is logological rather than biological or sociological; it involves impersonal logical necessity rather than individual human choice or sociocultural determinism.

This apparently contentless formalism has been vigorously criticized as basically unsatisfactory and humanly meaningless. However, Lévi-Strauss has denied the charge and has insisted on the complementarity of form and content in his kind of structuralism. His defenders have pointed to the bipolar oppositions that are central to his approach—such as male and female, sky and earth, left and right—as the basic content in his analysis of myths; to his use of the principle of exchange (derived from Mauss) to interpret the world of myth; and to his stress on the shift from nature to culture, as he finds, for example, in table manners. He has insisted that structuralism is just "a new way of apprehending content."

Lévi-Strauss has also been criticized for making general statements about worldwide patterns on the basis of data found in a few local cultures and regions, and also for ascribing the structural paradigms to a universal human mind. The English anthropologist Edmund Leach, himself an eminent structural analyst of myth, suggests that Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach can fruitfully be applied to particular societies, cultures, and religions, but that it should eschew specieswide universal statements. While sometimes labeling almost all such claimed universals as "trivial," Leach also points to the weightiness of some of the universal themes disclosed by myth analysis, for example, whether death is final, or why incest is forbidden, or how the human race began. He also thinks that Lévi-Strauss has made an invaluable contribution to the analysis of myths by looking to the basic patterning or structure of a tale, rather than its manifest content, in order to find its basic "message" or meaning. Moreover, he considers Lévi-Strauss's penchant for generalization a salutary corrective to the cautious, atomistic concentration on particular cultures by Anglo-American anthropologists. [See Structuralism.]

Clifford Geertz. The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who is sometimes loosely associated with the structuralist approach, sounds a distinctly new tone, epitomized by his stress on the term meaning, both in its referential sense and in the sense of meaningfulness, that is, of what makes human existence meaningful. He is engaged in a kind of hermeneutical anthropology (his own label is "interpretive anthropology") and, making an analogy between anthropology and literary criticism, he has likened the

cultures and religions he has investigated to works of art. This inevitably involves "a semiotic approach to culture," since the anthropologist is confronted with strange cultural contexts that he can understand only by unpacking the meanings of their signs (or symbols). Geertz's basic concept of "cultural system" is symbolical, since it refers to the discerned order or pattern of symbols and meanings in a particular culture. The term also applies to various aspects of a culture, such as art, science, philosophy, common sense, and, above all, religion.

Geertz sees sacred symbols as possessing a unique double quality. On the one hand, they provide a representation of the way things are—a cosmology or metaphysics. On the other hand, they provide a guide or program for human action—an ethics or aesthetics. Thus sacred symbols express both an "is" and an "ought." A religion consists of a cluster of such symbols that make up an ordered whole, a symbolic system that bestows meaning on human actions and events and provides a basic warrant for the ideas, values, and lifestyle of a society. Going further, Geertz ascribes the use of such symbols to the human need "to make sense of experience, to give it form and order," a need as vital as any biological need. He relates this approach to the study of religion to the current and widespread view of man as a "symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal."

In his essay "Religion as a Cultural System" (Geertz, 1973, pp. 87-125), Geertz fills out this basic schema. The main focus of the anthropological study of religion should be the meaning of religious symbols. Culture is defined as a historically transmitted pattern of symbolic meanings. Religion, viewed in its cultural dimension, is defined as "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (p. 90). Symbol is defined as "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol's meaning" (p. 91).

Symbols and their meanings, according to Geertz, are available to empirical study because they are tangible, public, "out there," not merely in individual minds; that is, they are social. Geertz, like Eliade with his "hierophanies," cautions that one must not confuse the objects and acts that serve as vehicles for meanings (i. e., what they are "as such") with their symbolic role. We do not study them "as such"; rather, we study the patterns of meaning that can be discerned in their use as symbols. Religious symbols uniquely act both to express an image of reality and to shape reality by

evoking certain moods and motivations. They serve to disclose meaning even in the most apparently irrational, enigmatic, paradoxical, chaotic, and negative situations and crises.

