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Defining Religion

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norms, but face-to-face coitus is undoubtedly most commonplace. The human embrace provides a sense of relatively total inclusion, even as the isolated and open-faced biped is otherwise given to a pervasive sense of insecurity and danger. The frontal nature of the human body is open to perceptions of mutuality and intimacy directly linked to its special posture.

Aside from the obvious consequences of the bipedal bodily template for the human pursuit of romantic fulfillment in all its cultural embellishments, the biped may be prepossessed of a bodily need to dispose of the burden of self-consciousness which the upright stance exacerbates. The very positional feature which wounded and made humans vulnerable can become the agency of the full-bodied embrace. The linear body, standing or reclining, is both subject to a greater aloneness or a deeper mutuality than it could be otherwise. But religion's frequent interest in the loss of self in a larger spiritual context, the discovery of perfect affirmation from the other, or the attainment of a metaphysical union with a supernatural Other is laden with the intimate, poetic language of nuptial intimacy.

In conclusion, I submit that the phenomenological description of bodily experience is a valid anthropological means to mediate a scientific discourse of neurological activity to religious behavior and symbols. Anthropologists cannot fairly give epistemological priority to either the neurological correlates of religious perceptions or to the symbolic correlation of religious meaning. Rather, the fundamental datum of the body anchors both together in a more holistic integration. That body, in its peculiar human configuration of upright posture and bipedal gait, is already pre-engaged in the process of human knowing and human believing, and the human brain cannot be properly conceived as knowing or believing, except in simultaneity with its bodily, bipedal aspect.

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CHAPTER 4

Defining Religion

James M. Donovan

Religion holds an enduring appeal for anthropologists. They scrutinize it, ponder it, talk and write about it, and—if they are lucky—learn something about it in the process. Given this inherent fascination, and the many volumes it has generated, one might assume that anthropologists agree upon *what* they are talking about. That whatever the differences over what religion *means, signifies,* or *does,* there is at least consensus about what it *is;* that everyone would point to the same phenomena as being "religious."

This assumption could not be more wrong. A fundamental difficulty in the anthropology of religion continues to be the definitional boundaries of its central focus.[1] Too often, as Peter Gay (1987:17) laments, the term suffers a "dilution...to a shallow, virtually universal metaphor for any conviction firmly held and obstinately defended." But surely we mean more than that when we use the word. But what?

At the outset, it needs to be kept in mind that disagreement arises largely because religion is not "real" in the sense that it has no existence independent of its investigators. As Kluckhohn (1985[1949]:63) noted, "labels like 'economics' and 'religion' are abstractions—not clear-cut categories given directly by experience." The task, in other words, is not to contemplate a preexisting thing and to search for words that refer to its essential characteristics. Instead, anthropologists and other social scientists have found it useful to artificially segment the social fabric into "institutions." The reason was stated clearly by Gunnar Myrdal (1962[1944]:667):

The sole criterion in defining scientific terms is practicality. Concepts are our created instruments and have no other form of reality than in our own usage. Their purpose is to help make our thinking clear and our observations accurate.

To a large measure, scientists analyze reality only after they have first constructed it. Definitions not merely identify, but also create the things defined. Only thus can we have Levi-Strauss (1963:10) saying that "totemism is an artificial unity, existing solely in the mind of the anthropologist, to which nothing specifically corresponds in reality." To paraphrase Alves (1984:13), both religion and the study of religion "is born with the power human beings have *to give names to things.*"[2]

Foremost among the implications of this fact is that there can be no right or wrong definitions of religion, nor true or false ones, only more or less useful ones (cf. Berger 1967:175). This latitude, however, has served as the warrant by which dramatically different, and in some cases mutually exclusive definitions have been proposed.

My purpose here is to review the major trends of this unresolved debate. This effort follows in the path of other anthropologists and social scientists who have already conducted similar retrospectives. But while these earlier efforts contain useful insights, they failed to bring closure to the discussion. Earlier efforts failed, I believe, because they did not emphasize the seriousness of the problem. Therefore, I shall immediately defend the project of defining religion as not merely intellectually interesting and philosophically neat, but rather as methodologically determinative.

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

A report from the 1992 meeting of the American Psychiatric Association contains a synopsis of a paper given by James D. Hegarty (Bower 1992). Hegarty examined the literature from 1900 to 1992 on the diagnosis and prognosis of schizophrenics. The results of this review indicated:

that psychiatric definitions of schizophrenia, rather than new treatments, primarily account for observed improvements or declines in the condition of schizophrenics over time....Studies in the first and last time periods generally used narrow definitions of schizophrenia, often requiring continuous signs of disturbance for at least six months. Projects in the middle period relied on broader definitions with no minimum time limits on symptoms.

In other words, an empirical fact attributed to differential treatment of schizophrenia—that improvement rates rose from 15 to 30 percent from 1930 to 1970, and then fell again—was found to be a function of how schizophrenia was defined in each of the three periods. As Hegarty notes, in the middle period "more patients got better because they had milder problems to begin with." A similar cloud surrounded statistics on AIDS cases. Epidemiologists find it difficult to track patterns of rise and fall over time as the definition of the disease undergoes frequent revision.

These examples from other disciplines highlight the problems that also afflict anthropology of religion. How one defines the phenomena to be studied predetermines one's findings. Although contradictory findings over time and space may indicate true problems surrounding a subject, they might also simply be the result of having studied different things glossed by the same label. "One of the now obvious difficulties which has long plagued the social scientist," writes Nancie Gonzalez (1969:92), "is the suspicion that he may be comparing unlike things, and thus may reach spurious, meaningless, or untrue conclusions in regard to whatever it is he wishes to 'explain.'" Sarana (1975:30) concludes, for instance, that the disagreements between Goldenweiser, Radcliffe-Brown, and Levi-Strauss about totemism resulted partly from the three researchers having "differed in the level of abstraction and the closeness to the reality of the data" (cf. Saler 1987:395). The way around such doubts and disagreements would be a definition universally accepted and stringently applied.

Some may view definitional issues as niceties that can be intellectually invigorating but that are methodologically and theoretically irrelevant and better left to philosophers; others might agree with Kroeber (1955:198). Conceding that definitional problems are important, he believed nonetheless that research can be conducted without first resolving them: "Useful definitions come at the end of inquiry." Max Weber, according to Peter Berger (1967:175), was of the same mind, as too, apparently, was Goethe (Robinson 1954). Robinson (1954:4) opines that those

who maintain that definition should come at the end probably have in mind those dialogues of Plato which consist in the gradual approach toward a definition... . Yet this same Plato lays it down in the *Phaedrus* that a speech should start with a definition to show what it is about.

But it is impossible to conduct research without behaving *as if* definitions of religion were noncontroversial. It is this de facto and inconsistent resolution of the problem of defining religion that opens the way for anthropology to be betrayed by its own conceptual categories.

Anthropology is a comparative discipline. Whether this is an attribute of science generally (Evans-Pritchard 1963), social sciences in particular (Durkheim 1938:125), or anthropology distinctively (Kluckhohn 1985 [1949]:293; Peoples and Bailey 1991:5), the fact remains. Historically, this method has been associated with the search for cross-cultural generalizations. Yet Holy (1987:1) claims that "the role of cross-cultural comparison as the method for generating and testing hypotheses derives from the positivistic paradigm in anthropology which is no longer shared by all (and probably not even most) anthropologists."

Even were this true, it is not an obstacle for assertions that anthropology is a comparative discipline. Positivistic hypothesis-testing is not a neces-

sary entailment of the method. "A thorough analysis of one or two systems can be used *either* to understand particular aspects and events of those systems (the idiographic motivation), *or* to test general laws and hypotheses (the scientific motivation)" (Jasper 1987:211). Thus, even interpretive anthropology is still a comparative anthropology, whether one explicitly compares entities cross-culturally or implicitly compares a single event "to something else that did *not* occur" (Smelser, summarized by Jasper 1987:226 n. 3; cf. Barnes 1987:119).

"To compare," Rapoport (1955:118) reminds us, "is to discover unity in diversity and differences among similarities, that is, to uncover structure. The first act in this process is to name the parts and the relations among them." The parts must not merely be named, however; parts that are the same should bear the same name, while those parts with the same name should be the same parts. As Eggan (1950:9) notes:

In order for the comparative study of correlated social phenomena...to be valid, it is necessary to make the first comparisons between phenomena which belong to the same class or type.... Only by exercising such controls can we be sure that the phenomena compared are comparable for scientific purposes.

Insights and interpretations applied by anthropologists are useless if comparability has not been preserved; like must be compared to like. The first utility of a definition is to assure just such comparability, and it furnishes the first argument defending the need of definitional clarification, that of *comparative uniformity.*

One goal of anthropological comparison is "to isolate relationships between variables by eliminating 'nuisance' or extraneous variables, or in causal terms, to isolate causal factors by eliminating competing variables as possible causes" (Frendreis 1983:260). The two-step process by which this goal is achieved is (1) to compare phenomena identified a priori as conceptual entities of the same kind; thereafter *nondefinitional* similarities are sought. But, as William James (1916:45) warns, "The essence of religious experiences...must be that element or quality in them *which we can meet nowhere else*" (emphasis added). In order to judge whether the results of step one meet this standard, we must determine whether they are restricted to the class, or whether they indicate the presence of more general traits and extend to dissimilar categories. Thus, a second step is required whereby (2) the first class is compared with other, different classes. Any similarities that are found would preclude those items from being deemed characteristic of the originals if the goal is to construct a typology, or explanatory of the phenomena if the goal is to identify a cause.

