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**REASONING AND RELIGION:
THE RELEVANCE OF THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION TO
CRITICAL THINKING PEDAGOGY**

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Abstract

In this thesis I inquire into method and theory debates within the academic study of religion, arguing for the potential of this broad field to enrich critical thinking pedagogy, especially with regard to worldviews and problems associated with the influences of worldviews on reasoning. I highlight the growing recognition within critical thinking literature that critical thinking pedagogy ought to include a sizable component devoted to worldviews, and argue for the relevance of the academic study of religion to this worldview component. An inquiry into three popular method and theory debates within the academic study of religion concerning the definition, comparison, and evaluation of religion(s), and into interreligious dialogue, helps cement this assertion. In my treatment of definition I attempt to put the close connection between religions and worldviews on firm ground. I also describe common misconceptions of religion and worldviews that should be of concern to critical thinking educators, and for which the academic study of religion is particularly apposite. Next I concentrate on how comparison of religions and worldviews is justified within the academic study of religion and on good and bad forms of comparison. My discussion of evaluation repeats this pattern: I look at debates over what constitutes good and bad evaluation in and of religions and worldviews, and the relevance of this subject to critical thinking. My foray into interreligious or cross-worldview dialoguing focuses on difficulties that are germane within the critical thinking domain. Although I do recommend the inclusion of these four subjects within critical thinking pedagogy, I take them primarily as a sample of a wider field of inquiry. This sample is meant to support a broader recommendation, namely: Just as education should be infused with critical thinking, so too should critical thinking be infused with the philosophy of the academic study of religion, and the fruits of its inquiry. This recommendation does not come without reservation. In the last chapter I discuss some of the problems that my suggestions bring up, first among which is the religious bias evident in much of what can be found under the auspices of the academic study of religion.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Consider the following case. The year is 1942. Just outside Józefów, a small town in eastern Poland, Major Wilhelm Trapp – the commanding officer of Reserve Police Battalion 101 – is informing his men about the coming operation. In a few hours they will be tasked with eliminating the Jewish community of Józefów. Able bodied men will be taken away. They are destined for death by slavery. Everyone else – the infirm, the elderly, women and children, and anyone who offers resistance – will be shot, either on the spot or later that day in designated locations outside of town.

Major Trapp explains to the men that this action is necessary because Jews were supporting the partisans, and because the action is a response to the bombing of German cities by the Allies. Still, the men were given an option not to participate. With a handful of exceptions, the men accepted their task willingly. The death toll for this operation was twelve to fifteen hundred. It was to be the first of many mass shootings of Jews that the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 would carry out.

The men were by and large ordinary Germans. They were not ardent Nazis. They were not given special ideological training. They were not chosen for their hatred of Jews. Three quarters of them were born before 1910 and had been educated well before the Nazis' ascent to power. Considering their background, the calibre of their upbringing, the patently absurd arguments given by Major Trapp, and the fact that they were not coerced to kill, their actions demand explanation. Why did they not react to the glaring deficiencies in Trapp's arguments? Why did they not opt out of this genocidal act, and the ones that followed?

In "Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust" (1996), the book from which this illustration is taken, Daniel Goldhagen offers the following answer. For the men of Police Battalion 101, the connection between the Jews of Józefów, the partisans, and the Allies' bombardment was real. These men held a

worldview that is alien to our own. Antisemitism was a fundamental tenet of that worldview. Although bizarre from our own perspective, Trapp's arguments made sense from theirs. In Goldhagen's words,

the perpetrators' belief in the unalterably demonic character of the Jews . . . led their commanders rightly to expect that their patently absurd assertions . . . about Jewish responsibility for bombing raids . . . would be comprehensible and reasonable to their men and would bolster their resolve. . . . For, having been imbued with a demonological antisemitism, these ordinary Germans believed that behind the bombing of German cities stood that global ogre, variously called "World Jewry" . . . or "the Jew" . . . and that the Jews of Poland . . . were tentacles of that ogre. In lopping off that tentacle, these Germans would contribute to the destruction of that monstrous force, that source of many evils, which was raining bombs on their cities. Major Trapp, in urging his men to conjure up before their minds' eyes images of "our women and children in our homeland" who died in bombing raids, so that they would overcome whatever inhibitions they might have had to slaughter Jewish children, assumed as a matter of course that his men would readily understand and take his advice. These ordinary Germans needed no further explanation. For the advice was based on the "common-sense" view of Jewry that was common to them. (pp. 404–5)

According to Goldhagen, these men – and the perpetrators of the Holocaust generally – acted voluntarily. Given their worldview, they thought it was the right thing to do (pp. 452–3). With no small alarm and revulsion, the arguments that I will discuss below lead me to concede that if these men's demonological and eliminationist antisemitic beliefs turned out to be true, Trapp's arguments would be stronger than they appear to be on first sight. But the persuasive success of Trapp's arguments is not premised on a realistic worldview. Rather, it depends on his men's inability to evaluate their own worldview rationally.

There is scarcely a more heartbreaking illustration of the strong influence worldviews exert on reasoning than when such influence is responsible for the taking of an innocent life. Despite being given the option not to take part in the killing, and despite the terrible nature and horror of the act, the men carried out their duties with zeal. They were blind to the awfulness of their handiwork. They saw only evil parasites worthy of expedient extermination. What these men experienced, what they thought was moral behavior, was dictated by their worldview. The gravity of the situation was of no consequence – their worldview reined supreme.

From our point of view we can readily appreciate the incredible malevolence and credulity of this antisemitic worldview. We also understand well the historical and psychosocial processes by which this worldview came to be. Yet, the fact that this worldview was nothing more than a default cultural inheritance – more indoctrinated than reasoned through – was something that the men could not appropriately comprehend. They did not realize that they were in the grips of a mad ideology. Their beliefs regarding Jews formed part of their identity. They were perceived as accurate descriptions of reality, and not as just another interpretation of reality – an interpretation that needs to be assessed. In short, their worldview was so destructive because it was unnoticed, and so, uncriticized.

Although none of the men offered an argument contra Trapp, suppose for the moment that one of them did confide in the commander they affectionately named “Papa” Trapp – who seemed to be very open and caring with his men – about failing to see the said connection. Ideally, we would wish Trapp to concentrate his critical capacities on the issue, realize his fault, and reappraise the antisemitic beliefs from which his claims emanated. Although we are in the realm of speculation, few would object to the claim that this is an unlikely scenario. Telling Trapp that his premises are highly controversial, or that he failed to consider counter arguments, is unlikely to weaken his belief, which is supported by his worldview, and which makes sense within his worldview. If he listens long enough for us to destroy his argument piece

by piece, he will probably find other arguments to support his conclusions. In all likelihood, his worldview will remain intact.

Although this illustration is taken from the extreme end of the spectrum, it is not as unique as one would hope. Worldviews have been a regular accomplice in genocides throughout history. The twentieth century has no special claim to infamy in this respect except for the greater technological and organizational resources available to modern perpetrators. There is no guarantee that records will not be broken in this century. Between atrocities of this scale, and an excusable cross-worldview misunderstanding that is of no great consequence to anyone, lie a host of greater and lesser evils – preventable evils – in which uncritical worldviews play a crucial causal role.

The case of Major Trapp and the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 points to several aspects of worldviews that (as I will later argue) an education worthy of its name – an education that imparts the ability and inclination think well, to be a good thinker, a critical thinker – cannot ignore. First, worldviews are implicated in reasoning. That is, behind overt argumentation there often exists an implicit propositional and affective substratum that determines much of what happens on the visible surface of reason giving and reason evaluation. This means that what is considered unjustified from the perspective of one worldview can be quite the opposite from the perspective of another; that the plausibility of a claim, or the quality of an inference or an argument, depends on the plausibility of the worldview on which it relies; that argument evaluation implies worldview choice; and that good argument evaluation will at times require good worldview evaluation. Second, the influence worldviews exert on reasoning can be extremely strong. Third, this influence is normally unnoticed. This means that it is not normally subjected to criticism, and so has, all too often, deleterious results. Lastly, this influence is mostly unidirectional: While worldviews command a strong influence on reasoning, reasoning rarely has a similar effect on worldviews. There is hardly a conflict or controversy of note, in which similar worldview phenomena cannot be identified.

Today, most educators¹ would readily admit that education should impart not only knowledge of the content of various disciplines, but also thinking skills. So much so, that reasoning has been acclaimed by many as the fourth R, equal in importance to reading, writing, and mathematics (McPeck, 1990c, p. 38; Piro & Iorio, 1990).² How does education today compare, as far as the teaching of thinking is concerned, with pre-Nazi era German education? More to the point, is it equal to the task of creating a citizenry that is able and disposed to think rationally about their own fundamental, deeply held beliefs? Does it normally impart the ability and disposition to evaluate and choose worldviews rationally?

One central tenet of the argument I intend to present in this work posits that, if education for thinking is not capable of doing these things, it does not possess a credible response to the destructive potential of worldviews. I also intend to argue that it is in fact deficient in this respect. I could not, however, evaluate all the relevant programs in New Zealand let alone in several countries within these narrow confines. Instead, I chose to focus on one prominent branch of the thinking programs tree, a branch that will be referred to as the standard approach to critical thinking instruction, or simply as the standard approach. The limitations I identify and the conclusions I reach with regard to the standard approach will apply more broadly, at least to the extent in which other thinking programs or educational systems display the same problematic characteristics.