Geertz has proceeded from close studies of small communities to general statements and broad comparative portraits of, for example, the religions of Java and of Moroccan and Indonesian Islam. He holds that recurrent general patterns of meaning may be discerned in comparative studies and that insights and conclusions about religion derived from one local culture can be tested by applying them to a quite different one. He is keenly aware that the scholar's interpretation of an alien culture and religion is hardly the same as the indigenous participant's understanding, but he is hopeful that by "sorting out the structures of signification" intercultural dialogue is made possible. Yet he still holds to the aim of a scientific study of culture and religion, in which the scholar plays a disinterested role *qua* scholar, with no personal involvement. That Geertz speaks of the "cultural dimension" of religion may imply that he grants the existence of other dimensions. He explicitly confines himself to what "religion comes down to as a social, cultural and psychological phenomenon" and makes no ontological judgments.

Mary Douglas. The British anthropologist Mary Douglas is notable for her attempt to relate the symbolic systems of small-scale primitive cultures to mainline movements in more complex societies—ancient and modern, Western and Eastern. Going counter to the mentalistic, logological trend initiated by Lévi-Strauss, whose work Douglas both admires and criticizes, she has returned to Durkheim's emphasis on social classifications as the basis for symbolic systems and to his focus on social relations as the model for logical relations, and thus for the way the world is viewed. Also in contrast to Lévi-Strauss, she has returned to Robertson Smith's emphasis on rites, rather than myths, as the central object of analysis.

Seeking a "cross-cultural, pan-human pattern of symbols," Douglas finds the common natural basis for this pattern in the human body, which she posits as the model for cultural systems and the locus for "natural symbols." She argues that how the body and its functions are viewed and controlled is a reflex of social structures and controls, and she relates various physiological models to varying cosmologies and theologies in both primitive and complex cultures.

In *Purity and Danger* (1966) Douglas concentrates on the rituals connected with pollution and taboo in primitive cultures, showing through a structural analysis that they are expressions of the universal human requirement for systematic order. This requirement is present in modern as

well as in primitive societies—for example, in housecleaning and toilet training. Although Douglas still insists on the distinction between primitive, undifferentiated societies and complex, institutionalized societies, she rejects the characterization of primitives as obsessive ritualists and denies the validity of the customary dichotomy between magic and religion. She finds "magical efficacy"—the alleged capacity of ritual performances to obtain desired results, which is usually viewed as a distinctive characteristic of primitive religions—to be an essential concept, sometimes embraced and sometimes rejected, in major Western religions. Douglas applies her analysis to everything from primitive witchcraft, to the holiness code in Leviticus, to traditional Chinese customs, discerning the symbolic system underlying each of them.

In *Natural Symbols* (1970), Douglas considers ritual as the expression of a society's cosmology. She seeks to discern connections between specific cosmologies and symbol systems and the types of social relations in particular cultures. Douglas has come to recognize that there are wide variations in primitive cultures, ranging from intensely ritualistic cultures, to cultures that stress "magical efficacy," to cultures with a complete lack of interest in ritual, cosmology, or a supernatural realm. Following Durkheim's lead, she theorizes that the explanation for these cultural differences can be found in the varying social contexts. For example, if her hypothesis is correct then the basic view of the human body, which presumably expresses a culture's understanding of the relation between matter and spirit, should be concordant with certain social structures—a theory that could be empirically tested. Thus for Douglas it follows that anthropological fieldwork will provide illumination on "the traditional subject matter of the history of religion" and will reveal "implicit forms of the great theological controversies."

Douglas finds a consonance between rigorously regulated social groups and firm controls and restraints of bodily functions. A high level of social formality, she asserts, corresponds with an intense concern for purity—the avoidance of pollution—and with an intense ritualism. The contrary is true of less regulated, more informal social groups. Douglas works out this theory in the form of a schema that locates cultures and their religions according to certain correlations of social pressures (labeled "group") and classification systems or worldviews (labeled "grid"). Where group and grid are high, the concern for purity rules and ritual performances is most intense, and so on down the spectrum to a situation where personal, spontaneous responses are encouraged and formal rituals eschewed. She

applies this schema to the contrasting emphases on sacraments and inner experience in both primitive religions and leading Western religions.