Consider a simple, formal illustration. We may define two cultures as containing two traits or institutions each, and further stipulate that this imaginary universe is composed of Aristotelian categories, which are

Table 4.1
Culture Trait Times (x) Trait Feature (Presence/Absence)

Features	Culture I Traits		Culture II Traits	
	1	2	3	4
1	N	Y	Y	Y
2	Y	N	N	N
3	Y	N	Y	Y
4	Y	Y	N	Y
5	Y	Y	Y	N
6	N	N	Y	Y
7	Y	N	N	Y
8	Y	Y	N	N
9	N	Y	N	Y
10	N	Y	Y	N
11	Y	N	Y	N
12	N	N	N	Y
13	N	Y	N	N
14	N	N	Y	N
15	N	N	N	N
16	Y	Y	Y	Y

characterized by necessary and sufficient conditions when considering class membership. Therefore, each trait can be evaluated for either the presence or absence of sixteen features; any more would be redundant, any less would omit some possibilities (see Table 4.1).

Our primary focus is on trait 1 in culture I. For whatever reason, from among the 16 features of this trait, we have selected #11 as being the defining one that is necessarily present by virtue of its being the kind of cultural trait that it is. In order to better understand trait 1 both in its own right and as exemplar of its type, we will compare it with its equivalent in culture II. Because only trait 3 possesses feature 11, it is judged to be trait 1's cross-cultural equivalent (operationalization of this step can be extremely delicate: cf. Armer 1973). Comparison of all features of this pair leads to the initial conclusion that the class to which traits 1 and 3 belong, which is defined by the presence of feature 11, also shares features 3, 5, 16, as well as the absence of features 9, 12, 13, and 15.

Our understanding of this category, however, will be improved immeasurably if we know which features characterize this pair uniquely. We therefore eliminate all features from the first result set that are shared with either traits 2 or 4. This step leaves us with only one *nondefinitional* feature as unique to the pair: the absence of feature 9.

But suppose, again for whatever reason, we had defined trait 1 differently. Had we selected #7 as the defining feature, and then followed the procedure described above, our result would have been different. The equivalent trait in culture II would have been #4, not #3, and the final result would have been the absence of feature 10.[3] The result alters with the initial trait definition.

From the purely abstract, we may now move to a sociological example. I. M. Lewis (1989:23) poses the question, "Is possession an entirely arbitrary and idiosyncratic affair; or are particular social categories of person more or less likely to be possessed? If so, and possession can be shown to run in particular social grooves, what follows from this? Why do people in certain social positions succumb to possession more readily than others?" To answer these questions, he ranges widely over the literature reporting the world's instances of spirit possession, seeking for recurrent patterns that will serve as the explanation he needs. In our terms, he compares like with like, and abstracts similarities. Lewis finds, for instance, that possession occurs most frequently among the jurally impotent and the socioeconomically disenfranchised, that "the special endowment of mystical power is given to the weak" (1989:104).

For this relationship to gain in explanatory power, further comparisons would be necessary to show that other, independent variables are not also characterized by being predominantly among the same population. He must, in other words, compare his likes with unlikes, to verify that the similarities abstracted from the former do not also characterize the latter. Perhaps disenfranchisement also describes persons who participate in a particular political party, and these peripheral persons do *not* participate in spirit cults. In this scenario some other variable is necessary to explain why these disenfranchised persons turned to possession cults, while other, equally disenfranchised persons opted for a more political solution. We would also wish to exclude the possibility that the jurally disenfranchised characterize all or most of the religiously committed individuals in the society, rendering their participation in the possession cults derivative of this more general trend. Unless these and other possibilities are eliminated, we are left with a simple correlation instead of the intended causal relationship put forth as unique to these social facts. Instead of *explaining* possession as occurring *because* of jural impotence and disenfranchisement, the actors of possession have been *described* as being of a certain sort, but not necessarily of a unique or distinctive sort. Lewis's model is further critiqued in Donovan (2000).

The outcome of this, and every comparative enterprise, is obviously contingent upon which phenomena are admitted into the focal category. This determines first what similarities are found *within* the group and restricts the possibilities of differences to be found *between* groups. Evans-Pritchard (1963:10) agrees: "the classification which necessarily precedes

comparison depends on which criteria are selected. Were different criteria to be selected, different conclusions would be reached." Let's look again at the case of spirit mediumship.

Lewis's results are derived from the comparison of instances that fall within the category of "spirit possession." He operates with the distinction "between trance (as a state of altered consciousness) and possession (as a culturally specific theory of trance and illness)" (1989:9). Thus trance is an etic category, discernible by external factors, while possession is emic, and persons, "whether or not [they] are actually in trance, ... are only 'possessed' when they consider they are, and when other members of their society endorse this claim or indeed initiate it" (57). The two may be overlapping categories, but they are not necessarily so.

Alternatively, Rouget (1985:7) discerns between trance and possession by the induction technique: trance is restricted "solely to those [states] that are obtained by means of noise, agitation, and in the presence of others," and contrasts principally with ecstasy. Here possession is a subtype of trance (cf. Firth 1959:141), contrasted with shamanism, and is distinctive by virtue of the type of relationship exhibited between man and spirit. Lewis does not think much of Rouget's typology, but our point is merely this: would a cross-cultural review based on Rouget's definitions yield the same results as did Lewis's?

And how are we to deal with Glock and Stark's (1965) restriction of possession to alleged diabolical agency, contrasted with "revelational" experiences, which are attributed to the divine? Given the Judeo-Christian chauvinism of this typology (by this standard, Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda mediums are not "possessed"), it seems unlikely that Lewis could have used it for his worldwide review without drastic, and stultifying, consequences.

Problems arose even when we had complete control over our idealized data. Difficulties accrue exponentially when we turn to the real world, where cultures are composed of more than two traits, and where traits are never exhaustively characterized in terms of their features. A good definition can help immeasurably to cut a path through this thicket, assuring that like can be appropriately compared with like and unlike, with everyone agreeing upon the categories.

A second argument for the need for definitional clarity would be the more practical consideration of *field identification*. Some would contest the desirability of a universal definition for anything at all. Melford Spiro (1987:188), rather than believing that the comparative method requires a consistently applied definition of phenomenon, advocates the opposite.

This insistence on universality in the interests of a comparative social science is, in my opinion, an obstacle to the comparative method for it leads to continuous changes in definition and, ultimately, to definitions which, because of their vague-

ness or abstractness, are all but useless. And of course they commit the fallacy of assuming that certain institutions must, in fact, be universal, rather than recognizing that universality is a creation of definition.

I, at least, find unclear what Spiro would propose as a more suitable goal. Perhaps in the back of his mind he is making a distinction recorded by Platvoet (1990:181):

definitions of "religion"...seem to have been constructed for mainly two purposes: (1) to define what religion "is" where—and whenever it is found; (2) to define what religion is taken to be in societies that are being studied for the purpose of provisionally delimiting "religion" as an object of study.

Eschewing the first, Spiro would seem to advocate a kind of cultural relativity when it comes to religion: religion is whatever your informants call religion. Worse, it can frequently be whatever the anthropologist calls religion. Ethnographers often tell us everything about a culture's religion *except* why they believe what they are describing is a "religion." As Horton (1960:201) observes, "the reader is simply asked to accept as 'religious' any phenomena which the author happens to select for treatment under this heading."

While fieldworkers must ever be sympathetic to what they are told by informants, they cannot accept everything wholly uncritically. In this case, it simply would not work to let informants label religion. While in the Rio, I became very concerned with being able to estimate how many adherents there might be to the sundry Afro-Brazilian cults. Despite frequent lamentations in the literature, the decennial census data are the best to be had. Wondering about the accuracy of these numbers, I routinely asked people how they planned to respond to the question *"Qual é sua religião"* on the upcoming census.

I expected individuals who stayed on the periphery of these cults not to label themselves as being adherents, and I was not disappointed. What was a surprise, however, was the response I commonly got from the *heads* of these houses. Half of the leaders of Candomblé houses with whom I spoke fully intended to list themselves as Catholics on the 1990 Census. Among the justifications for this response was always offered the feeling that somehow Candomblé was *not* a "real" religion. Catholicism, now *that's* a religion (although this is not necessarily a compliment; viz. Roberto's *"Religião é comercio"*). By contrast, one mãe-de-santo contrasted the Catholic *religião* with the Candomblé *seita* (literally, "sect").

In any event, had I been dependent upon informants whether to consider Candomblé a religion, I would have not been able to reach any decision, being split down the middle as they were. Yet it has always been treated as a religion in the anthropological literature, and not without

cause. Whereas Spiro, based on this informant response, would have us remove Candomblé from the list of Brazilian religions, the more appropriate response, I think, is to ask why Brazilian Candombleiros are so reticent to acknowledge publicly their religion as on par with Catholicism.[4] A cultural relativity standard should alert us to be open to novel religious forms, but ultimately whether something is denominated a "religion" must be decided independently of whether informants happen to recognize it as such.[5]

A good definition to identify field phenomena will, of course, also heighten the uniformity of the resulting set used in analyses. The arguments for a universal definition, in other words, are not independent. Instead, it can be seen that every stage of the research process presents its own justifications for a good definition.