The standard approach has come to dominate critical thinking instruction at the tertiary level. It consists primarily of structural (inferential) argument analysis and fallacy identification. There is much to be said in its favour. Indeed, none of the criticisms offered below should be taken as implying a recommendation for its

¹ Here and below, if not indicated otherwise, when I speak of education or educators I am referring to those of Anglophone countries – primarily USA, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand – and countries with similar educational characteristics.

² In New Zealand, the educational emphasis on the three Rs, and on critical thinking as the fourth R, can be seen in (among other things) the application of the new national standards only to literacy and numeracy, and in naming thinking as the first and most important key competency in the new New Zealand Curriculum (Hipkins, 2006).

replacement. On the contrary: The standard approach represents a considerable advance in the teaching of critical thinking, and if anything, it deserves more resources and a greater presence at primary and secondary levels. I will argue, however, that the standard approach is insufficient in itself, and that education for thinking must include a sizable component devoted to worldviews, a major part of which should be the scientific study of religion.

Religion has also been offered as a fourth R. For countless many, a good education is one that inculcates belief in a particular religious tradition. Although I will discuss religious or confessional approaches to the study of religion at some length, I must immediately distinguish such approaches from the kind of study recommended here. A very different (and less popular) stream of thought views religion as an important curricular subject on account of its prominence as a natural phenomenon. Whether true or false, religions exist, and they exercise considerable social, psychological, economic, and historical power. So much so, that without religious literacy – without an understanding of religion and religions – students will be incapable of understanding or dealing with too much of what is important in their world (Dever, Whitaker, & Byrnes, 2001).

What I hope to show, is that there is much in the study of religion that is of use for a pedagogy that is intent on teaching good reasoning or critical thinking. This is because good thinking must also be good thinking about worldviews, our own worldviews in particular, and because religions are in important respects paradigmatic of worldviews generally. I will argue that just as education should be infused with critical thinking, so too should critical thinking be infused with the philosophy of the academic study of religion and the fruits of its inquiry. Reasoning and Religion – the two fourth Rs – are thereby combined.

How is this to be achieved? This work can be roughly divided into two parts. The first consists of Chapters Two and Three, and is devoted to critical thinking. Chapters

Four through Seven are devoted to particular elements of the academic study of religion, and an elucidation of their relevance to critical thinking.

Chapter Two begins by pointing to a growing awareness that despite its popularity, current critical thinking instruction is as yet incapable of consistently producing critical thinkers. This can be seen in the common inability of graduates of the standard approach to apply the lessons they have learned in the critical thinking classroom where and when doing so might hurt. In order to clarify this issue, I discuss the broader problem of transfer. The renaissance of informal logic – the progenitor and chief contributor to the standard approach – was in part a response to the lack of transfer of formal logic instruction to thinking outside the classroom. And yet, despite its superiority to formal logic in that respect, and its genetic connection with the problem of transfer, the standard approach is still largely ineffectual as far as students' deeply held beliefs are concerned.

After looking at formal and informal logic with the problem of transfer in mind, and after explicating the contours (and arguing for the existence of) the standard approach to critical thinking instruction, I delve into the discourse over the generalizability of its constituents. The heated debate over generalizability is largely concerned with the general applicability (or lack thereof) of the ingredients of the standard approach to everyday reasoning and reasoning within particular disciplines. The generalizability debate is important to my argument because lack of generality, or lack of applicability to various thinking domains, has been a forceful contender in explaining lack of transfer. Agreeing with neither generalist nor specificist extremes, I attempt to show that a middle ground exists, and that it points to a vital deficiency – a missing element in the standard approach – that is related to the influence of deeply held beliefs on students' reasoning.

What exactly needs to be added to the standard approach so that students will be inclined and able to think critically about their own fundamental beliefs? This is a question that the generalizability debate leaves unanswered. The debate is, however,

instrumental in bringing several important subsidiary questions to the fore. For example, is there a body of knowledge that relevant expert communities consider important or crucial but is neglected by the standard approach? Does the standard approach lack the wherewithal that is necessary for dealing with strong psychological hindrances to transfer peculiar to deeply held or fundamental beliefs? What do relevant expert communities consider as successful thinking in the realm of fundamental beliefs, and does this differ from parallel conceptions in the standard approach?

Dealing with these and similar questions will inevitably spill over to the second part of the thesis. But in Chapter Three this effort will begin by exploring explanations for lack of transfer – this time specific to deeply held beliefs – that are already present in critical thinking literature. With the help of the work of Richard Paul and likeminded scholars I will make the case that there is a maturing recognition among writers on critical thinking that the missing element is in fact an appropriate treatment of worldviews. This claim is important to my argument and I will take some time to defend it. My aim will be to convince the reader that despite the popularity and monolithic nature of instruction *a la* standard approach, a considerable number of scholars have long been arguing (cogently) for its augmentation. As far as the generalizability of the standard approach is concerned, the workings of worldviews and their effects on reasoning make the reflexive application of critical thought into its own specific critical thinking domain. Although the constituents of the standard approach do seem to apply to worldviews, without a considerable additional emphasis on worldviews – what they are, how they influence reasoning, how to study and evaluate them rationally – the standard approach cannot be seen as a viable approach to teaching critical thinking for this domain. And since critical thinking, properly so called, is of necessity also critical thinking about our own worldviews, the standard approach does not represent a sufficient educational approach to critical thinking.

Since my argument relies on the possibility of evaluating worldviews rationally – a problematic claim – Chapter Three includes a consideration of some arguments pro

and con. Although not fatal, relativist critiques (and responses to them) serve to highlight some of the difficulties that thinking critically about worldviews involves. These difficulties point, yet again, to a specific educational need, a need born of the nature of worldviews as a unique object of thought.

Even if rational choice of worldviews is possible, there is still the matter of its educability. In a final bid to show that there is a genuine recognition of the importance of dealing with worldviews in critical thinking, I survey extant approaches to critical thinking instruction that already attempt to deal with this subject. My survey reveals a broad agreement on how this should be done. To be able to deal adequately with problems like the implication of worldviews in reasoning, their deleterious influence, and their rigid insularity, the standard approach needs to be augmented with the teaching of (among other things) certain dialogical, dialectical, and comparative reasoning skills, worldview criteriology, critical thinking dispositions, and subject specific knowledge (most notably about various general worldview phenomena, the scientific worldview, and other specific worldviews, including the student's own). In the remainder of the chapter I begin to make the case that, despite its relative obscurity within critical thinking literature, the scientific or academic study of religion represents an invaluable source for contribution to these and other worldview related educational needs.

The second part of this work consists of four chapters. Each chapter has as its focus a particular area within the academic study of religion. Considering the themes I identify in Chapter Three, these are areas that look particularly promising for critical thinking pedagogy. Chapters Four, Five, and Six inquire into questions surrounding the definition of religion, comparison of religions, and their evaluation, respectively. These topics have been the subject of heated methodological and theoretical debate. Method and theory literature, together with literature entrusted with inducting students of religion into these subjects, offers insight into the ways in which scholars have been grappling with the conceptualization, comparison, and evaluation of religions.

Underpinning my thesis is the equation (or near equation) of the academic study of religion with the academic study of worldviews. In Chapter Four, a chapter devoted to the definition of religion and worldview, I will attempt to put the close connection between the two on firm ground. This will be done with the help of two streams of thought. The first sees religion as analogous to, and in important respects paradigmatic of, worldviews generally. The second line – a more controversial position despite being championed by the likes of Ninian Smart and William Paden – takes this similarity one step further, advocating for the replacement of religion as the foundational concept of the field in favour of worldview or similar concepts. Religion then becomes a species of worldview – one that is oriented towards the supernatural – and the academic study of religion is reconceptualized into the academic study of worldviews. If the arguments put forward in Chapter Three, in favour of treating worldviews as a pedagogically distinct critical thinking category, have any force, this should open the doors, in principle, to germane literature from outsiders. First among these should stand the scholarly community devoted to understanding worldviews and related phenomena, or the scholarly community devoted to the study of religion, if religion is paradigmatic of worldviews.

Also, knowing what religions and worldviews are (or are not) and what they can do, seems to be a prerequisite for good thinking when these are heavily implicated in reasoning. My second aim for this chapter is therefore to show that studying definitions of religions and worldviews, as well as the philosophy of the subject – that is, studying method and theory debates revolving around the definition of religion – have unmistakable promise for critical thinking pedagogy. To this end, I describe three common definitional failures – perhaps fruitfully described as subject specific definitional fallacies – that ought to concern critical thinking educators. Definitions that are parochial, simplistic, and unduly normative, have plagued the field since its inception (and are still very much a part of its makeup today). Scholarly discourses over these definitional failures apply in no small measure to misconceptions of worldview and worldviews that are ubiquitous in popular thinking, misconceptions

that make the fair consideration of alternative worldviews or the critical evaluation of one's own all but impossible.

The source of academic preoccupation with definitional inadequacies is, of course, the longstanding endeavour to articulate a respectable conception of religion, a conception that will do justice to all the variegated phenomena that scholars of religion study. As was the case with definitional don'ts, here too, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Definitional successes (or definitional dos) and in particular, conceptions of worldviews like the one offered by Ninian Smart, represent not only an epistemologically acceptable understanding of this family of phenomena, but also one that is pedagogically useful. Notably, constructs akin to Smart's worldview highlight normative complexities and allow for their negotiation, they apply to any and all cultures, and they are sufficiently open-ended when it comes to the multi-faceted nature of the subject-matter. These are necessary ingredients in any critical approach to worldviews.