In Douglas's work a familiar stress is made on the ordering and grasping of human experience through symbolic codes that express basic cultural worldviews. Her specific emphasis is on rituals as the bearers of these codes and on the consonance of the ritual codes with the social structures of particular cultures. Despite her marked sociocultural determinism, she allows for autonomous personal attitudes toward rituals and views the human body as a model for the social body, as well as the other way around. Although she states as her "rule of method" that comparison must be limited to a restricted social environment or cultural range, she often jumps from consideration of a small, remote tribal society to wide-ranging comparisons with traditional Roman Catholicism or Protestantism or with the New Left and "hippie" movements of the 1960s. In lamenting what she sees as the sociological and psychological evils of contemporary antiritualism (alienation and spiritual aridity) and in praising the wholesome effects of a consistently ritualistic way of living, she seems to depart from the objective detachment often claimed for anthropological scholarship and to opt for normative judgments and a sermonic stance.

[The history of the modern scholarly study of a number of religious traditions is traced in a group of articles, each entitled History of Study, under the following entries: African Religions; Arctic Religions; Australian Religions; Chinese Religion; Egyptian Religion; Finno-Ugric Religions; Indian Religions; Indo-European Religions; Mesoamerican Religions; Mesopotamian Religions; North American Religions; Oceanic Religions; South American Religions; Taoism; and Tibetan Religions. See also Buddhist Studies; Islamic Studies; and Jewish Studies. Further information concerning the development of the modern scholarly study of religion can be found in entries on the religious systems of specific areas and peoples.]

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SEYMOUR CAIN

Methodological Issues

The study of religion is hedged about by conditions and limitations. First, there is the individual student's motive for entering the field—a partly or wholly subjective matter on which it is unwise to generalize. Second, there is the availability of material and the extent to which the investigator is personally equipped to understand and analyze it. But given adequate motivation and access to relevant material, there remain, finally, questions of method. How is the material to be organized and classified? What analytical procedures are appropriate in a given instance? And how far may these procedures be elevated into general methodological principles? Further questions suggest themselves. To what extent do the personal presuppositions of the investigator affect the way in which a given body of material is approached and analyzed? Is the study of religion a "pure" or "applied" science, if indeed it is a science at all? Is it, or is it not, directed toward a goal beyond the intellectual understanding of the given instance? Ought the study of religion to remain aloof from matters involving personal commitment, or may the student be permitted (or even expected) to affirm the value of one religious tradition over against others?

These questions, and many more of a similar kind, have been hotly debated in recent years. Taken together, they have virtually made of "methodology" an independent subdiscipline within the study of religion—or rather two subdisciplines, one historical and the other systematic. The historical stream, comparable in most respects to the history of science, examines past methods and approaches, with a view to mapping out the

course of the study itself over the past couple of centuries. The other has features in common with the philosophy of science on the one hand and with systematic theology on the other. It has its sights set on the past only to the extent to which yesterday's methods still remain in force; otherwise it concentrates on what is currently known or assumed about the nature of religion on the one hand and about the presuppositions of the investigator on the other.

Most current methodological issues in the study of religion arise in relation to this second, systematic stream, and are precipitated by the different sets of presuppositions that scholars bring with them into the field. It makes a great deal of difference whether the investigator has been trained initially as, for instance, a theologian, a philosopher, a classical philologist, or a fieldworking ethnologist. It is of more than passing significance whether he or she does or does not assume religion to be of "natural" origin. Presuppositions of this order are seldom clearly stated, and later generations of students may be left to draw their own conclusions. For this reason, among others, a history of ideas approach to methodological issues is virtually indispensable as a preliminary to systematic reflection.