Our advice, then, is that writers should explicitly define how they are using all terms, even when they feel the meanings are obvious. This may initially make matters worse, as we will see how much incongruity is actually beneath our discipline's facade of mutual intelligibility. But through this confusion lies the only road to terminological consistency and the real goal of valid comparison.

DEFINING RELIGION: PROSPECTS

Without a useful definition, anthropology cannot collocate phenomena for comparison and study. Given this need, we might suppose that anthropologists would allow at least the *desirability* of uniformly defining religion, despite the problems associated with deciding just what form that definition should take. A fractious bunch, we cannot concede even this much.

Asad (1983:252) and Dittes (1968:417) are especially pessimistic. If for the former, "Universal definitions of religion hinder...investigations," the latter argues, "Definitions and descriptions which attempt to embrace in a single statement the religions of diverse cultures invariably seem to lose the critical significant characteristics of any one." Dittes has misunderstood the purpose of definition, believing as did Bosanquet (1979[1920]:27) that "to restrict and define" is "to omit and to diminish." But a definition is not intended to be a complete description of any specific instance, but rather of the generic qualities of the class to which the instance belongs. It might omit, but this is not necessarily to diminish.

Alston (1967) suggests that the way around the limitations of the "single statement" definition type is a list of nine "religion-making characteristics":

If it is true that the religion-making characteristics neither singly nor in combination constitute tight necessary and sufficient conditions for something being a religion, and yet that each of them contributes to making something a religion, then it

must be that they are related in some looser way to the application of the term. Perhaps the best way to put it is this. When enough of these characteristics are present to a sufficient degree, we have a religion.[6]

Southwold (1978) proposes a similar checklist approach using twelve initial attributes. He writes, "The word 'religion' designates cultural systems which have at least some of these attributes" (371).

Southwold's treatment is less sophisticated than Alston's, the latter recognizing problems not admitted by the first. For instance, unless some minimal number of list items is specified as being required, then both lists can be used to characterize *any* cultural system. Southwold's attribute 4 ("Ritual practices") describes much more than religion, but he does not require that more than one attribute be present to characterize religion. Even should we add another attribute, say, number 10 ("A priesthood, or similar specialist...elite"), we have still not distinguished religion.[7] Alston (1967:142), however, recognizes the desirability of being more precise:

If we tried to say something like "for a religion to exist, there must be the first two [religion-making characteristics] plus any three others," or "for a religion to exist, any four of these characteristics must be present," we would be introducing a degree of precision not to be found in the concept of religion actually in use.

Alston proposes a solution unrecognized by Southwold. Southwold is only able to conceive of definitions as being of two types, Nominal and Real. The Real definition, which he defines as "A precise statement of the essential nature of a thing," is unobtainable in the case of religion, hence definition "ought not to be attempted" (1978:370).

There is, however, another type of definition beyond the Aristotelian necessary and sufficient conditions. Most categories of human thought are instead radial, defined by Lakoff (1987:5) as a conceptual structure "where there is a central case [prototype] and conventionalized variations on it which cannot be predicted by general rules." By this model, definitions can be used to characterize the central or prototypical case. Deviations from the prototypical are then viewed as being part of the overall category, but as being less good representatives of it. In a common example, a penguin is clearly a bird, although less of one conceptually than the prototypical robin. The failure to accord all instances of religion definitional parity is not grounds to eschew definitions, but rather a reason to forego insistence upon artificial Aristotelian categories.

Alston leans in this direction. Referring to Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "family-resemblances," he offers Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism, and Orphism as "ideally clear paradigm cases of religion." He contends:

As more of the religion-making characteristics drop out, either partially or completely, we feel less secure about applying the term "religion," and there will be

less unanimity in the language community with respect to the application of the term. However, there do not seem to be points along these various dimensions of deviations that serve as a sharp demarcation of religion from not-religion. It is simply that we encounter less and less obvious cases of religion as we move from, for example, Roman Catholicism through Unitarianism, humanism, and Hinayana Buddhism to communism. (1967:142)

One might conclude then, that while not all anthropologists agree that a useful and universally applicable definition is desirable, most of their objections are based on a limited view as to the structure of intellectual categories. While identification of unequivocal instances of religion, and operationalizing a continuum of increasing distance from these prototypes remain problematic, there is nothing logically precluding their successful resolutions.

DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION: FOURFOLD TYPOLOGY

Earlier attempts to bring order to the definitional chaos surrounding religion have generated a number of typologies. For instance, Leuba (1912:24–25), citing Wundt, offers a three-part classification:

In the first group, a specific intellectual function or purpose is chosen as the essence of the distinguishing mark of religion; in the second, specific feelings, sentiments, or emotions are singled out as the religious differentiae; in the third, the will—this term being used in its wider meaning, to include desire, cravings, and impulses—is given the place occupied by the intellect or the feelings in the other groups.

Clark (1958) reports that an unsystematic survey of the members of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion yielded definitions that fell into six broad groups (plus one "indeterminate" category): (1) Concepts of the supernatural, spiritual or non-material; (2) Concepts regarding ultimates or the ultimate; (3) Definitions involving group concepts; (4) Ideas concerning the institutional and creedal; (5) Ideas emphasizing theology; and (6) Ideas of interaction between the inner and outer aspects of life.

More typically, social scientists have found simple dichotomies to be useful. Goody (1961), for instance, contrasts "exclusive" and "inclusive" definitions of religion, typified by Tylor and Durkheim, respectively. Berger (1974:126) distills the predominant approaches into the "*substantively* defined, in terms of the meaning contents of the phenomenon [and the] *functionally* defined, in terms of its place in the social and/or psychological system."

Such bipartite schemes can be read as distinguishing between objective and abstract criteria. Objective criteria, such as the presence of supernaturalisms, are those that are observable in the real world. Abstract criteria, by contrast, reside not in the real world but in the minds of the analyzers

who use real world observables to infer the presence or operation of unobservables.

Definitions in this essay preserve this bifurcation, but I find it useful to make further distinctions within each of the two groups. Objective definitions are comprised of either (1) content or (2) behavioral (performative) criteria. Here, the anthropologist seeks to identify religion by what people say or do. The two kinds of abstract definitions are (3) mental and (4) functional, and are identified respectively by the person's emotional or psychological responses (i.e., what it does to you), or by the needs fulfilled by it (what it does for you).

These categories are not mutually exclusive: "The use of abstract or concrete categories cannot be an either/or proposition. Actually the co-existence of these two approaches serves as a check upon the abuses to which each is susceptible" (Sjoberg 1955:111). Many definitions of religion, especially the more elaborate ones, could be placed in more than one class; Durkheim is particularly problematic. This multivocality of religion contributes the problem of consistency: "Since a single social scientist may include several ideas in his definition of religion, we may suspect that there is a temptation to use it in one sense at one time and in a different sense at another" (Clark 1958:146). Despite the potential pitfalls, this undeniable polysemousness will have to be accounted for within the resolution of our problem.

Content Definitions

Content definitions seek to identify religion based upon the presence of specific symbols. Almost exclusively the symbols reference supernaturals of some sort. The classic instance of this type is offered by Tylor (1979 [1873]:10): "It seems best...to claim, as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in Spiritual Beings."[8] This influential position has been seconded unambiguously by Max Muller ("the Infinite," quoted by Durkheim 1975[1899]:76), as well as by more modern proponents of this criterion such as Anthony Wallace ("It is the premise of every religion...that souls, supernatural beings, and supernatural forces exist," quoted by W. Goodenough 1974:166), and Raymond Firth (1959:131, "Religion may be defined as a concern of man in society with basic human ends and standards of value, seen in relation to non-human entities of powers").

Although Durkheim will be discussed extensively in the next section, his influential distinction between the sacred and the profane is introduced here:

All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of

which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred*. (1965[1915]:52)

Two readings of the *sacred* are possible, and differ by whether "sacred" is assigned a content and functions semantically as a synonym for "supernatural." This interpretation Durkheim himself would reject, but, as we shall see, it is a possibility that is in fact a logical implication of his own discussion. Thus Paden (1988:11) can state:

What characterizes religious behavior is that it takes place with reference to things that are *sacred*. If the old defining referent of religion was "God" (and most Western dictionaries still define religion as the worship of a supreme being), the more modern, cross-cultural term is *the sacred*...The sacred can...have any content, though to the adherent it is always something of extraordinary power and reality.

At a certain level, Paden offers "sacred" as a neutral alternative to "God," and in any event what is sacred still seems to be necessarily some *thing* despite the admitted freedom to assume a wide variety of forms.

By a second reading, however, "sacred" belongs not in a content category, but in an emotional one. According to Marvin Harris's (1968:478) interpretation of Durkheim,

all the basic concepts associated with religion...originate in the recurrent experience by which human beings feel the force and majesty of the social group. Men collectively invent the basic categories of religion in order to explain the unseen but felt force of the collective consciousness.

Here, the "sacred" is identified by its psychological impact, not by its content, and becomes synonymous with Otto's "numinous," to be discussed below.

We may simply note, therefore, that *sacred* is itself a problematic concept and, therefore, one that can shed little light upon the meaning of *religion*. In any event, the sacred/profane distinction that Durkheim suggests to uniquely characterize religion necessarily fails because, as both Goody (1961, considering the Azande and the LoDagaa) and Southwold (1978, discussing Buddhism) conclude, this bifurcation of reality is not a cultural universal, and when applied inappropriately leads to many classification decisions that go against common sense.