In Chapter Five I concentrate on comparison of religions, worldviews, and parts thereof. The attention given to this subject here is warranted by the unambiguous emphasis on comparison in critical thinking, itself a result of the recognition that reasonable evaluation of worldviews (at times, a prerequisite to good argument appraisal) is dependent on reasonable comparison. Critical thinking literature contains abundant references to poor comparative capabilities, especially when it comes to fundamental beliefs, the educational failure with regard to these, and corresponding recommendations to increase educational attention to comparative reasoning. In this chapter I take a look at how comparison is justified within the academic study of religion, and at the makings of good and bad comparisons or comparative practices: common comparative biases or obstacles to good comparison, and good comparative skills, standards, dispositions, and knowledge.

Within the academic study of religion the propriety of comparative studies is defended with reference to (primarily) four grounds: (1) Comparison helps scholars

understand religious phenomena – and religion itself – as general phenomena; (2) it is a useful tool with which generalizations about religion can be tested; (3) it helps scholars understand specific religions by highlighting features that are peculiar to them; and (4) it may sow a seed of doubt and reflection in a realm of thought marred by dogma and apologetics. These comparative aims also provide a justification for comparative engagement with religions and worldviews within instruction for critical thinking. Putting relevant material from critical thinking and the academic study of religion side by side, I show that the needs that have been stressed in critical thinking, for which comparison was offered as a solution, accords with what scholars of religion say comparison in and of religions can satisfy.

My overview of common comparative crimes and misdemeanours shows, however, that appropriate comparative aims often give way to a defensive rationalization of prior beliefs and the subordination of alternative perspectives. It also shows that comparative methods are often one-sided, rigid, hasty, overconfident, and unreflective; that comparative frameworks can lack epistemic and moral justification; and that the results of comparison can therefore be distorting in the extreme. These are the very opposite of what scholarly or critical comparison should be.

As was the case with regard to definitional debates, method and theory literature within the academic study of religion contains a wealth of information not only about comparative pitfalls such as these, but also about guidelines for good comparison that have a bearing much further afield. In particular, there is no shortage of discussion on the corrective importance of explicitness, clarity, openness and reflexivity or self-criticism with regard to comparative aims, methods, frameworks, and conclusions, and on the need to treat comparison as aspectual and tentative, to choose the comparative framework carefully, and with the same care, ensure the depth and breadth of inquiry.

Chapter Six is devoted to evaluation in and of religions and worldviews. Although evaluation – problematic evaluation in particular – is also an underlying theme of the

chapters on definition and comparison, I consider it important to deal with this subject head-on for reasons similar to those that prompted the emphasis on comparison: the implication of worldviews in reasoning and extant critical thinking literature. As with the previous chapters on definition and comparison, I will be concerned with arguments over what constitute legitimate and illegitimate evaluative practices.

On the face of it, there would seem to be no greater authority on the truth and value of religions (and worldviews) than the scholarly community entrusted with their study. Criticisms and defences of this proposition will form the organizing theme of this chapter. The authority of the academic study of religion is premised on the epistemic superiority of the scientific worldview. The first of the two most conspicuous critiques of this position is the objection from incommensurability or radical relativism already discussed in Chapter Three. In this chapter the problem of the possibility of choosing between worldviews rationally will be discussed from the perspective of the academic study of religion. As was the case with critical thinking, there exists a legitimate benign interpretation for the criteriological deficiencies that this critique brings to light. Worldviews are inevitably implicated in their own evaluation. Disavowing evaluation altogether is excessive given the weight of the evidence. Instead, the emphasis must be on using worldviews to critique and evaluate each other under controlled circumstances. As far as choice of a worldview is concerned a legitimate conception of rational choice should reflect this.

The academic study of religion should be paradigmatic of (and the primary source for information about) such controlled circumstances, but only if sufficient confidence can be put in scholarly standards and the scientific perspective as the most reliable conduit to truth in the sphere of religion and worldviews. The second critique – or rather, a family of related criticisms – holds that the standard naturalistic understanding of science cannot be the ultimate arbiter on religion because it is inferior to perspectives that recognize a putative supernatural reality, or are at least open to such a possibility. This brings us squarely to what is probably the most

important common denominator within all major method and theory debates in the academic study of religion: the struggle between natural and supernatural metaphysics for academic (and ultimate) legitimacy.

Since I am concerned only with scholarly literature, arguments against a strictly natural metaphysics generally take scientific assumptions as valid – at least where normal objects of scientific inquiry are concerned – but disagreement still abounds with regard to their interpretation and usefulness when applied to religion as a specific, perhaps unique, object of study. I will consider how a handful of these standards – mainly methodological and object (data) pluralism, intersubjective verifiability or accessibility, reduction, naturalism and criticism – are understood according to various positions on the metaphysical divide. Consideration of the relevant debates, I will argue, ought to favour a modest naturalistic conception of the academic study of religion: a conception that allows for the logical possibility of supernatural explanation and so a true religion. At the same time, it would be a conception that stresses the questionable nature of some religious commitments in the quest to understand religion, and by implication, the questionable nature of all non-scientific worldviews.

Chapter Seven will be devoted to interreligious dialogue. A substantial amount of critical thinking scholarship is concerned with rational dialogue, dialogic communities, and classroom controversy. Interreligious dialogue, by its very definition, occurs between different worldviews. Thus, literature on interreligious dialogue is a likely place to find discussion of parallel problems, parallel solutions, and perhaps novel ones. Although I will still be concerned with good and bad dialoguing, the target literature will no longer be of the method and theory variety. Interreligious dialogue is less a scholarly form of inquiry than a religious practice – a subject to be studied by scholars of religion – even if many religious studies scholars are also participants in this activity. The literature I have chosen will be of scholar-practitioners. The chapter opens with a short look at how interreligious dialogue is justified within the relevant literature, and in particular, on the arguments of two

writers whose work I find well-matched to critical thinking: Leonard Swidler and Paul Knitter. I then list and briefly outline a number of commonly encountered problems or obstacles to interreligious dialogue as well as proposed remedies for their solution, all of which seem apposite for critical thinking.

Just as Chapter Three ends with a section delineating some of the more obvious *prima facie* connections between the academic study of religion and critical thinking pedagogy, Chapters Four through Seven close with my attempt to flesh out the relevance of definition, comparison, evaluation, and dialogue in religion to critical thinking in a little more detail. Although I do recommend the inclusion of these four subjects within critical thinking pedagogy, I take them primarily as a sample that is indicative of the relevance of a wider field of inquiry. Admittedly, then, other subjects could have been chosen. In Chapter Eight I point out some of the areas that I consider to be particularly worthy of attention but that for lack of time and space I could not include in the body of this work. I also consolidate some of the main conclusions, and I take a brief look at a handful of the more obvious problems that recommendations such as those promulgated here will have to square with, first among which is the religious bias evident in much of what can be found under the auspices of the academic study of religion. I will also touch on the possible conflict between a critical education about worldviews and parental (minority, indigenous) rights to determine the character of education, the lack of sufficient numbers of suitably qualified teachers, and an already overcrowded curriculum.

Chapter 2 Critical Thinking and Transfer

Tip of the Hat, Wag of the Finger

Readers in critical thinking will quickly recognize a recurring pattern. In paper after paper, in numerous textbooks and in monographs, critical thinking is introduced both as a widely accepted educational goal and one that is, as yet, neglected, misunderstood, and unattained.³ Critical thinking, it is said, is currently enjoying phenomenal popularity. Writing on the subject is prolific, conferences abound, it is hailed as important in governmental reports and policy documents the world over, and educational initiatives designed to teach it – most notably, the critical thinking course – are gaining an unmistakable momentum.⁴ The case, I think, has been well made, and I take it as a given that critical thinking has a high level of support as an educational aim at all levels of education and in all curricular subjects.⁵

And yet (here comes the wagging), there is also widespread agreement that educational practices and outcomes are still wide of the mark. Teachers are generally unclear about what critical thinking is, or how to teach it (Paul, 1996). An entrenched emphasis on rote learning, didactic teaching, and other popular but problematic classroom practices has meant that current teaching “discourages rather than encourages critical thinking and the values and dispositions essential to it” (Paul,

³ See Browne (1999; 2000), Gibson (1995), Jungwirth and Dreyfus (1990), Rambo (1991), and Reed (2001) for just a few examples. Piro (1990) reverses the pattern: the wagging comes first.

⁴ Critical thinking is included under the five key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2010), competencies that are “the key to learning in every learning area:” “Thinking is about using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas. . . . Intellectual curiosity is at the heart of this competency. Students who are competent thinkers . . . challenge the basis of assumptions and perceptions.”

⁵ See also Bailin (1999a; 1999b), Harris (1997), Hoefler (1994), Walters (1990b), and Wright (2002).