Religion itself is of course notoriously difficult to define and circumscribe. This being so, it is only to be expected that there should be corresponding difficulties in respect of the study of religion. That religion is multifunctional—individual and collective, existential, intellectual, social, and ethical—is universally recognized in theory, while being difficult to apply in practice. Depending on the limits set by the individual investigator, the study of religion may concentrate on a single function or aspect of religion to the exclusion of others. A prior conviction on the observer's part that the "essential" component of religion is to be found in one of its functions rather than others has the effect of establishing a scale of priorities within the range of observable phenomena. The sociologist examines one function, the psychologist another, simply as a matter of professional competence and personal choice. The philologist has been trained to interpret words, and in the absence of textual material may be completely disoriented. Specialization of this order is necessary, of course, but may become a danger when alternative methods and approaches go unrecognized and unappreciated or when the range of religion's expressions is narrowed down to what the specialist is capable of mastering: in such cases it is appropriate to speak of "reductionism." To the extent that the study of religion actually is a meeting-point of disciplines (many of which enjoy independent existence in the academic world), it must accept a great diversity of possible approaches and methods.

Judgments of Value. Problems of method in the study of religion are not all of one kind, however. Method may be related to either material or motive. In the former case, the issue has to do with the structure of religion itself, as demonstrated by texts and monuments, myths and rituals, and morals and ethics, as well as by the religious experiences of individuals. Here the problem is that of demonstrating the relationship between these factors in terms appropriate to the setting in which each appears. In the case of religious experience, the personality of the investigator comes to the fore. Today it tends to be assumed that no student is capable of evaluating material dispassionately or "objectively," since every student is in subtle bondage to a period, an ideology, a theology, a social class, and/or a climate of opinion. Presuppositions may or may not be recognized, and it has been one of the main objectives of the phenomenology of religion to recognize and dismiss (or at least "bracket") whatever of a personal nature may perchance give rise to inappropriate value judgments. But skepticism on this point is currently widespread. It is argued that even were a state of freedom from presuppositions attainable (which, by implication, it is not), the desirability of such a state is itself a judgment of value. Thus objectivity is a pipe dream, and methodological discussion a necessary meeting place of competing subjectivities. The student may achieve technical competence in respect of religious symbol-systems, but on the hermeneutical level the value-free approach is simply unattainable.

Vocabulary. To a great extent the study of religion over the past three or four decades has involved a determined attempt to settle accounts with an academic past dominated by evolutionist presuppositions. [See Evolutionism.] But the attempt has proved difficult. The evolutionists gave the study of religion a basic vocabulary; they classified religions historically, geographically, and culturally, systematizing them into various "isms," each the rough equivalent of a species in the biological sense. Where religious miscegenation was believed to have taken place, a further "ism" was devised as a label: syncretism.

It has been easier to call in question the easily identifiable presuppositions of evolutionism than to modify its vocabulary. Many popular textbooks today still follow a line little different from that in vogue at the turn of the century. In theory, Hinduism is a highly inappropriate term with which to label a highly complex network of interlocking phenomena; nevertheless, it continues to be used. Objections to such terms as shamanism and totemism have been made repeatedly; the terms have survived.

Despite these terminological survivals, it is recognized today that any religious "system" is made up of many interwoven strands, and one of the

objectives of the present-day study of religion is to try to disentangle them, historically and functionally. Perhaps this is best done in a narrowly circumscribed setting, along the lines established by anthropologists. But there remains a lively interest in wider but less easily defined questions: the macro-history of religion, the "essence" of religion, religious "truth," the nature of religious experience, and religion as a human universal.

A complicating factor concerns the position from which questions like these are approached, either from within or from outside a community of believers. Here a wide range of motives may be brought into play. There may be a "will to believe" or a determination not to believe. A given tradition may or may not be assumed to be normative and therefore "true." There may be a broad acceptance of religion-in-general, coupled with a far-reaching skepticism with respect to religions-in-particular. The permutations and combinations are almost endless and introduce a highly subjective factor into the method question.

Response Threshold. Whereas in the past it tended to be assumed that the study of religion involved the discernment of the natural laws by which religion operates—that is, laws that function irrespective of the stance of the student—it has now come to be recognized that the sociology of knowledge is an independent and complex issue in the study of religion. In its most acute form, the question "How can I be sure that the method(s) I am using do justice to the integrity of what I am investigating?" can induce mental paralysis. In a less acute form, it leads to a wish always to defer to the believer's own interpretation of a given tradition—a desire that becomes the more pressing the more contemporary the object of study.