When ascertaining the appeal of a content definition, we should keep in mind what a *useful* definition should provide. According to Weigert (1974:181),

there are two generally accepted criteria for a successful concept: 1. at the level of theory, it should contain logical characteristics which distinguish it from other concepts;

2. at the level of observables, it should be operationalized in such a way as to allow phenomena to be named and classified in an orderly and unambiguous manner.

What this means is, first, that religion should be defined in some way that distinguishes it from other categories at the same level within the intellectual hierarchy. Thus, so long as we wish to continue talking about religious, political, and economic institutions, which Da Matta (1991 [1979]:67) judges to "be complementary, but [that] they do not coincide," these should all be defined in such a way as to be distinguishable one from the other. Second, the criteria we settle upon to make our theoretical distinctions should be reliably, and preferably readily, discernible in the field. Little would be gained if religion were defined by some set of attributes that all agreed "captured" the phenomena but that eluded ready or even possible identification in the real world. In this category would be efforts in American constitutional law to limit the scope of "religion" for Free Exercise purposes to that which carries "extratemporal consequences" (Choper 1995). How are we to ascertain what acts carry such consequences in the (supposed) afterlife? At best, we can only list those that are *feared* to carry these consequences.

By Weigert's standard, content definitions are without peer. Indeed, Spiro (1987:191) warns that without them, all sociocultural phenomena would blur together into an indistinguishable smear. These definitions are characterized by the necessary presence of iconic representations, linguistic tokens, or class of objects: religion is defined *by what it talks about* or otherwise refers to, and this information is relatively easy to come by. Moreover, the claim that "notions about the sacred and about spiritual beings" (Morris 1987:1) are universal dovetails neatly with the acknowledged universality of religion itself. Given such credentials, the content definition seems to be the default value for most people; unless they have consciously articulated an alternative type, they implicitly begin with a content definition of supernaturalism.

Some social scientists have gravitated toward content definitions because they are dissatisfied with the alternatives (e.g., Berger 1974), or because of the necessary implications of their larger theoretical contexts (e.g., Spiro 1987; see below). Rodney Stark, however, offers the best defense of content definitions on their own merits.

In an earlier work Stark advocated a scheme whereby religions were viewed as one of two types of value orientations, defined as those "overarching and sacred systems of symbols, beliefs, values, and practices concerning ultimate meaning which men shape to interpret their world" (Glock and Stark 1965:9). These systems come in two general types, or "perspective realms":

In one realm, all value orientations include some statement affirming the existence of a supernatural being, world, or force, and predicate their ultimate solutions on

this assumption. We shall call these *religious perspectives*. Value orientations in the second realm do not posit a supernatural, but limit their statements about ultimate meaning to the material world, although often to past or future versions of it. We may refer to this second type as *humanist perspectives*. (10–11)

Labeling only one perspective "religion" beneath the higher-order category "value orientations" reminds us of Southwold's (1978:367) "super-class, called say 'religion-plus,'... [which] may well seem a scientifically more valuable category than that of religion simply. We should have preserved the purity of our conception of religion at the expense of demoting it in the conceptual hierarchy."

Many social scientists would recognize Stark's distinctions, although they might refer to both perspectives as being religions, with the distinction being between the supernatural and the secular. In later works, however, Stark (1981; Stark and Bainbridge 1985) expressly argues against this reading, stressing that his scheme is better because it is theoretically productive. The religious and humanist perspectives are not merely variant forms of value orientations; rather, the former is hierarchically superior to the latter.

Introducing new terminology, Stark defines religions as "systems of general compensators based on supernatural assumptions" (1981:162). By compensator, Stark is referring to the substitutes "for rewards that are unavailable to many, and for those not directly available to anyone.... [Humans] will often exchange rewards of considerable value over a long period of time in return for compensators, in the hope that a reward of immense value will eventually be forthcoming in return" (160–61). Stark argues that while not all compensator systems need be supernatural, or religious, those that are not are demonstrably inferior. Failure to make this distinction by refusing to restrict religion to supernaturalisms, Stark suggests, blinds one to many patterns of involvement with value orientations. Hence his adamant assertion that "a religion lacking supernatural assumptions is no religion at all" (159).

Stark holds that "to the extent a religious organization 'demythologizes' and moves toward naturalism, it will fail to kindle the levels of commitment obtained during a more supernaturally-oriented period" (164). He further observes, "People tend not to remain in secularity and, more important, secularity travels poorly down the family tree" (168). Ultimately, "the attempt to create religions without gods results in religions which are inherently lacking in appeal" (170), so that movements that were originally humanist/secular sought to increase their popularity and increase their followers commitment, experienced "a movement toward mysticism" (172). He cites the progressions experienced by Jungianism and *est*, to which we could add Scientology, and notes that "What can be read on the walls of Seattle is the transformation of militant lesbians, filled with dark talk of arms and ammunition and boundless hopes of triumph

into a coven of witches" (172). Stark concludes that the "truly priceless compensators can come only from the gods. Therefore wholly naturalistic systems of thought lack the capacity to fulfill the primary functions of religions. Therefore they are not religions" (175).

If content religions are to be criticized, Stark at least allows the criticism to occur on meaningful ground. Most can agree with his major points, especially his assertion that not all systems of thoughts are equally adept at fulfilling the "functions of religions." If they were, the phenomena of religious conversion and religious evolution would be inexplicable.

But by venturing along this line of thinking, Stark has left far behind his original conception of religion. Within his reformulation, if real religion is effective religion, then supernaturalisms are less important than *belief* in supernaturalisms, because it is one's willingness to accept the compensators that renders the benefit. Supernaturalisms are not better because they are supernatural, but because their being supernatural contributes to their being more believable and acceptable as compensators for postponed rewards because they are less falsifiable.

The assumption seems to be that, as *Homo economicus*, man naturally senses the market value of everything, and behaves rationally according to that information. Yet as soon as belief becomes the relevant dimension, then this chain of reasoning, by which Stark concludes that naturalistic compensators are inherently more limited in their appeal, is inappropriate, because believing is *not* a wholly reasonable, much less logical, process. People do, indeed often act against what is in their own best interests when viewed dispassionately.

Most of the phenomena that Stark cites can be accounted for on a continuum of religious efficacy independent of form. It was for this reason that Allport, for instance, found it profitable to explore the intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientations (cf. Allport and Ross 1967; Batson and Ventis 1982). Stark's defense of the definition of religion as necessarily supernaturalistic fails not because it is wrong, but because it is superfluous to his more substantial and valuable suggestions; in the context of advocating a content definition, he speaks in terms of functions and beliefs. This suggests the inadequacy of his initial assertion.

The weakness of this definitional strategy magnifies when considering more closely the group of phenomena that the definition captures within its net. Ideally, it should capture everything that is religion, and nothing that is not. Strictly applied, supernatural definitions fail on both counts.

Armer (1973:62–63) warns that "sampling based on identical (i.e., absolute) criteria may result in (1) quite inequivalent samples in some societies or (2) no sample at all in societies lacking populations that meet the particular criteria." This is the context in which the problem of Buddhism arises. If religion is defined by the presence of supernaturalism, then Buddhism is not a religion, even though most, if not all students of

religion wish to include it within the category. This exclusion is unacceptable, and some unconvincing attempts have been made to show that Buddhism does have supernatural elements (Southwold [1978] reviews this debate). Durkheim (1975[1899]), however, uses this case to demonstrate the inadequacy of theistic definitions, a conclusion with which Southwold (1978) agrees.

Besides excluding instances we wish to include, a supernatural definition includes items we wish omitted. Superstitions and folktales, for instance, are replete with supernatural references, yet few researchers would consider them religious phenomena. "In using a symbol-carrier, say an oath, people do not necessarily use the symbol. Yet how often in speaking of a primitive religion do we not make inferential statements about symbolic behaviour because we see some people carrying or handling objects which others have stated are symbolic" (Firth 1959:140). Because inclusion of these undesirable elements within ethnographies rarely occurs, we are obviously witnessing selective omission. The adherent of the content definition has failed to apply the definition strictly. This means that the fieldworker is necessarily preselecting his data to conform with his expectations, and not with his definition, a slipshod methodology indeed.

We can summarize this discussion by stating that the preponderance of supernatural definitions demonstrates that they refer to a significant core of what we know to be "religion." A content definition highlighting supernaturalisms would be the best kind of definition *if* it collocated phenomena as we demand. Instead, we are presented with a theoretically meaningless hodgepodge of cultural bits: "The serious objection to theistic definitions and conceptions of religion is not that they fail to be universal but rather that they are too superficial" (Southwold 1978:367). Given this flaw, the options are either to ignore it, and compensate via ad hoc, extradefinitional judgments, or to recast our definition in other terms.

Behavioral/Performative Definitions

A second type of definition specifying objective criteria is the behavioral/performative. Such definitions attempt to identify religion by what people do, that is, through actions that we usually term *ritual*. Whatever else is entailed by religion, behaviors are its most salient features. Anthropologists are, if nothing else, observers, and what we observe are behaviors. Anthropologists, therefore, are particularly prone to distill "religion" down to "ritual" (cf. Douglas 1984[1966]:65).