1992b, p. 151). As a result high-school and university graduates generally perform very poorly on even basic critical thinking tasks and tests (Norris, 1985; Tsui, 2002). In the words of Niel Browne (2000), there is a serious “gap between aspiration and achievement in the area of critical thinking.”⁶

Why does such a gap exist? How can it be bridged? The critical thinking community has expended considerable efforts towards answering these questions, and not without some progress. Nevertheless, much still remains to be done, and it is to this developing corpus that I devote my modest and partial contribution. The usual suspects (lack of teacher training, an overcrowded curriculum, lack of interest and coordination by faculty, funding, etc.) will not be dealt with here, but my argument will follow a well-trodden formula, namely:

Subject X is necessary/important/beneficial for critical thinking, but is as yet neglected/unfamiliar/untapped by educators. If subject X were to receive more attention the gap between aspiration and achievement would be somewhat contracted.

The literature on critical thinking shows a remarkable openness to interdisciplinary contributions and I anticipate no great surprise in my choice to look outside traditional critical thinking sources narrowly circumscribed. I do suspect, however, that my choice of X has not been considered by many as a likely candidate. The argument I will present here will be an attempt to show that the academic study of religion may yet turn out to be a very serious contender in the race to that long-awaited goal: a practicable pedagogy effective at producing critical thinkers.

In this chapter and the next I will focus on a particular component of the aspiration-achievement gap – the difficulty in teaching for critical thought when it comes to the students’ own deeply held or fundamental beliefs – and I will argue that it is here that the academic study of religion has its greatest potential. The bulk of this chapter will

⁶ See also Case (2002), Chaffee (1992b, p. 121), Siegel (1992, p. 109), and Townsend (1921).

be devoted to an elucidation of the problem. The next section shows how a particular aspect of the aspiration-achievement gap – the problem of transference (or transfer) of competence in deductive or formal logic to thinking outside the classroom – has been a major cause of the recent renaissance of informal logic. In the following section, titled “The First Wave of the Critical Thinking Movement,” I highlight the influence informal logic exercised on what has come to be the standard approach to critical thinking instruction – an approach that I describe in the section titled “The Standard Approach.” The same section also illustrates that the standard approach, despite its superiority to formal logic, has been ineffectual as a remedy for the problem of transfer, especially where students’ deeply held beliefs are concerned. In the section titled “The Generalizability Question” the debate over the general applicability (or lack thereof) of the ingredients of the standard approach to everyday reasoning and reasoning within particular disciplines is surveyed. This section takes seriously the view that the standard approach has a vital missing element related to the influence of deeply held beliefs.

Formal and Informal Logic and the Problem of Transfer

I begin by picking up one historical strand of the critical thinking movement: informal logic.⁷ Informal logic has been one of the great contributors to the critical thinking movement, if not the greatest. In fact, some explicitly take the terms to be synonymous, and many more seem to treat them as such. I take what has become the standard approach to the teaching of critical thinking – an approach that is largely inspired by informal logic – to be a very valuable ingredient in the teaching of critical thinking. But this standard approach also conflicts, in a way, with the educational path that I aim to lay here. Because it has come to dominate instruction of critical thinking at the tertiary level, and because it has coagulated into somewhat of a settled rigidity to the detriment of the field’s evolution, it represents an obstacle that is impossible to ignore. Of more immediate concern, however, is the presentation of a theme: the problem of transfer. The problem of transfer will be a major concern for this work. Informal logic offers a particularly clear illustration for this problem, as well as a starting point from which progress can be charted.

The origins of informal logic, and in particular, its pedagogical limb, “lie in a desire to make logic useful” (Johnson, 2006, p. 231). In 1960’s North America, a group of logic teachers began experimenting with the teaching of an alternative kind of logic. Up to that point, teaching formal or deductive logic was close to being the only game

⁷ This will not be a history of critical thinking as such, as I intend to ignore vast swaths of relevant and, no doubt, important intellectual landscape. The long and by no means feeble life of critical thinking in Western philosophy from ancient Greece up to mid-twentieth century, most geographical/cultural philosophical traditions (e.g. continental, oriental, etc. or Christian, Muslim, etc.), whole disciplinary strands of the modern critical thinking movement (e.g. educational psychology), and many other chapters in the story of critical thinking will, regrettably, be omitted. These shortcomings, I hope, are excusable given the equally limited purpose to which this work is devoted. My argument is not an historical one, and it is not, as far as I can see, dependent in any direct way on a particular history. The interested reader will be able to connect my argument to several other important historical threads. A short history of critical thinking in Western philosophical thought can be found in Paul (1996). Mathew Lipman (1991) devotes a chapter to the history of the modern critical thinking movement from the late nineteenth century on.

in town. Deductive logic was considered to be the paragon of rationality. A deductively valid argument is one in which the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises. If these premises are known to be true the argument is deductively sound, and the conclusion can be known with certainty. If Socrates was a man – so the classic example goes – and if all men are mortal (and surely, no one would deny these facts), then by a flawless syllogism we must admit that Socrates was mortal. Teaching students how to assess reasoning using deductive logic should, it was hoped, supply them with tools with which they could construct good arguments and find out the limitations of arguments that they encounter both in philosophy and generally. Moreover, these tools could be applied with the precision and confidence of a mathematical proof (Govier, 1988, p. 30).⁸

But the hope that students' general reasoning skills would improve by learning formal logic did not eventuate. Even those who took to formal logic well were not appreciably better than their peers in evaluating "real-world" arguments, that is, arguments encountered day to day, moral arguments, practical arguments, political arguments, etc. The problem was one of lack of transfer. Dexterity in formal logic did not translate – or transfer – to better real-world reasoning (Blair, 1988; Fisher, 1988, pp. 1–2).

There is a general agreement among informal logicians as to the probable causes of this lack of transfer, an agreement that led to some common responses. One of the main problems seemed to be a certain lack of fit between formal logic and common forms of reasoning – good and bad. Deductively valid inferences, it was recognized, are not the only kind of good or even common inference. Inductive, abductive, presumptive, and other kinds of inferences or argument schemes can be perfectly reasonable, and are much better at describing some forms of reasoning than deductive logic. Moreover, even arguments that are amenable to formal description will often

⁸ Informal logic was no *creatio ex nihilo* of the 1960's. "Historical Foundations of Informal Logic," edited by Douglas Walton and Alan Brinton (1997) compiles papers devoted to several of the main fathers of informal logic in Western philosophy from the sophists until Kant. The last paper by Ralph Johnson and Anthony Blair is devoted to the twentieth century movement, as is Johnson's "Making Sense of 'Informal Logic'" (2006).

take considerable effort to translate into deductive form. Argumentation is typically enthymematic. Which of any number of alternate missing premises should be added is not always easy to determine. As a consequence, the process of translation can be quite imprecise. This lack of precision or confidence in the propriety of the translation means that the precision that characterizes formal logic does not correlate in a straightforward manner into confidence in argument evaluations that depend solely on the formal logic prism (Blair, 1988, p. 19; Scriven, 2003, p. 39). In any case, complex arguments that logic students would have encountered outside the logic class were not making regular appearances within it. Arguments most commonly dissected were contrived – designed, as they were, to come under the logician’s knife. Also, students who were keen on the evaluation of real-world arguments would have found formal logic to be of no help when it came to the evaluation of the plausibility of premises. These problems were not visible only to logic teachers. Students too, often found the subject “difficult, uninteresting, and impractical” (Govier, 1988, p. 31).

The informal logic movement, in its pedagogical incarnation, rose out of such critiques, and a growing recognition that instruction in argument analysis and evaluation was in need of reform (Blair, 2006, p. 259). If logic students were going to get better at argument analysis and evaluation, logic instruction would have to be made more practical and interesting (Govier, 1988, p. 30). The logic taught would have to be a closer fit to good colloquial argumentation. Equally, it should also be a better fit to bad colloquial argumentation. That is, deficiencies in arguments identified by this new kind of logic should be descriptively close to common mistakes in reasoning, needing no extensive translation, and so easier to use given common constraints in time and expendable effort. These deficiencies should also be apposite. The accusation of deductive invalidity, even if accurate, would be of little import in argument evaluation if the argument is intended to be a non-deductive inference to the best explanation. Thus, informal logic embarked on a broadening of evaluative criteria, looking to include more inference types (inferences that, though invalid, could still be reasonable), criteria devoted to the acceptability of premises, and

criteria with which to identify common mistakes in reasoning, namely: fallacies. All these were to be introduced to students using a minimum of formalization or technical terminology – only the most practically promising tools were to be taught (Fisher & Scriven, 1997, p. 52), utilizing (as far as possible) non-contrived, interesting, real-life arguments (Johnson, 2006, pp. 246–7).

The first textbooks aimed at informal logic instruction in introductory university courses saw light in the 70's. Textbooks like Michael Scriven's "Reasoning" (1976) and Ralph Johnson and Anthony Blair's "Logical Self-Defense" (1994, first published in 1977) set the scene for much that was to follow. Before the decade's end the first of many international conferences devoted to informal logic was held. The following decade saw a mushrooming of interest in informal logic, the metamorphoses of the "Newsletter of Informal Logic" into the Journal "Informal Logic," and the establishment of a steady stream of articles, monographs, and textbooks, which, to date, is showing no signs of drying up. At this point, with high hopes for students' general argumentative skills, and, in Blair's words, "several shelves of [informal logic] textbooks" (Blair, 2006, p. 259) in view, it is time to pick up another strand of the critical thinking movement.