A "response threshold" is crossed when it becomes possible for the believer to advance his or her own interpretation against that of the scholar. In classical comparative religion this was hardly a problem, since most of the scholar's time was spent investigating the religions of the past and often of the very remote past. Interpretations might be challenged, but only by other specialists working according to Western canons and conventions. Today, by contrast, a greater proportion of study is devoted to contemporary, or at least recent, forms of living traditions. The study of religion often shades into a dialogue of religions, in which the views of both partners are (at least in theory) equally important. The response threshold implies the right of the present-day devotee to advance a distinctive interpretation of his or her own tradition—often at variance with that of Western scholarship—and to be taken entirely seriously in so doing. [See Dialogue of Religions.]

Insider and Outsider. How far the student of religion who is not personally a "believer" can understand and enter into the spirit of a religious

tradition is as hotly debated now as it was a century ago. With respect to the religions of the past, this has seldom been an acute problem: evidence was limited to texts and monuments, and the existential dimension of religion could at best be inferred. But at the present time, it tends often to be assumed that no specific form of religion can be understood in depth other than from the inside. By some students the contrary is, however, maintained with equal force: since, as a condition of being a bona fide member, the insider tends to be forced into a certain (and by implication narrow) understanding of the tradition to which he or she belongs, the ideal investigator is one who works from a position outside limitations of this kind. Neither view can be maintained as a general principle. Intellectual understanding is one thing, imaginative sympathy another, emotional arousal a third, and the study of religion may be directed toward any of these. Insiders and outsiders alike may have their sights set at various levels. Purely intellectually, the outsider may know far more about a given religious tradition, its history, structure, and social implications, than does the average devotee, while being untouched emotionally by any claim the tradition may make to divine revelation. The insider will hold that all else is unimportant in comparison with the revealed message and may remain indifferent or hostile to any question of fact that does not actually support it. In between these two perspectives every combination and permutation is known. But to the extent to which the student does not belong within the tradition under examination, the elusive faculty of imaginative sympathy is greatly to be desired—though where it does not exist, it is difficult to suggest any means by which it might be taught.

Problem of Translation. Consciously or unconsciously, every student of religion belongs within a tradition of discourse—that is, a basis of spoken or unspoken presuppositions and conventions—that supplies the terms with which religion is understood. Most of those terms are of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Western origin; though complemented from time to time by newer coinings, by and large they express less what religion is than what post-Enlightenment Western rationalism believed it to be. The word religion itself, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued, belongs in this class, as do the various "isms" that have already been mentioned. On a different level, the only basic doctrinal vocabulary available was that of (largely Protestant) Christianity.

Classical comparative religion was of course a purely Western enterprise; it was, in intention at least, a science, but a science according to the nineteenth-century notion of what science ought to be. Ideas and concepts and doctrines were translated into their closest Western

equivalents. But even when it was explained that, for instance, Hindu moksa is not synonymous with Christian "salvation" or that to associate the Sanskrit sat or satya with Western notions of "reality" is to convey an impression precisely the opposite of what is intended, the attempt at direct translation persisted. It must be recognized, however, that all religious symbols, words included, derive their meanings from the total context within which they are used. Each arouses a host of associations in the minds of "insiders" and "outsiders" respectively—associations which may differ markedly from one period to another even within a single tradition. Unless the range of possible associations and "meanings" can be grasped, understanding is bound to be elusive. The New Testament, say, is in an important sense a different scripture in Greek, Latin, seventeenth-century English, and late twentieth-century English; it might similarly be argued that the Bhagavadgita assumed a new identity on its translation into European languages from 1785 on.

This is the most important reason why the study of religion has always had an important philological component, though even so, the ability to read a text and the ability to understand it may be two different accomplishments. For texts are never ends in themselves. Over and above what a text says, there is the matter of the images it conveys, its function in the life of a believing community, its relation to other forms of religious expression—music, dance, sacred space, prayer, incantation, symbols of power generally—and its own hermeneutical tradition. So while the student of religion must be able to grasp whatever texts are relevant, textual study is only one aspect of a complex whole. Where primal religions are concerned, there are in general no written texts to be studied, and the emphasis must lie elsewhere, in the function and transmission of sacred tradition as a whole.