Examples of this type of definition are Kishimoto (1961:240), who holds that "religion is an aspect of culture centered upon activities which are taken by those who participate in them to elucidate the ultimate meaning of life," and Gans (1990:120), who asserts that "Religion can most simply

be defined as the activity that commemorates human origin." Others include Horton ("in every situation commonly labeled religious we are dealing with action"; 1960:), Paden ("religion is something people *do*"; 1988:10), and Worsley ("religion is a cluster of beliefs which are *used*"; 1969:229).

Finally, although Morris (1987:69) claims that "Weber refused to define religion," one can at least see the direction in which Weber was headed: "The relationships of men to supernatural forces which take the forms of prayer, sacrifice and worship may be termed 'cult' and 'religion,' as distinguished from 'sorcery,' which is magical coercion" (Weber 1963[1922]:28).

Durkheim's multifaceted approach to religion also emphasized the behavioral dimension of religion. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965[1915]), he offers the oft-cited conclusion that "In all history, we do not find a single religion without a Church," "Church" having been defined previously as "common practices" (59).

Searching for a usable definition of religion, Durkheim wants to rely on external behavior. He notes: "There is a category of religious facts which is commonly accepted as being especially characteristic of religion and which as a result ought to give us what we are looking for [a definition], namely ritual" (1975[1899]:87–88). Unfortunately, as he also notes, ritual, even if it is typical of religion, does not characterize *only* religion: "There are no social practices…which do not have the same characteristic.… . If we have been unable to make it the prime element of our definition, it is because, considered by itself and in its intrinsic characteristics, it is indistinct from morality and law" (88, 91).

Looking for something distinctive about religious rituals, Durkheim is drawn toward their compulsory nature. While morality and law compel obligatory *practices*, religious ritual demands obligatory *beliefs* or *"représentations."* Thus, "phenomena held to be religious consist in obligatory beliefs, connected with clearly defined practices which are related to given objects of those beliefs [the sacred things discussed in the previous section]" (93).

Durkheim's approach is flawed in two ways. First, in an effort to be thorough he takes with one hand what he has given with the other. He concedes that not all religious phenomena are of the character he has specified: "If one does not want to be open to grave misunderstanding, it is necessary to be aware of confusing a free, private, optional religion, fashioned according to one's own needs and understanding, with a religion handed down by tradition, formulated for a whole group and which it is obligatory to practise" (96). Second, while he seeks to minimize individualistic religion when compared to his socially cohesive and obligatory religion, he does not back away from naming the former a "religion." Indeed, having warned that it can be only a "secondary consideration," he amends his definition: "In addition, the optional beliefs and practices which con-

cern similar objects or objects assimilated into the previous ones, will also be called religious phenomena" (98).

Durkheim concludes that religion consists of those beliefs and practices, both optional and obligatory, which are directed toward sacred objects. In other words, *any* belief, and *any* practice, so long as it is directed toward the sacred, is said to be religious. By overspecification, Durkheim's defining criteria cancel themselves out. We are left with an ambiguous and unintended emphasis upon the *object* of religion. As a consequence, one gets the many readings of "sacred" discussed previously, and something that looks very much like a content definition.

Even if this were not the case, many anthropologists would object to Durkheim's characterization of individual religion as secondary and comparatively inconsequential. Other researchers would want to reverse this priority:

Bodin as both religious virtuoso and diplomat conveys a clear sense that religion exists in two "guises," inner or personal and outward, and that the authentic core and essential definition relates to the former, relying on a definition, often repeated, from Philo of Alexander: "Religion is nothing other than the turning of a purified soul to the true God." This suggests that where civil and compulsory forms of religion differ from one's inner conviction, one may conform, regarding as religiously indifferent any governmental requirements. (Preus 1987:6–7)

Another flaw of Durkheim's definition is that, like Stark, he unintentionally changes focus. He states initially that "only the exterior and apparent form of religious phenomena is immediately accessible to observation; [and that] it is to this therefore that we must apply ourselves" (1975[1899]:87). Applying this method, he examines ritual, isolates "obligatoriness" as a defining attribute, and with this constructs his definition. But the quality of being obligatory is *not* "external and apparent," nor is it "immediately accessible to observation."

As Southwold (1978:366) points out, "One can never infer a man's beliefs from his behaviour alone: for any course of behaviour is consistent with more than one possible set of beliefs." These methodological problems are further articulated by Sjoberg (1955:113):

There is particular need for standardizing and objectifying the procedures by which imputations are made concerning the "subjective" aspects of human experience, data which are not directly observable. Just how to standardize the imputation of meanings to human action is a pressing issue in all the socio-cultural sciences. When a person enters a place of "worship," just what "meaning" is to be attached to his action? One can observe and record the act easily enough, but imputing meanings to it is another matter.

Durkheim seems to suggest that participation is equivalent to belief. He leaves no room for the agnostic or atheist, as practice definitionally means belief; and if the practices are obligatory, then everyone is by definition a staunch believer. (Mary Douglas [1984(1966):21] notes still further inconsistencies within Durkheim's definition of religion.)

The preceding discussion is a reminder that ritual is a lower order concept than is religion, and not a synonym. Failure to accord each of these categories their respective statuses can result in some grating lapses where anthropologists talk about religion, having studied only ritual. Rosaldo (1989:12–13), when dealing with the topic of death, observes how the emphasis on ritual can effectively skew a sense of understanding of the higher class of phenomena. The moral here is to call things what they are. To speak of "religion" when one has studied only ritual is misleading, and vice versa.

The original objection to using behavior (ritual) as the sole defining criterion for religion thus remains: most—if not all—social interaction would be captured in this net. Equally serious, however, is the charge that behavioral definitions fail to be self-sustaining. As Durkheim's attempt illustrates, one begins talking about behavior, and ends talking about beliefs and other mental constructs. Definitions of religion based upon behaviors are logically inconsistent and conceptually useless. To the extent that there exists a religion/behavior relationship, one may suspect that religions *motivate* behavior, but that any direct, one-to-one relationship cannot be substantiated.

Mental Definitions

Abstract definitions follow a different tack. Rather than appealing to one's senses, as in the objective strategy, the definitional criteria here are not directly observable. Empirical indicators are held to be important only to the extent to which they signify the operation of unobservable variables and processes. The first of two categories within this class are mental definitions, to be discussed here; the second, functional type will be discussed in the next section.

Although encompassing a wide variety of dimensions, mental definitions have in common the assumption that what makes religion "religion" goes on in the head. What that "something" might be, of course, varies. To some, religion is an emotion; to others, it is a belief, to yet others, it is an expression of psychodynamic processes.

Among those who regard religion as being foremost an emotion are Erich Fromm (1950: 92), who dissects the religious experience into wonder, concern, and an attitude of oneness, and William James (1916:31, 38), who, having at one point defined religion as an apprehended "relation to...the divine," goes on to clarify that what is divine is whatever "the

individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest." Lowie ("religious thrill," 1924), and Marrett ("awe," see Leuba 1912: 359) also belong in this category.

Epitomizing this approach is Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1950). Otto's attempt, as he states in his introduction to the first English edition, is "to analyse all the more exactly the *feeling* which remains where the *concept* fails" (1950:xxi). The concept of deity, Otto explains, is part rational and part irrational. The latter is usually emphasized because language is intended to convey rational meanings (i.e., ideas and concepts), hence "expositions of religious truth in language inevitably tend to stress the 'rational' attributes of God" (2). The core of religion for Otto resides not in the rationalizations, but in the ineffable "holy," a holiness shorn of its intellectualized content. He intends to "invent a special term to stand for 'the holy' *minus* its moral factor or 'moment,' and...minus its 'rational' aspect altogether" (6).

It will be our endeavour to suggest this unnamed Something to the reader as far as we may, so that he may himself feel it. There is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it no religion would be worthy of the name.... I shall speak, then, of a unique 'numinous' state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. (6–7)

Despite his caveat that the numinous cannot be strictly defined, and his warning that any reader who is unable to intuitively identify within himself the "deeply-felt religious experience" to which he is referring should "read no farther" (8), Otto still manages to dedicate an entire book to the subject.

Enough has been said to characterize the types of definitions that belong here. The advantage of emotional definitions is that they aim to include as a marker of the phenomena the valuation with which it is held. Religion is important to its participants, and any theorizing that does not allow, much less account for this affective dimension has missed something vital. However, as early as 1912 Leuba had identified the flaw in this definitional strategy. "The truth of the matter is...each and every human emotion and sentiment may appear in religion, and that no affective experience as such is distinctive of religious life" (1912:37). There exists, in other words, no emotional experience that is evoked *only* in the religious context. The emotions proposed, then, must be argued to be present in greater or lesser degrees in religion than in other institutions, an approach that thus far has escaped reliable operationalization.

The second category under the heading of mental definitions is labeled "cognitive," and refers to those propositions in which one "believes," "has faith," or to which one is "committed." While many researchers imply the presence of beliefs, few writers formally advocate belief as a defining vari-

able of religion, although we might note that Tylor's classic minimal definition was phrased in these terms. Instead, this dimension becomes prominent in less structured contexts, as, for instance, when positivism is said to be a religion because it accepts some of its fundamental postulates (e.g., that the universe is rule-driven and that these rules are constant over both time and space) with a leap of faith not unlike that which characterizes belief in God. Thus Spiro (1987:103) can say that "the role of the 'will to believe' in the acceptance of scientific ideas is as prominent as the role that William James attributed to it in the acceptance of religious doctrines."