The First Wave of the Critical Thinking Movement

Educational interest in critical thinking was already well on its way by the time informal logic came along. There was a growing recognition among educators generally that normal methods of teaching and learning – primarily didactic teaching and rote-learning – left pupils and students unprepared when the need came for a reasonable application of knowledge in deciding what to believe or do, in problem solving, etc. The missing element, many thought, was direct tuition in reasoning skills (Fisher, 1988, pp. 1–2). Informal logicians, many of whom were already convinced that their enterprise was the articulation and imparting of “general and transferable reasoning/critical thinking skills,” found receptive ears (Fisher, 1988, p. 12).⁹ Their arguments were not without merit.

Critical thinking involves, in no small measure, an appropriate use of epistemologically justifiable criteria “to assess candidates for belief or action” (Blair, 2006, p. 256). More precisely, it is the reasons for and against these candidates that need to be assessed. That is, the plausibility of the premises and the quality of the inferences linking them to the conclusion that they purport to support need to be reasonably evaluated. This is nothing more and nothing less than argument evaluation *a la* informal logic (Johnson, 2006, p. 250). So, “to the degree that critical thinking entails being able to evaluate argumentation, a training in critical thinking will profit from knowledge of informal logic” (Johnson and Blair, 1994, pp. 11–12).

Many took the point one step further. The fact that informal logic was supposed to replace formal logic as the paragon of rational argumentation and its teaching, and the fact that research into critical thinking was still in its infancy, and definitions that nowadays would be considered too narrow were still in contention, meant that it was

⁹ See also Johnson (2006, pp. 248, 250).

no great leap of the imagination to equate critical thinking with informal logic. Perhaps critical thinking was simply the reasonable evaluation of arguments, conceived by informal logicians, and taught in informal logic courses. The introductory informal logic course was thereby rechristened “Critical Thinking” (Blair, 2006, p. 256; Johnson, 2006, p. 250).^{10,11}

Whether consubstantial or only largely so, the linking of informal logic and critical thinking saw an unmistakable increase in the popularity of critical thinking theory and instruction. Richard Paul (1996, p. 27) termed this the first wave of the modern critical thinking movement, a wave in which informal logic exercised the greatest influence.

¹⁰ There are several variants to the names of courses that are hardly distinguishable as far as content is concerned, for example, practical logic, critical reasoning, or introduction to critical thinking.

¹¹ An early forerunner can be found in the informal logic “credo” found in the very first issue of the “Newsletter of Informal Logic” in 1979 where it is written that informal logic is concerned with, inter alia, pedagogical questions like “how to design critical thinking courses [. . . and] what sorts of material to use” (Quoted in Lipman, 1991, p. 110). A more recent example is given in Fisher and Scriven (1997, pp. 59, 68) where informal logic is taken to be the meta-discipline of critical thinking: Informal logic is critical thought about critical thinking.

The Standard Approach

The first wave of critical thinking set a pattern of instruction that remains the most common form of practice to date. Critical thinking instruction became largely confined to one dedicated introductory level course in philosophy departments, with course content being so many variations on the theme of argument analysis and fallacy identification *a la* informal logic. Paul timed the first wave *circa* 1970–1996 (1996, p. 27). In all probability, however, his intention was not to pronounce that the wave was receding by 1996, at least not as far as teaching practice was concerned. Paul was writing in 1996, and was advocating for a new wave of research and instruction to remedy the limitations of that which preceded it. By 1996 it was fairly clear that research into critical thinking put the equation (or near equation) of critical thinking and informal logic in serious doubt. But actual teaching practice was another matter.

The equation of critical thinking with informal logic was noticed early on. In 1981 John McPeck wrote – referring to introductory logic, critical thinking, or critical reasoning courses going further back as much as a quarter of a century – that “whatever the title may be, the content of such courses consists chiefly of informal logic” (1981, p. 66). McPeck considered Scriven’s landmark 1976 informal logic textbook “Reasoning” as representative of the content found in critical thinking courses and textbooks generally. By 1988, both the focus of “Reasoning” on argument analysis and its explication of this process into a handful of now familiar steps were well established as the standard for informal logic instruction.

The core of this standard included teaching techniques for extracting an argument from an actual bit of discourse, usually from the popular media; displaying the argument’s logical structure and substance in one of several forms; and evaluating the argument. The arguments increase in size and difficulty, but the texts used are rarely

over a page long, and usually smaller. In the process, elements of the arguments, mainly premises and conclusions, are identified; unexpressed elements are postulated; and modifications are made in an attempt to clarify its author's intended meaning. Evaluation involves assessment of both premises and inferences. That is, both the reasons given to support the conclusion, and the connection between the reasons and the conclusion are assessed, so that both the substance and the structure of the argument are evaluated. Typically students are encouraged to look for deductively invalid inferences, weak inductive inferences, unsupported and controversial claims, and fallacies (Blair, 1988; Govier, 1988, pp. 34–5).

Still in 1988, Joanne Kurfiss (1988) published a report on critical thinking in higher education claiming that

Teaching “critical thinking,” at least at the introductory level, has become almost synonymous with the methods of applied informal logic. Textbooks on critical thinking and courses based on informal logic focus on the structural features of arguments, criteria for evaluation of arguments, and the fallacies or sources of error that can make an argument seem valid [broadly speaking] when it is not. (p. 14)

A year later John Hougland wrote: “To judge from textbooks on the market and reports from fellow teachers at conferences and meetings, the most widely adopted organizing principle for such courses is argument analysis” (1989, p. 273). Things were not appreciably different in the 90's (Johnson and Blair, 1994, pp. 10–2; Walters, 1990a, pp. 451–2). Blair's 2006 exploratory survey of informal logic and critical thinking courses in sixteen leading universities in the United States and Canada, as well as similar results here in New Zealand, leads me to believe that the

standard approach to the teaching of critical thinking has remained remarkably stable up to now (Blair, 2006).^{12,13}

Owing as much as it does to informal logic, a lot was required of the standard critical thinking course in terms of transfer. The fact that informal logic, as an educational reform movement, drew its sustenance from concern about the lack of transfer from formal logic courses meant that transfer became a leading measure of its success. Are informal logic courses and critical thinking courses based on an informal logic core successful in improving the reasoning of those who take them? To what degree do they facilitate critical thinking outside the informal logic/critical thinking class? Do they improve thinking in other academic subjects? Do they improve the student's thinking outside the academy? Is the student better able to see through illicit persuasion in popular media and culture? Do students become more critical towards their own beliefs? In short, how much do these courses help as far as education for critical thinking is concerned? All of these are questions of transfer – of the transference of results to areas outside the classroom walls.

The genetic connection with formal logic would have been enough to raise the search for evidence of transfer to a prominent position among the aims of first wave reformers and practitioners alike. A further incentive was the inevitable need to prove the effectiveness of any educational change or intervention in an overcrowded and under-funded curriculum. This second impetus was, I suspect, the real driving force behind the rapid inflation of the questions surrounding transfer into the considerable proportions of “the great critical thinking debate” (Weinstein, 1993).

¹² Blair's data comes from calendar course descriptions. Course descriptions from all seven New Zealand universities found in official websites in January 2007 (see Appendix) exhibit an unmistakable similarity to their North American counterparts.

¹³ The assertion that there is a standard critical thinking course should not be taken too far. Critical thinking courses differ in many respects. It should become clearer below that during its noteworthy career the introductory critical thinking course has been tweaked in a bewildering array of directions. I dare say that as far as my own involvement in the teaching of “PHIL 103: Critical Reasoning” at the University of Waikato is concerned, I never taught the same course twice. I have a feeling that many of my fellow teachers would have similar views. Of course, some differences are more substantial than others. Some critical thinking courses – by absolute numbers, many – do not fit the mould at all. But most do. This loose similarity, based around a common core – a primary emphasis on argument analysis plus fallacies *a la* informal logic – is sufficient for my purpose.

The approach to critical thinking that first wavers took could too easily be interpreted by teachers of other academic subjects as stepping on their toes. Even if first wave reformers meant only to complement existing studies in the various academic subjects, and even if separate instruction in critical thinking by way of informal logic could live peacefully with the other subjects under some conceivable scenarios, a defensive reaction was not without reason. Might not claims with regard to the general applicability of skills taught in the standard critical thinking course lead some policy makers – rightly or wrongly – to siphon much-needed resources away from some subjects to this little-known newcomer? The claims to transfer, and in particular, the claims to generalizability – the transference of good thinking to academic subjects generally – had to be sorted out.

The ensuing debate, in at least the following respect, was and remains somewhat malformed: Its empirical arm is disproportionately smaller than its theoretical or conceptual counterpart. The voluminous theoretical output that this debate has led to, when compared to the empirical work that the debate should have encouraged, brings to mind the whimsical form of a Fiddler crab – one arm appearing to have succumbed to gigantism, the other starved of nutrients. Unlike the Fiddler crab, however, form does not fit function. Theoreticians have consistently called for empirical research to be carried out to help settle some of the questions that they were grappling with.¹⁴ But conclusive empirical evidence is yet to materialize. The empirical work cited in the theoretical literature was never sufficient in quality or quantity to support the strong claims that had to be adjudicated. The lack of “proof” may itself have contributed to the size of the theoretical controversy by encouraging redoubling of efforts to settle the matter by theoretical means. In the following paragraphs I will attempt a brief summary of the empirical side of things, after which discussion will shift to the theoretical work, of which I intend to make extensive use.

¹⁴ See for example Kurfiss (1988, p. 23).