Tradition and Transmission. The present-day study of religion has learned much from anthropology and sociology about the transmission of sacred tradition. But here as elsewhere not all students agree as to the approaches that are necessary and appropriate, especially where the "great traditions" (using this term only in reference to the numbers of their adherents) are concerned. The methods of literary criticism were first applied to sacred scriptures a century ago, and they are still warmly advocated in some quarters. But a sacred scripture is a living tradition arrested at a moment of time; it has a prehistory and it has a later history of interpretation. Oral tradition preceded written transmission, and there is a "traditio-historical" approach (advocated strongly in the 1950s and 1960s by Scandinavian scholars, among others) that attempts to analyze this "oral" phase. Later, there is the ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation within the living and developing community—the

"cumulative tradition" of which Wilfred Cantwell Smith has written. Again, however, it must be stressed that this later phase involves much that is not necessarily religion, such as the complex relationship of a community of believers to the world in which it is placed and of its members to one another and to those who adhere to some other religious or secular tradition. All these matters need to be considered in estimating the process by which sacred tradition—whether written or not—is transmitted from one generation to another.

Secularization. Intruding into the whole question of the study of religion is the extent and effect of the process of secularization. The process as such has three well-defined phases: first, the phase of rejection, as former believers turn from religion to some secular authority, usually that of one or another form of science; second, the phase of adaptation, in which individuals seek to come to terms with what is new while reshaping the old to fit new patterns of thought (this is where liberalism emerges); and third, the phase of reaction, in which old values are refurnished and fresh allegiance is demanded. It is at this third stage that various forms of fundamentalism appear in direct opposition to both apostates and liberals.

The study of religion is itself caught up in this process in complex and subtle ways. Thus while the student may attempt to keep this aspect of the sociology of knowledge at arm's length, he or she is necessarily involved in it. Religion may be studied either from within a community of believers or from outside, but it can hardly be studied independently of the secularization process, and this leads to direct consequences with respect to what is seen as the object of the academic exercise or the personal quest. Probably few students at present see the study of religion as the laying out of a smorgasbord from which to assemble a solid meal. But a sharp line of demarcation passes between those who retain a conviction that there remains a seat of final authority somewhere within the world of religion and those who do not. To the latter, the study of religion can hardly be other than a behavioral science, and religion itself something between idealism and pathology. The former—and they are many—may locate final authority narrowly, within a highly specific tradition, in which case that tradition will serve as a model for what religion ought to be or might be. Or they may concentrate on the one demonstrable universal in all religion, namely, that it involves human beings and human experience.

Experience and Mysticism. The study of religion in this century has been affected by a polarization similar to that found in Western religion generally between the individual and the corporate, the personal and the social. But on either count, "religious experience"—whether of the

individual as such or of the individual in society—has offered an attractive alternative to a one-sided concentration on intellectual formulations of religious belief. Many consider it to be the scholar's business to penetrate beyond the externals of religion to the personal experience of the "real," "the transcendent," "the numinous," or "the holy" which validates them. From William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) by way of Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) to Ninian Smart's *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969) this emphasis has been constant and cumulative, and was strongly reinforced by the intellectual disorder that followed in the wake of two world wars and the frantic experimentation of the 1960s. Anthropological researches into the phenomena of shamanism and experiments in the use of hallucinogenic drugs suggested parallels with the experiences of mystics of all traditions—mysticism being taken to be the highest point attainable by the individual within (or perhaps beyond) the religious sphere.

But of all the dimensions of religion, it is the experiential which is the hardest to define and analyze. The experiences of other human beings can be known only to the extent to which they are able and willing to communicate them—by word, action, or gesture. Physiological symptoms may be given a religious interpretation and perhaps vice versa. Individuals may be unable or unwilling to provide any but the faintest clues to the nature of their religious experiences. There may be deliberate or unconscious deception, and individual experience must be seen as being conditioned in innumerable ways by the expectations of others and as having its locus within a community, its values, and its symbols. That innumerable attempts have been made to communicate the nature of personal religious experience cannot be overlooked. But to treat the individual's experience as determinative of all religions is simply mistaken. It is important, certainly, to the extent to which it is accessible to the investigator; in all but a few cases, however, it can be dealt with satisfactorily only in relation to the community within which it is placed.