An example of how believing can be incorporated into the definition of religion comes from Thakur, who begins by proposing that "it would seem to be a necessary condition for a belief-system to be religious that some at least of its propositions be metaphysical" (1981:25). He continues by characterizing belief:

When a person commits himself to a religion, he accepts that the metaphysical entities, etc. postulated by the relevant system do actually exist. He does not, for example, consider them merely logically possible or philosophically plausible. He *assumes* the truth of the metaphysical propositions asserted or implied by the religion in question, as indeed of certain other propositions. For the believer, that is, they are not tentative hypotheses, awaiting verification or falsification by events, or even philosophical examination by rational criteria.[9] (29)

Because Thakur links belief-commitment to action-commitments (as does Spiro, who claims that "beliefs...not only guide, but they also serve to *instigate* action" [1987:164]), we might stress that, technically speaking, he uses "belief" in a sense that perhaps should be reserved for "faith" (Donovan 1991).

While it is unclear why the state of believing has not been exploited more often, we can point out that there are indeed serious obstacles to its utility to identify a unique culture set. If believing or having faith is to be unique to religion, then other sets formally defined by the social sciences must exclude this variable. The possibilities of this, however, are slim.

In 1931, Kurt Godel "showed that [Whitehead and Russell's] *Principia*, or any other system within which arithmetic can be developed, is *essentially incomplete*. In other words, given *any* consistent set of arithmetical axioms, there are true arithmetical statements that cannot be derived from the set" (Nagel and Newman 1958:58–59). Thus, some part of even the most precisely deductive system must be taken on faith.

This conclusion applies to any *formal* system. But, as Heijenoort (1967:356) notes, "all sciences other than mathematics are so remote from a complete formalization that [Godel's] conclusion remains of little consequence outside mathematics." Still, because complete formalization is the

ideal state toward which all sciences aspire, the implication is that all such systems have a belief component.

Nevertheless few would regard mathematics as a religion because it has inherently unprovable assumptions taken utterly on faith. Thus any attempt to divvy up cultural reality into parts that necessarily include beliefs, and parts that do not, will fail to the extent that both the reality being divided and the act of dividing partake of belief-grounded systems: everything is religious. However important believing is to religion (e.g., E. Goodenough 1986:3), believing is not ipso facto religious. Again, Leuba (1912:34–35) provides a pithy summary:

A belief or a feeling can at best constitute a prominent or a dominant component of the total religious experience; but prominence or dominance is not synonymous with "essence" or with "vital element." The error of the definitions we have considered consists in identifying with religion itself mere aspects of religious life.

The most that can be ventured is that, if beliefs are organized hierarchically, religious beliefs are those at the top. I should make clear that being "at the top" does not refer to having content on the broadest (e.g., "cosmic" or "ultimate") level. Rather, it refers to the priority that it carries, and influence that it exerts, over the wider belief structure. Assuming that all beliefs lower than belief X in the hierarchy cannot overtly contradict X (a gross assumption, admittedly, and overlooking the fact of cognitive dissonance), then "religion" is that belief that, by being at the top of the hierarchy, forces compliance on every lower belief. This view is perhaps one way of dealing with the concept of *commitment*, which crops up during attempts to characterize religion.

Resistance to this approach is logical, philosophical, and disciplinary. Anthropologists are not usually trained to map the cognitive structures of their informants, this being traditionally the domain of psychologists. Participant observation is a behavior-oriented method, and "We cannot logically define religion in terms of belief and go on to treat it in terms of behavior" (W. Goodenough 1974:166). To define religion as the apex of a person's belief hierarchy might well define religion out of anthropology altogether.

The third and final type of mental definition shares with the first two an emphasis upon what is going on in the minds of informants. It differs, however, by attributing the emotions and beliefs explicitly to underlying psychodynamics. Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (1961a[1927]:30) is, of course, the archetype of this approach:

[Religious ideas], which are given out as teachings, are not precipitates of experience or end-results of thinking: they are illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in

the strength of those wishes. As we already know, the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection—for protection through love—which was provided by the father; and the recognition that this helplessness lasts throughout life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one. Thus the benevolent rule of a divine Providence allays our fear of the dangers of life.

Freud concludes this essay with his famous statement that "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity" (43).

Among anthropologists, Melford Spiro has conducted an impressive body of research that falls within this category. From one perspective, Spiro is a classic representative of the content strategy of definition:

By "religious belief" I will mean any belief that, directly or indirectly, relates to beings who possess greater power than human beings and animals, with whom human beings sustain asymmetrical relationships (interactions and transactions), and who affect human lives for good or for ill. In short, "religious" beliefs comprise that subset of beliefs which, directly or indirectly, are concerned with 'superhuman' beings. (1987:163)

Religion for Spiro is defined as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (197). Spiro credits his emphasis upon the superhuman[10] dimension to the legitimate respect that must be paid to "the criterion of intracultural intuitivity; at the least, [the definition] should not be counter-intuitive" (192).

It is unclear, however, whether Spiro's definition passes his own test. According to Herbrechtsmeier (1993), the "superhuman" concept wrecks havoc within the belief system of Buddhism, emphasizing the wrong thing in Mahayana versions and relegating Theraveda schools out of religion altogether, both results going against the grain of "intracultural intuitivity." Even more perplexing is what this standard does to such Protestant theologians such as Paul Tillich.

While we would not want to say that Bultmann and Tillich were proponents of a nontheistic religion, their understanding of God was so sophisticated that to describe it as reverence for "superhuman beings"...would be the grossest of distortions. (Herbrechtsmeier 1993:9)

So Spiro's standard would force us either to miss the point of Tillich's work, or to categorize that work as nonreligious. Either result would, again, fail the test of "intracultural intuitivity."

Spiro did not arrive at his formulation unmotivated. The psychodynamic edifice that he constructs is possible *only* if religion is restricted to those culture sets that profess an active belief in superhumans, and this may have had something to do with his unique choice of terms.

In attempting to explain why "religious actors believe in the reality of the mythicoreligious world" (1987:183), Spiro first notes the benefits that can be rendered by participation in the system: "religion is the cultural system *par excellence* by means of which conflict-resolution is achieved," and serves as "a highly efficient culturally constituted defense mechanism" (159). Not just any system, however, will elicit the necessary emotional reaction from the participant, however. It must, as it were, strike a chord:

any cultural system is a vital force in society so long as there is a correspondence between the symbols in which cultural doctrines are represented and their representation as beliefs in the minds of social actors. When such a correspondence does not obtain, a cultural system may yet survive, but it survives as a fossil—as a set of clichés—rather than as a living force. (183)

For religion to be effective, a match must exist between the institution and some level of the psychology of the person; the benefits rendered by participation in the institution motivate the individual to seek out such a match (See Dahl 1975).

On the whole, we would not disagree with at least this much. But Spiro goes yet further. Drawing on Freud, he summarizes his theoretical position:

The theory, briefly, states that it is in the context of the family that the child experiences powerful beings, both benevolent and malevolent, who—by various means which are learned in the socialization process—can sometimes be induced to accede to his desires. These experiences provide the basic ingredients for his personal projection system which, if it corresponds (structurally, not substantively) to his taught beliefs, constitutes the cognitive and perceptual set for the acceptance of these beliefs. Having had personal experience with 'superhuman beings' and with the efficacy of 'ritual,' the taught beliefs reinforce, and are reinforced by, his own projective systems. (202)

Having been developmentally equipped with a symbolic vocabulary for superhuman persons, Spiro suggests that this is used to provide the necessary match between the person and the social institution via the latter's projection. We might also surmise that the match is not fortuitous, that the institutions assumed this form as a direct result of these projective systems. Thus, in some sense, the experience of being a helpless child "causes" religion, or at least religious form.

If the actors' mental representations of these benevolent and malevolent superhuman beings are merged with the reified and projected representations of their kindly and hateful parents of childhood, then, they are simultaneously, but *unconsciously*, gratifying their dependency and aggressive needs in regard to their childhood parents, their *culturally inappropriate* objects and targets. (182)

While Spiro concludes that "this function explains at least one of the unconscious motivational bases for the belief in the reality of the mythicoreligious world" (182), we can plausibly entertain the idea that he feels this is the primary "motivational base."[11] Religion is therefore explained (at least in part; Spiro's thesis covers much more ground than can be reviewed here) as being the culturally appropriate outlet for ambivalent emotions experienced toward one's parents during infancy and childhood.[12]

There is clearly much to be derived from such an approach. For example, it allows Spiro accurately to predict that "religious beliefs will vary systematically with differences in family (including socialization) systems" (203). But it is entirely possible that all those who rely on Freud for this point are overreaching themselves. According to Meissner (1984:60),

The weight of the argument supports no conclusion further than that religion often serves as a matrix within which the displaced fantasies of infantile residues find expression. It is another matter to say that such projections serve an originative function as well.

And if the psychodynamics identified by Freud, and taken up by Spiro, do not in fact generate religion, their utility as definitional criteria is dubious indeed, because it lessens the likelihood that they are *unique* to religion.

Finally, we must note that, had religion been defined in *any* other way than his unique emphasis upon superhumans, the necessary match between projective systems and religious beliefs could not obtain, and Spiro's explanatory structure would collapse. One can only reiterate the importance of definition in determining research outcomes. Although Spiro writes as though he were describing religion, he addresses only a special theistic subset of religion.