The empirical evidence points in two different directions. The first, and – guardedly – positive direction, concerns the transfer of better thinking practices from the typical critical thinking course to other academic subjects and some aspects of everyday reasoning. This transfer is, at the very least, possible. But just how effective such courses are in producing transfer, and what are those still variable elements of content and delivery that are more likely to achieve the desired effect, remains unclear. Diane Halpern’s oft-cited paper (2001) provides a good example of the kind of evidence that theoretical work has had to rely on. After several pages recounting the difficulties involved in carrying out the necessary research,¹⁵ she brings together seven strands of evidence that she believes offer enough cumulative support for the possibility of moderate improvement in thinking skills outside the critical thinking classroom. The studies that Halpern cites, however, are mostly from related areas (e.g. developmental psychology, problem-solving and creative or higher-order thinking skills), or using dubious or hard to interpret data (e.g. student perceptions, IQ tests). Regrettably, methodologically defensible research results from standard critical thinking courses are simply too few and far between to answer questions that go beyond the mere possibility of modest transfer.

Of course, to say that some transfer is possible is to say very little. The possible may yet prove to be less than typical (Mackenzie, 1991, pp. 56–7; Paul, 1996, pp. 27–8). The benefit of this research lies mainly in silencing those nay-sayers on the extreme side of the theoretical debate like McPeck, who conclude on conceptual grounds that general thinking skills cannot be taught because they do not exist.¹⁶

Suppose, however, that it can be established that modest gains are typical and should be expected. Such gains, in all likelihood, will be too small to vindicate a course in argument analysis and fallacies as sufficient by itself. This much, the evidence can support. In Paul’s words, the critical thinking course “can at best open the door to the beginning of critical thinking, provide an opening framework” (Paul, 1996, p. 28).

¹⁵ See also Jewell (1991, p. 80) on this point.

¹⁶ A more charitable version of his position will be dealt with below.

The mantra “a critical thinking course does not a critical thinker make” can be seen as another positive outcome of the diminutive empirical arm of our crab. It is one that the staunchest proponents of separate courses in critical thinking can readily accept, and it is one that has been a driving force behind an ever growing list of alternative or supplementary critical thinking interventions on offer or at least under discussion (several of which will feature below).

So much for the positive side. Empirical evidence also points in a more sinister direction. The transfer of good thinking from the critical thinking class to another class down the hall or across campus, or, alternatively, to the student’s daily encounters with unscrupulous professional persuaders and their handiwork, is of little concern to me here. The backbone of my argument revolves around the direction of critical thought towards one’s own deeply held beliefs, or to beliefs that are important, central even, to the student’s life and identity. Keeping in mind that the current discussion is still limited to the standard critical thinking course, the more relevant kind of transfer has to be, in the main, the critique of one’s own deeply held beliefs using argument analysis and fallacy identification skills.

As in the preceding case, little doubt remains as to the possibility of such results. Some students do go on to question and change their own deeply held beliefs using the skills learned in the critical thinking or informal logic course. The outlook for typical results, however, is much dimmer. The cumulative evidence – again, mostly from related fields, with a substantial grounding in the social sciences, but including a considerable experiential element from critical thinking teachers’ and scholars’ perception of course results – strongly suggests that this kind of transfer is not typical.

I say “strongly suggests” with little fear of exaggeration. I do not mean to play down the need for more research. Accurate empirical studies detailing the extent of such transfer (or lack of transfer) among the community of current and past critical thinking students – a community that now spans innumerable thousands, and is

several decades deep – are sorely needed. For one thing, despite the commanding popularity of the standard approach, critical thinking teaching is variable. Research that would discriminate between, at least, the major strands of critical thinking instruction, could teach us much about the differential strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches in producing desired transfer effects. Nevertheless, I sincerely doubt that this kind of research would change the overall picture when it comes to transfer to deeply held beliefs. Of course, it remains possible that a delayed transfer could be found. A delay several years long is still consistent with negative teacher perceptions – teachers simply don't follow their students' progress for long. But extant evidence makes such an “invisible” transfer unlikely.

As far as the big picture goes, the research suggested above will in all likelihood be a translation or replication of lessons learned in history, sociology, psychology and elsewhere to a specific educational field. As I hope to make patently clear later on, many prominent critical thinking scholars and educators have already been working on the assumption that the problem exists, and have produced a considerable body of literature devoted to its solution. But on the ground – in instruction aimed at critical thought at all levels of education – the effect of this growing corpus is as yet slim. The *prima facie* rapid increase in popularity of critical thinking as a goal of education has, in the opinion of many, vastly outstripped the willingness of decision-makers to implement some of the radical changes that seem to be required by this problem. Since the suggestions that I will eventually give will no doubt seem just as radical as some of the others, they will no doubt face the same obstacles. A good amount of empirical evidence showing that the tentative steps taken thus far in instruction for critical thinking are as yet far from sufficient to produce the desired effect – people who are willing and able to think critically about their own deeply held beliefs – may go a long way in motivating more substantial, and hopefully more fruitful, efforts.

For now I abandon efforts to elucidate the empirical side of things. More similar material will be introduced piecemeal as my argument develops. Next, I move on to

treat the business end of the Fiddler: the theoretical or conceptual arm of the great critical thinking debate.

The Generalizability Question

I left the previous section taking more or less for granted that there is a lack of sufficient transfer of skills from typical critical thinking classrooms to students' deeply held beliefs. In this section I would like to explore one possible explanation, or rather, a family of related explanations of this lack. These explanations revolve around the question of generalizability: Are the skills taught in critical thinking courses really general skills? Do they apply to all disciplines and spheres of thought? Do they apply well in some spheres, but not in others, or in some contexts but not in others? If it were established that such skills are in some way deficient when taken out of a particular environment, it would be less of a surprise to find that students leave their argument analysis toolkit behind when they exit that environment.

Protagonists of the generalizability debate within critical thinking literature have been divided (somewhat crudely) into two opposing camps of “generalists” and “specificists” (Bailin and Siegel, 2003, p. 184). Specificists like John McPeck and Mark Weinstein believe that the skills taught in critical thinking courses are not easily transferable because they are not general, but are rather heavily or even wholly dependant on specific contexts of inquiry. Generalists like Robert Ennis and Harvey Siegel have been defending the generalizability of the ingredients of the standard course against the sometimes overly zealous attacks of specificists. In what follows I will survey several of the arguments and counter-arguments by these scholars and others. I will tread what I consider to be a middle path, staying clear of the excesses of both camps. My immediate aim is to expound on those limitations of the standard course with regards to critical thought applied reflexively to one's own deeply held beliefs that the generalizability debate can serve to highlight.

Pure Generalizability and *de facto* Teaching

I begin with a brief definition of “pure generalizability:” This is a position that holds that critical thinking consists, both in principle and in practice, wholly in the application of general skills and standards – in the main, those that are taught in the standard course – to any and all subjects, and that such application is independent of the vagaries of the different subjects or of in-depth knowledge of those subjects.¹⁷ Pure generalizability is no longer a position that any scholar in the generalist camp defends. In all fairness, it is doubtful whether generalists ever held such a position. Nevertheless, I believe some of the hyperbole to which specifists have succumbed will be more readily forgiven if their critique will be taken as aimed primarily at an extreme version of the generalizability thesis, rather than the moderate versions found in the literature. Reacting against extreme generalizability when generalists are in fact moderate does not necessarily implicate specifists in underhandedness. In the early years of the first wave, scholars were rather neglectful when it came to subject specific aspects of critical thought, and it was easier to interpret this lack of emphasis as denial. Specifist critiques had the welcome effect of driving generalists to state more clearly their conceptions of the generality of various aspects of critical thinking, as well as the limits of that generality.

There is more to pure generalizability, however, than simple mirage. It is all too often a regular stowaway or a regrettable by-product of the standard critical thinking textbook and course. This is partly due to a neglect of subject specificity in the formative years of the standard approach, and partly a result of the practical limitations of single course instruction. In a course that is likely to be the only instruction in argument analysis and fallacies students will encounter, limitations of time dictate against in-depth investigation into critical thought in multiple subjects. The time available is barely enough to introduce the logical or inferential aspects of

¹⁷ See Bailin (1999a, p. 271) for a version of pure generalizability that is less tied to the content of the standard course.

argument analysis. Adding to this the burdens made necessary when such skills are applied to complex issues or matters that require disciplinary knowledge and know-how is considered by most as unfeasible. Instead, the standard approach has come to concentrate its effort on the assessment of inferences or logical forms by the use of examples and exercises that rely on little more than knowledge of the former, augmented by common knowledge. This, in effect, relegates the evaluation of the plausibility of controversial premises, and the evaluation of whole arguments in relation to a context that may need to be “thickly” described and deeply understood, to relative insignificance (O'Rourke, Michael, 2005; Polycarp, 2001a).

Whether through faithfulness to a mould, or the practical limitation of the medium, the standard approach has committed an unintended crime of omission. Its lack of emphasis on subject specific aspects of critical thought has created a “hidden curriculum” evident in students’ perception and behaviour: a belief among many graduates of the course that an analysis of an argument’s logical structure constitutes critical thought *simpliciter*, or else, behaviour along this line. To repeatedly ignore relevant complexity in the practice of argument analysis is to assume a pernicious form of pure generalizability.¹⁸ The fear of such a result, let alone its commonality, is sufficient justification for a specifist reaction, to which I now turn.

¹⁸ I will later endeavour to show that such behaviour is especially pernicious when it comes to sensitive beliefs.