The study of mysticism is fraught with peculiar difficulties. Some are merely existential difficulties magnified, while others are entirely specific, including the virtual impossibility of arriving at a single acceptable definition of the word mysticism and the recognition of the wide range of experience that might be described as "mystical," from cataleptic trance at one extreme to a sense of wholeness and well-being at the other. Here, as so often in the study of religion, the absence of terminological precision has made methodological coherence practically impossible. The study of the phenomena associated with "mysticism" will continue; the word itself is, on

the other hand, of little or no use as an analytical tool. As with religious experience generally, mysticism needs further to be related to the social settings within which it occurs.

Religious Leadership. This issue regarding the place of the individual within the believing and worshiping community continues to be of great importance. A special question concerns the nature of religious leadership—a question made more acute in the wake of the new religious movements of the period since the 1960s. Whereas traditional leadership has been wholly or partly institutionalized within an accepted authority structure that locates trained leaders in conventional roles, recent developments have brought the "charismatic" leader to the fore. Whether guru, prophet, messiah, or revolutionary ideologist, the charismatic leader and his or her followers have provided fresh possibilities for psychological and sociological analysis. On the one hand this is a matter of the background and personality of the leader; on the other, of the alienations and affirmations of those who choose to become followers. On the whole analysis has so far been directed rather more to the latter than to the former. Surprisingly little is still known of the personalities and motives of those responsible for founding religious movements in any period, perhaps because of the difficulty of finding a middle ground between total affirmation and total negation of their claims to be vehicles of revelation.

The Question of Culture. Perhaps the single most pressing problem of method in the present-day study of religion has to do with the relation of religion to culture and the interrelations of separate religious traditions in a culturally plural world. That religion is related to culture is something of which all but the most naive are aware. How the relationship functions is another matter entirely. If culture is regarded as the sum total of those factors (language, law, history, dress, food, music, literature) that give members of a community their sense of belonging to that community rather than some other, is religion to be added to the list or kept separate from it? Alternatively, if it is allowed that the outward forms of religion belong within the orbit of culture, can there be an "essence" of religion which is not so limited? Or may there be "ethnic" as opposed to "universal" religions—the former culture-bound, the latter not? That religions themselves frequently claim to be noncultural or supracultural, based on "eternal" and "universal" verities, affects the issue not at all. The student's problem is that although empirical methods can easily establish which elements of a given religious tradition have been or are anchored in a definite time and place, and which therefore may be regarded as culturally conditioned, there is no empirical method by which to measure the timeless and transcendental. At

this point, the study of religion must pass over into theology (or at least metaphysics) or assume a judicious silence.

Science, Art, and Craft. That the study of religion is a science was maintained forcefully a century ago. The experiential wave has since attempted to force the study into the imprecise role of an art, sustained by impressions, furthered by dialogue, and transmitted as an aspect of a wider personal desire for self-realization and self-expression, "method" in any strict sense being rendered obsolete in the process. That the study of religion also involves the practice of one or more craft techniques has always been assumed, however. Encyclopedic knowledge may have been thought attainable two centuries ago; today it is no longer even a remote possibility. But the methodological problems affecting religion at large have a habit of reappearing in virtually identical forms at whatever point the student may choose to begin. There will always be the difficulties connected with the tension between the "inward" and "outward" expressions of religion, between religion's "essence" and "manifestations," and between its many observable functions. In almost all modern societies, there are the additional problems posed by secularization on the one hand and by religious and cultural pluralism on the other. It is hardly to be expected that such an intricate set of locks can be made to open with the help of only one key.

Methodological pluralism, in other words, is both necessary and desirable; methodological sectarianism is to be deplored. The study of religion—as distinct from confessional theology or its equivalents—can hardly claim to be a "discipline" in the medieval sense of a disciplina in which discipuli are taught by a magister only that which it is considered safe for them to know. Rather, it is—and must remain—a meeting point of disciplines, a polymethodic enterprise dedicated to the understanding and explanation of perhaps the most persistent expression of the state of being human.

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