Functional Definitions

"The most significant and useful question concerning religion," claims Leuba (1912:42), "is not what are the essential and dominant components of religion, but what is its function in human life, and how is this function performed. The question of composition is subsidiary to these." Functional definitions often include terms that are similar to emotional or behavioral definitions. However, the present category stresses the fact that religion is a solution to a problem, that it fulfills some need that, if left unmet, would redound to the detriment of the organism, both individual and finally social. Religion from this perspective is identified by what it does for you.

As a class, functional definitions are "ipsative." As Weigert (1974:184) explains,

A functional ipsative definition is one in which the specificity, substantive content, and label for a social phenomenon are predicated on the basis of a function identified and categorized by the investigator. The investigator categorizes and labels a function, and the function "ipsatizes" the labeling of the phenomenon.... Thus, whatever specific substantive content the investigator locates as performing that function is religion.

Instances of functional definitions are Rubem Alves (1984:2), who speaks of the "necessity that life make sense," while Wundt refers to the "requirements of the human mind" (Leuba 1912:360). Both authors conclude that it is religion's role to meet these needs. A middle ground is taken by Spiro. On the one hand, he does posit functions of a sort for religion:

As I interpret the record, I would suggest that there are at least three sets of desires which are satisfied by religion and which—for lack of better terms—I shall call cognitive, substantive, and expressive. The corresponding functions of religion can be called adjustive, adaptive, and integrative. (1987:209)

He does not, however, believe that these functions are unique to religion as he has defined it (191, 218), a stance we expect because his explanatory structure will not allow functional equivalents that do not include reference to superhumans to qualify as "religion."

Spiro appreciates the earlier position taken by Nadel. While recognizing that religion "does" something, Nadel (1954) was reluctant to make this the defining quality of religion.

The use of the word 'competence,' rather than 'function,' appears to be deliberate, so as to avoid any implication that religion is some kind of inherent 'functional requisite,' fulfilling specifiable 'functions.' Instead, it can (or commonly does, or potentially may—i.e., is 'competent' to) do various things which may, however, be done by other 'competential alternatives,' to paraphrase Merton. By using the term 'competences,' Nadel avoids the assumption too often hidden in the word 'function' that religion is somehow *peculiarly* or *necessarily* fitted to fulfill these 'requirements' of sociation. (Worsley 1969:231)

Despite Dimock's (1928) optimistic appraisal of functional approaches to religion, therefore, some writers resist them.

"Religious faith," Malinowski (1948:89) postulates, "establishes, fixes, and enhances all valuable mental attitudes, such as reverence for tradition, harmony with environment, courage and confidence in the struggle with difficulties and at the prospect of death." These beliefs and rituals can be sustained even when they do not seem to render any obvious benefits.

Experimentation with lower animals has consistently indicated that unless a given act, or habit, is at least occasionally rewarded, it will eventually deteriorate and

disappear.... How, then, are we to explain the unremitting toil and steadfastness of purpose of those human beings who apparently eschew all [worldly] rewards and satisfactions?...It is known that for those animals high enough in the evolutionary scale to experience anxiety, a reduction in this disagreeable state of affairs is highly rewarding and will sustain even the most difficult habits for a surprisingly long time.... [T]hose individuals whose lives and work are ostensibly devoid of reward in the usual sense of the term are nevertheless reinforced and sustained by the gratification that comes from reduction of conscience-anxiety, or guilt. (Kluckhohn, 1985[1949]:214)

Anxiety-reducing beliefs, asserts Malinowski (1948:89–90), "embodied and maintained by cult and ceremonial, [have] an immense biological value."

This position is related to that of Batson and Ventis (1982:7), who "define religion as whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the questions that confront us because we are aware that we and others like us are live and that we will die. Such questions we shall call existential questions." Clifford Geertz (1968:40) refers to this type of definition, into which also falls Bellah (1968), as "confidence theories," and his work belongs in this category (cf. Segal, this volume; Berger 1974:127). Geertz offers up a complicated definition for religion: religion is

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [and women] 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. (1973:90)

The system is comprised of "sacred symbols" that "function to synthesize a people's ethos the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their world view—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order" (89). In other words, "In religious belief and practice a people's style of life, what Clyde Kluckhohn called their *design for living*, is rendered intellectually reasonable" (Geertz 1968:406). Geertz contends that it is imperative that religion perform this function:

Man depends upon symbols and symbol systems with a dependence so great as to be decisive for his creatural viability and, as a result, his sensitivity to even the remotest indication that they may prove unable to cope with one or another aspect of experience raises within him the gravest sort of anxiety. (Geertz 1973:99)

Like Spiro, he identifies three areas that are of particular concern to religion.

Bafflement, suffering, and a sense of intractable ethical paradox are all, if they become intense enough or are sustained long enough, radical challenges to the

proposition that life is comprehensible and that we can, by taking thought, orient ourselves effectively within it—challenges with which any religion, however "primitive," which hopes to persist must attempt somehow to cope. (100)

As would be expected from a functional ipsative definition, Geertz's definition encompasses much that would not be routinely studied by anthropologists under the rubric of religion: "A man can indeed be said to be 'religious' about golf, but not merely if he pursues it with passion and plays it on Sundays: he must also see it as symbolic of some transcendent truths" (98). Both Berger (1974) and Spiro (1987:196) view this as a weakness of functional definitions, but theologians like Tillich (1987) would side with Geertz. On the other hand, cultural data that others would unproblematically include within religion, Geertz excludes: "if [religious ritual] is truly automatic or merely conventional it is not religious" (1973:113).

Restricting attention to the definitional problem, we admit disappointment that Geertz's essay, called by Asad (1983:237) as "perhaps the most influential, certainly the most accomplished, anthropological definition of religion to have appeared in the last two decades," provides an intellectually engaging but practically useless standard by which to identify religion. Having elaborated at great lengths what religion is like conceptually, and what it does psychologically and socially, he never tells us how to recognize it in the field. How, for example, are we to know whether golfing is or is not "symbolic of transcendent truth," or whether ritual is "truly automatic or merely conventional." Only when these distinctions can be reliably made is Geertz exposition worthwhile; but no clues are forthcoming from him.

This question is pivotal, as we discussed earlier, due to the comparative nature of anthropology. While other types of definitions such as the content can easily identify members of its class (although comparing these members would be a pointless practice), functional definitions require that the function be precisely operationalized so that cross-cultural functional equivalents can be compared. In Geertz's case, we would want to know, for instance, *exactly* to what types of suffering is religion expected to respond, how is this suffering to be quantified, and how do we identify the symbol system (religion) that is in fact alleviating that suffering, because we cannot accept at face value the informant's identification of the system he *believes* to be responding to the problem (cf. Csordas 1994). Finding answers to these questions in many settings would enable us to have a cross-cultural sample of religion. Work from the perspective of evolutionary psychology promises to resolve some of these issues (see, e.g., Boyer 2001).

Geertz is not unique in this lapse. Functional definitions rarely enjoy this degree of elaboration. Consequently, Arner (1973:69) concedes that

"until independent, objective criteria for assessing equivalence are available, determination of functional equivalence will be largely a matter of individual, professional judgment." Such a state, however, is markedly less than desirable, although on the brighter side, there seems to be no inherent obstacle rendering the needed explication impossible. For whatever reasons, it merely seems not to have been much pursued.

Despite these problems, there is still substantial reason to continue Geertz's line of investigation. While no consensus exists that concedes that the phenomena collocated by functional definitions are "religion," few have argued that the collection of instances so brought together (ideally, if not in practice) is anthropologically useless. The debate, rather, seems to be over what to call the category (Saler 1993). This is more than can be said for the other definitional approaches we have examined. As we saw, the group of appearances of supernaturalisms in a culture is devoid of easy interpretation, and is most certainly not "religion." And even if some emotions have proven valuable for anthropological research (e.g., humor: Bricker, 1973; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952), the class of all instances of feeling "awe" or "dependence" have yet to demonstrate theoretical importance in and of themselves. Effort to operationalize the theoretical function and to identify cross-cultural equivalents is likely to be fruitful, even if it is decided at a later date that we have not truly isolated *religion.*

CONJUNCTIVE AND GENERATIVE DEFINITIONS

This review has shown that none of the four major types of definitions, when strictly applied, are without major flaws. Stated most simply, those that can be operationalized are theoretically meaningless, and those that are most meaningful have yet to be operationalized. In an effort to surmount these difficulties, most researchers have proposed definitions that combine the four definition types in various ways, reminding one of Alston's (1967) checklist approach. Most definitions cited are actually of this kind, with very few proposed definitions being "pure" examples of any particular strategy. Given that each definitional strategy discussed contains at its core an observation of high intuitive relevance, one can expect that any definition that receives disciplinary consensus will incorporate features of content, behavior, psychologism, and function. But all approaches to combine are not equivalent. One must distinguish two types. First, the definition can conjunct the different dimensions as though stringing separate, independent beads on a string. Religion here is X and Y and Z, with no necessary relationship between variables. We may term this approach the *conjunctive.* In addition to the examples already given (e.g., Durkheim), Wells (1921:270–71) defines "the objects of religious belief' as entailing both supernaturalisms and "certain acts and attitudes towards this order," while James (1916:31) concatenates "feelings, acts, and experiences."