Pure Subject Specificity

In contradistinction to the pure generalist thesis, the pure specifist holds that there simply are no general critical thinking skills or standards, and that, therefore, teaching critical thinking through a general course is an ill-conceived venture – wasteful at best, and at worst, an obstacle to critical thought. The thesis’ leading proponent is McPeck, although even as early as his landmark “Critical Thinking and Education” (1981) his support of pure specificity seems inconsistent with other facets of his contribution to the generalizability debate.¹⁹ While others remain content simply to point to the contradiction,²⁰ I believe it does not step out of the bounds of charity to interpret his argument for pure specificity along a slightly more moderate line. Nevertheless, his hard-line position is still worth a brief recounting here, not so much on account of its popularity – and it should be acknowledged that pure specificity is not without its followers – but rather as a marker, to delimit the other extremity of the debate and set the scene for the qualifications, concessions, and conciliations that follow. I will concentrate on the two most commonly found forms of pure subject specificity.

McPeck’s most notorious attempt to establish subject specificity – a line of argument that Ennis later termed “conceptual subject specificity” – asserts that positing general critical thinking skills or standards is incoherent. Thinking about everything generally, so the argument goes, is inconceivable. All thinking, and therefore all critical thinking, is about some particular subject: “Critical thinking, like any thinking, is necessarily connected to particular objects of thought” (McPeck, 1990a, p. 11). The fact that all thinking comes partnered with an object of thought is proof of a necessary link between good thought and its object, such that that talk of general critical thinking is empty, and all critical thinking skills and standards are specific to particular subjects (Ennis, 1989, pp. 5, 8–9; Henson, 1989, pp. 305–6).

¹⁹ I will discuss some of these in the next section.

²⁰ See for example Gardner (1996, pp. 445–6).

McPeck's argument, as it stands, has been shown by Ennis, Siegel, Paul, and others to commit a non sequitur (Bailin and Siegel, 2003, p. 184). It simply does not follow from the fact that thinking is always about something, that there are no general aspects to thought: that commonalities between thought about two or more different subjects cannot exist. Ennis asks: "Why should the fact that critical thinking is always about something imply that we cannot have general critical thinking dispositions and abilities (and instruction of them) that can be applied to particular cases?" (Ennis, 1989, p. 9) McPeck's conceptual argument, as it stands, assumes and leaves undefended the claim that there are insufficient commonalities between forms and objects of thought for general critical thinking skills and standards to make any sense.

McPeck, however, did not leave it at that. In a second, "epistemological" route to pure subject specificity, McPeck and others endeavour to establish the non-existence of common skills and standards for good reasoning by postulating various differences between objects of thought – differences of sufficient magnitude to put the propriety of generic standards of evaluation in doubt. Here is the basic form of the argument: First there is the rather benign, but often vague postulation of difference at the level of the object. For example, "objects of thought," McPeck writes, "can and do differ enormously" (1990a, p. 11). The second step of the argument connects difference at the level of the object to a parallel difference at the level of thought. This connection is typically made by way of a scholarly community: a community of experts that educators would tend to accept as a trustworthy indicator of good thought in various subjects. The scholarly community charged with the investigation of subject X, it is said, has come up with "a distinctive logic, methodology or philosophical orientation" (McPeck as cited in Brown, 1998, p. 29) suitable for the investigation of X. The pattern is thus, a distinct subject with its own group of experts who approach the subject through a unique way of thinking representing a completely distinct model for critical thought, and therefore no general critical thinking.

I say completely distinct rather than simply distinguishable because for pure epistemological specificity to follow, the divisions between the different modes of thought of the various communities of experts have to be, to an extent, hermetically isolated. Too much commonality between them and we are no longer dealing with pure epistemological specificity (Higgins & Baumfield, 1998, p. 393).²¹

According to this line of reasoning, different questions (topics, subjects, domains, fields, disciplines, etc.) require knowledge of different facts for their resolution. Without this knowledge critical thought is impossible, and the skills taught in the standard critical thinking course (or any supposedly general thinking skills) do not supply this requisite knowledge. Since the skills taught in the standard critical thinking course are insufficient – perhaps grossly insufficient – for critical thought on particular subjects, they are not general in the required educational sense.²²

I hasten to add, however, that pure specificists (of the epistemological variety) would not admit any generality to the content of the standard critical thinking course, so the argument above should not be seen as implying a formula that has critical thought as the result of a simple addition of requisite knowledge to the content of such courses. Rather, the application of thinking skills, described in a generic form, to specific subject matter, involves their transformation by that subject matter. The facts relevant to the topic determine their application, and so, their meaning. A truly general skill, it is said, cannot be applied differently in different contexts: Difference in application implies different skills (Gardner & Johnson, 1996, p. 444). The very meaning of what constitutes acceptable, relevant, and sufficient reasons; the very meaning of what constitutes a good argument interpretation; the very meaning of what constitutes an inconsistency, or clarity, open-mindedness, and any of the other skills and standards promulgated by generalists, is always dependant on the various topics, and is

²¹ There is another sense of pure specificity, however, that need not go that far. From a practical educational point of view, it would be enough for there to be a psychological barrier of more modest proportions – just enough for transfer of good thinking from one subject to another to be practically uneducable – for pure specificity to make sense pedagogically. I will deal with this kind of practical or psychological specificity shortly.

²² Davies (2006, pp. 184–5) offers a similar interpretation.

particular to them (Barrow, 1991, p. 12; Kurfiss, 1988, p. 19). This transformation, it is held, “far transcends the importance of preliminary generic descriptions” (Smith as cited in Brown, 1998, p. 27). Because “standards of evidence for the evaluation of claims, as well as rules of inference and reasoning, are entirely indigenous to the separate disciplines [topics, and so on], whose methodological principles alone dictate what is reasonable, well-founded, true, etc.” (Henson, 1989, p. 305) critical thinking always “presupposes considerable knowledge of the subject area in question” (McPeck, 1990c, p. 43). A generic description (and pedagogy) of thinking skills must therefore give way to one that is based on the successful behavior of communities of experts and associated bodies of knowledge (Weinstein as cited in Weinstein, 1997, pp. 81–3).

The pure specificist position, then, is one of incommensurability: Skills and criteria of critical thought are entirely indigenous to specific fields or topics and completely distinct from each other. The so called general skills and criteria that constitute the standard approach do not apply across different subjects because they are not sufficiently similar to the skills and criteria of critical thought that the various objects of inquiry demand (Ennis, 1997, p. 5; Siegel, 1991, p. 19).

Moderate generalists would agree that differences in skills and criteria for good thinking can be found between various fields. Ennis (1989, p. 8), for example, points to a strong reliance on deductive proofs in mathematics, which he contrasts with non-deductive statistical and best explanation inferences in the social and empirical sciences. There is also no great difficulty for the generalist to admit that scholars often neglect to formally recognize the validity of general standards and skills – that is, that various fields of thought seem unique to their practitioners (Rambo, 1991, p. 529). Neither of these admissions, generalists recognize, would allow for pure specificism to follow with any force. Differences, or lack of recognition of similarities by some experts, do not equal lack of similarity. They don’t even show similarities to be uncommon or unimportant. Examples of differences can be countered with

examples of similarities.²³ The generalist claim that similarities exist between distinct fields, disciplines, subjects, and topics, some of which are appropriate content for general critical thinking instruction remains in contention.

Generalists also point to intra-field differences (Ennis, 1989, p. 8), which, when added to inter-field commonalities, show concepts like *field* and its cognates to be too vague to do the predictive job assigned to them by pure specifism. According to Siegel (1991, p. 22) no matter how *field* is defined, whether narrowly (such that every inquiry would constitute a field onto itself) or broadly (e.g. science as a field), many skills and standards of good thought simply do not fit neatly within it, and so which skills and standards apply to which fields (or some such) remains an open question to be investigated empirically. The recognition of a field as distinct does not allow us to infer that good thinking within it is so unique that the contents of the standard approach do not apply to it.

Underpinning general critical thinking skills and standards is, generalists claim, a single scientific or scholarly epistemological framework. It is this epistemology that is the source of legitimacy for general skills and criteria (Siegel, 1991, pp. 23–4), and it is this epistemology that is the source of legitimacy for subject specific skills and criteria, the latter being an interpretation, adaptation, and articulation of basic epistemological assumptions and general skills and criteria to fit the vagaries of specific subjects (Brown, 1998, p. 33; Polycarp, 2001a, sect. 3). Severing fields of thought from this underlying epistemology and from each other means severing them from rational justification and from everyday language and knowledge (Paul, 1992a,

²³ Here are some examples given in direct response to pure specifist claims. Govier (1988, p. 33): “Certain basic styles or types of argument, such as dilemmas, syllogisms, analogies, appeals to authority, occur in a variety of contexts.” Siegel (1991, p. 27): “Criteria of deductive validity, inductive strength, observational adequacy, explanatory power.” Pithers (2000, p. 246): “Learning to look for contested conceptions of any phenomenon,” among others. Ennis (1989, p. 8): “Agreement that conflict of interest counts against the credibility of a source, and agreement on the importance of the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions.” Of course, most skills and criteria expounded in the standard approach and in extensive lists of thinking skills common in the literature are thought of as general and important.

p. 9), as well as from any external critique, without which pure specificity becomes a self-defeating relativism (Brown, 1998, pp. 33–5).