An alternative combinatory definition I will term the *generative.* While including two or more of the discussed types, these are presented hierarchically. The lower types are present due to the implications of the first; the higher criterion, in other words, generates the others. Thus, Monique Augras (1983:14) asserts that [religion is the conjunction of a system of meanings, including the models of behavior that spring from them].[13]

A generative definition entails fewer independent variables, because the presence of other dimensions is construed as being implied by the first. Conjunctive definitions, by contrast, while attempting to cover the same empirical territory, do so by arbitrarily stringing elements. Generative definitions are preferable given a standard of theoretical parsimony and elegance.

It is difficult to see how content definitions could be used generatively. No necessary implications can be drawn about behavior, emotions, or function simply from the fact that supernaturalisms are involved. Likewise, behavior and the "mental" facets of religion seem limited in their theoretical entailments despite recurring correlations with the other types. Only the functional approach holds promise of being truly generative.

For instance, assuming function X, we might find, as Stark suggested, that supernaturalisms are exceptionally proficient at fulfilling this function. This cognitive preference for ultimate compensators might then be reinforced by Spiro's psychodynamic scheme. Religions would thereby preponderantly include such supernaturalisms, but not necessarily so. This outcome renders comprehensible and useful the category of the "implicit religion" (Donovan 2002).

If function X falls within the category of what Geertz terms "confidence theories," then we can expect characteristic emotional accompaniments with the fulfillment of the function, "awe," for instance, being an "antidote" to anxiety. This feeds back into the content consideration, for it would make fitting sense that supernaturalisms would be highly effective were the function related to death and other existential issues.

Finally, where X is essential to the individual's and society's healthy functioning, we can expect social ritual and other behaviors to serve to reinforce and maintain confidence in and adherence to the symbolic system designed to meet that function. Movement from a functional statement of religion, to one of every other type, is therefore possible, and should be the ultimate goal.[14]

CONCLUSIONS

The charge of this essay was to review definitional trends of *religion.* Four major types were discussed: content, behavior, mental, and functional. While each type has considerations that suggest its relevance, all are incomplete when examined in isolation. Consequently, two approaches

combining these types were briefly discussed: conjunctive and generative. Judging the former inferior to the latter, it was suggested that only the functional definitions are capable of being truly generative. The most inclusive definition of religion, therefore, will be one that is generative functional. Clues as to what such a definition might look like are found first in the lapse of both Stark and Durkheim, when trying to expound on an entirely different criterion, into speaking about beliefs. A strong definitional contender will also be one that emphasizes religion as a phenomenon that works primarily in response to the needs of the individual, not of society, however much the latter may appropriate and manipulate religious forms to meet its own, different needs (making it misleading to speak of "a culture's religion," when a culture can only have a modal religious form). A second consideration favoring this locus is that anthropologists observe individuals, and can only extrapolate from these individuals conclusions about "society" and "culture." Making the individual the focus of religion may facilitate the operationalization required for any useful definition.

It is possible to propose a definition of just this type: the definition of *religion* is *any belief system that serves the psychological function of alleviating death anxiety.* Defense of this statement is extensively laid out elsewhere (Donovan 1994). As implied earlier, this definition should be assumed to apply best to the prototypical instances of the class. Further work will be required to account for deviations from this prototype.

NOTES

1. Leuba (1912) lists in his appendix forty-eight definitions. At least twenty-eight more are cited in Berkowitz and Johnson (1967). This discussion utilizes even more references.

2. A tendency exists for scholars to be frequently fooled by their own use of language, and to think that if they can name it, it must be real. Goldschmidt (1966:130) warns of being "trapped by our linguistic habits into the use of reified terms applied cross-culturally."

3. The general trend seems to be results which are thus either the negation of a nondefining feature, or have the exact distribution of the defining feature. Hence nonanalytic generalizations in the literature tend toward either the *positive* but trivial consequences of the original feature, or something that, at root, is defined as the opposite or negation of some other feature. For instance, Lewis's (1989) conclusion that poor people are predisposed toward spirit possession is a negative finding, since the condition of being poor is largely defined by the absence of wealth.

4. Useful in this project would be the following entry from Lody (1987:81), which describes perfectly what I found among my own informants:

Seita: designação comum para caracterizar religiões afro-brasileiras, notadamente o candomblé. É comum ouvir-se dos próprios praticantes o seguinte: *sou adepto da seita, sou da*

seita, toda a minha família é da seita, pertenço à seita dos orixás, entre muitas outras expressões. Percebe-se que o emprego da palavra implica um tipo de isolamento social e econômico, já que a preferência por ela é evidente sempre que aparece junto a referências à *religião* católica. As gerações mais novas, que pertencem ou apenas freqüentam os terreiros, raramente usam a palavra seita, o que chamam orgulhosamente de candomblé.

5. Interestingly, American law has likewise found it prudent to reject native statement as definitively determining what is or is not "religion." On the one hand, the courts have determined a set of beliefs to be a religion despite protests to the contrary by its adherents (*Malnak v. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi,* 592 F.2d 197 [3d Cir. 1979]). On the other, Scientology has worked long and hard to be designated a religion despite resistance from both governmental agencies and some of its own members (*The Founding Church of Scientology of Washington v. United States,* 409 F.2d 1146 [D.C. Cir. 1969]; Whitehead, 1987). Justice Black, writing in *Welsh v. United States* (398 U.S. 333, 341 [1970]), summarizes the high court's opinion that a person's "characterization of his own belief as 'religious' should carry great weight...[but] his declaration that his views are nonreligious should [not] be treated similarly....[A] registrant's statement that his beliefs are nonreligious is a highly unreliable guide."

6. Alston introduced this approach to defining religion in an earlier work, *Philosophy of Language* (1964), while illustrating the concept of terminological vagueness.

7. Southwold actually specifies the presence of a "religious elite," but I have omitted "religious" because, since the object of the list is to characterize *religion,* the presence of "religious" in the list is circular. We need to know what religion is in order to characterize something as religious.

8. We see here the immediate problem of trying to isolate a single dimension. While Tylor talks here about the *belief* in spiritual beings, historically he has been read to require only their *presence,* a much lower standard.

9. We must grant that it is irrelevant for this discussion whether religious tenets are true, although this luxury is not always available (cf. Donovan 1990). But I must side with Thakur against Needham (1981:76), who claims that "it is not a general characteristic of religions that their tenets are held to be true." One can quibble over what it means for a proposition to be "held to be true," (e.g., must it be literal, or merely figuratively true?), but it is flying in the face of ethnographic fact to say that adherents of a religious system are not convinced that they are focusing on something which they take to real, and by implication, true. In the words of William James (1916:64), "many persons possess the objects of their belief, not in the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended."

10. I am unconvinced by Spiro's attempt to completely sever "superhuman" from "supernatural." It is correct to note that "supernatural" requires a theory of natural law which many cultures do not possess; lacking natural law, there can be no concept of transgressing natural order, such transgressing being the hallmark of "supernatural." By comparison, "superhuman" can be more, but not necessarily different from the natural order.

The distinction itself can be useful, but as a defining characteristic of religion, "superhuman" comes off as being overly restrictive. Although he believes he is in the company of Horton (1960) and Goody (1961)—and there is certainly the family

resemblance shared by all content definitions—I do not read the latter as being as narrow as Spiro requires his definition to be. His insistence upon superhumans is an original assertion.

11. We should note that Spiro's use of "function" differs from that offered below. He uses the word in the sense of "utility," whereas we will stipulate that this utility be necessary. Spiro, saying that religion is a projective system which allows expression of ambivalence towards one's parents, does not say that such expression is a requirement of the human psyche, nor that any such needed expression must necessarily take this form.

12. We can compare this conclusion with Freud's (1961b[1930]:20–21) original statement:

The derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate. I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection. Thus the part played by the oceanic feeling, which might seek something like the restoration of limitless narcissism, is ousted from a place in the foreground. The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness.

13. "A religião é o conjunto do sistema de significações incluindo os modelos de comportamento que delas decorrem."

14. This result is not unique to anthropology. A review of trends within American jurisprudence leads to a very similar conclusion (Donovan 1995).

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CHAPTER 5

Agency and Religious Agency in Cognitive Perspective

E. Thomas Lawson

Religious ritual systems enlist many of our quite ordinary cognitive resources in their representation. Making such a claim goes against a host of views that focus, in the tradition of William James, upon the extraordinary qualities of religious experience. In the Jamesian tradition of scholarship, the main concern is to deal with the experiences of the few and treat them as paradigmatic for the ideas and actions of the many. Such an approach differs from a cognitive perspective where the focus is upon what the many have in common with the purpose of showing how such representations are generated by our garden variety cognitive equipment. The cognitive approach does not deny the relevance of scholarship in the Jamesian tradition; in fact, the search for neural correlates for, for example, mystical experiences is a project of great interest. There is simply more to the scientific study of religion than the study of exceptional states.

One of the most interesting areas of investigation for scholars involved in the scientific study of religion from a cognitive perspective is the fact that human beings seem to have a proclivity for introducing agents in their accounts of how the world goes and to include *agents with special qualities* in their representations.

In earlier work (Lawson and McCauley 1990), McCauley and I have discussed how our theory of religious ritual makes substantive predictions about an array of features of people's representations of ritual action. Essentially, what we argued was the representation of action required the notion of agency and the representation of ritual action required the notion of agents with special qualities. Rituals involve agents acting upon patients usually by means of some instrument or other. For example, the