The fact that, at times, general skills and standards will need some “interpretation, adaptation, and articulation” for them to be successfully applied in various domains does not imply to generalists that different skills and standards are involved. To show that one has two skills rather than one, or two standards rather than one, it would be necessary to show more than mere difference in application in different fields. This much should be expected, as different fields or topics can have different sorts of claims, and different sorts of claims require different sorts evidence to support them. What the specifist position requires are cases in which difference is found in the application of skills or standards to the same sort of claims in different fields. Gardner’s criticism of generalizability is thereby diffused. A general skill can in fact apply differently in different contexts. Only where the contexts are sufficiently similar will difference in application imply different skills (Siegel, 1991, p. 22).

Moderate Subject Specificity

As already intimated, fidelity to the generalists' most staunch opponent does not necessitate as strict an interpretation of subject specificity as the descriptions above have suggested to some. Even if, as far as generalizability goes, to say that McPeck's corpus has a moderate side would be something of a misnomer, he does occasionally step back a little from the pure variety of specificity. For example, he writes: "I believe there are, in fact, some very limited general thinking skills" (1990a, p. 12). In the next quote there is no explicit acceptance of general thinking skills but it could be implied: "Because objects of thought can and do differ enormously in scope, quality, and variety, I argue that there can be no one general skill or limited set of skills (including formal logic) which could do justice to this wide variety of objects" (p. 11). The words *do justice* suggest to me that McPeck's more credible target is not generalism as such, but rather a pure generalist position that takes the content of the standard critical thinking course as sufficient in and of itself. And again: "This is the reason that there can be no completely general set of thinking skills" (pp. 11–2). If there is "no completely general set of thinking skills," perhaps there is a partly general one? Could "completely general" be interpreted thus: "so general as to be sufficient in and of itself for critical thought in any and all subjects"? Lastly: "Logic, as such, has little (and often no) role to play in [. . . reason assessment]. Siegel, on the other hand, wants to make a case that a subject-neutral logic plays a much larger role in reason assessment than I acknowledge" (McPeck, 1990b, p. 98). In these quotes McPeck shows a willingness to step back from the "either/or" – the false dilemma – of pure specificity and generalizability.

Again, I must stress, McPeck does not go far away from pure specificity even in his most generous moments. When he admits to "some very limited general thinking skills," he means exactly that. In McPeck's view, thinking skills are less and less useful as their generality increases: Truly useful skills are limited to "specific domains or narrower areas of application," and general thinking skills like "not

contradicting oneself, [and] not believing everything one hears,” are “trivially obvious,” (McPeck, 1990a, p. 12) and far from adequate for critical thought (Gardner et al., 1996, pp. 446–7). A similar point is made in Bailin, Case, Coombs and Daniels (1999a, p. 279):

Given the diversity of problems and problem contexts, we believe that any account of the steps involved in problem solving or decision making will either be so vague as to be largely unhelpful, or they will be so specific that they will have little generalizability beyond a specific class of problems or decisions.

David Perkins (1986) maintains that this “generality-power tradeoff” is a “widely recognized relationship between the generality and power of thinking tactics” (p. 5) but he is less dismissive than McPeck about general critical thinking skills, which, according to him, may “offer modest gains across a wide front” (p. 56). The extremely modest nature of McPeck’s qualification of pure specificity notwithstanding, his apparent abandonment of the pure variety goes a long way towards making a critique of pure specificity superfluous. Specificity admits of moderate versions – more workable than the pure form, and less easy to knock down. In what follows, I offer a brief description of several arguments that attempt to establish a more circumscribed form of subject specificity. Critiques of moderate specificity presented later will apply *perforce* to its less compromising relative.

Robin Barrow (1991) presents an epistemological specificity that is “impure” in at least two ways. First, it stops shy of claiming every topic has its own and only its own standards for rational evaluation. Instead, Barrow talks of the broader scholarly divisions between morality, science, mathematics, art, philosophy, and perhaps even individual disciplines, but even here they are seen as distinct rather than mutually exclusive. Second, Barrow focuses on a particular aspect of standard critical thinking instruction – namely, practicing argument analysis mainly on neutral and trivial examples – not generality *per se*:

The material for such programs is generally deliberately chosen with a view to such things as avoiding technical vocabulary, avoiding specialised concepts, avoiding the need for unfamiliar or unstated information, and avoiding issues that have no immediate concern for students. (p. 15)

For Barrow this means avoiding too much: “Such programs typically avoid the very dimension that needs to be tackled, namely the embodiment of critical thought within certain complex, sophisticated, and important areas of inquiry” (p. 15). Barrow accuses the standard approach of triviality: Standard courses in critical thinking “may help one to respond rationally to a question such as whether a particular piece of argument about abortion contains any obvious contradictions, but they will not help one to think critically about the issue of abortion,” an issue that would demand much broader knowledge. Worse still, if the standard model of critical thinking instruction is allowed to dominate, development of critical thought where it actually counts will be neglected. Notice that Barrow explicitly admits some usefulness and generality to the standard approach. This usefulness, however, is far from sufficient for critical thought about abortion, and about other important issues. To treat it as such could mean neglect of important instruction and relevant information.

More impurities can be found in Weinstein (1989). Mark Weinstein accepts that “much of what is included in the [. . . standard critical thinking course] is general, discipline neutral and relevant to aspects of instruction in a variety of college courses” (p. 38). But, like McPeck and Barrow, he does not believe it is sufficient, and he questions whether it is even necessary. Weinstein’s main pedagogical concern is with teaching for critical thought within the academic disciplines, which for him, requires mastery of disciplinary forms of inquiry. These are embedded in the language of the disciplines: their paradigmatic practices, concepts, arguments or argument types, and competencies (pp. 35–7). Weinstein does not take disciplinary languages to be *a priori* exclusive. The existence or lack of important commonalities that may be learned in the general critical thinking course is a question best answered

empirically. To the extent that disciplines depend and require different argument types or epistemological norms, the standard critical thinking course loses its applicability. This should be determined by “careful analyses of the particulars of the various disciplines” (p. 40).

Admitting that this question has an empirical element is an important concession that McPeck would not allow (Brown, 1998, p. 29). But in Weinstein’s case this concession should not be seen as overly generous, since he believes that attention to “the particulars of the various disciplines” reveals more than enough specificity. In his view, the “epistemological and logical criteria” promoted in the standard course “are not obviously identical with or readily translated into correlative principles in the various fields.” He claims this to be established by recent philosophy of science:

The attempts of philosophers of science to come up with general analyses of scientific practice that are both logically based and descriptively adequate has been seen as unsatisfactory to philosophers themselves. Both within and among the disciplines, faithfulness to scientific practice points up the inadequacy of the available general accounts of scientific method, of causation, of induction, and of the nature and role of observation. (p. 41)

Elsewhere (Weinstein, 1994, p. 154) he refers to psychological experiments on reasoning:

The view that argument analysis is not an undifferentiated skill is increasingly apparent within cognitive psychology. Research on as fundamental and pervasive an ability as that of syllogistic reasoning points to the enormous influence of context on subjects’ reasoning abilities. The salient context includes such items as the familiarity of the subject matter and the complexity of the language employed, as determinants of subjects’ ability to reason well. . . . Even in ordinary circumstances, a subject’s ability to access, recall and apply evidence has been seen to be a function of extra-logical beliefs and

underlying attitudes. . . . Cognitive psychologists see schema, organized structures within which information is situated and from which inferences are constructed and assessed, as the key factor in understanding reasoning.

Weinstein is not alone in admitting an empirical aspect to the generalizability debate, and in basing specificist conclusions on it, some quite bleak. Peter Gardner (1996, p. 452), for example, believes that “the bulk of the [empirical] evidence is overwhelmingly against the existence of general thinking skills of the transferable variety.” Surely, he adds, “this conspicuous failure to find such ‘skills’ cannot be discounted as the result of bad teaching or stupid teachers, any more than it can be rectified by a more effective pedagogy” (p. 452). McPeck alludes on occasion to empirical matters. For instance, he writes that although some logical principles are general this does not guarantee “psychological transfer” (1990f, p. 15). There is no guarantee, that is, that students who learn a general skill or standard in one context, will use it (or even, it is sometimes alleged, know how to use it) in another (Henson, 1989).²⁴ But McPeck is adamant, however, that the generalizability question has its answer in theory.

Thus, although Weinstein’s approach allows general thinking skills, for him thinking skills are in large measure disciplinary skills – those that have been shown to produce good results. The same goes for standards of good thought – these “reflect the central concepts and methods in the field” (Weinstein, 2003, p. 282). The pedagogical ramifications Weinstein draws from all this leave him with no qualms about an educational approach that leaves the standard course by the wayside. “The concern,” he writes, “is less with the general concepts of informal logic and more with the concept maps that govern assessment of information in the fields” (Weinstein, 1989, p. 45).

Another specificist position of the impure ilk can be found in Winch (2006). Christopher Winch believes that critical thought needs always and mainly subject

²⁴ See also Glaser (1984).

specific knowledge. Purely structural argument analysis and fallacy identification – in his view, the dominant approach to critical thinking – is at best only preliminary:

While a training in deductive and inductive logic may be useful in assessing arguments in contexts outside the logic classroom, we cannot assume that it will give us all we need in order to do this. . . . A training in critical thinking could only be a preliminary to expertise in argument evaluation and is certainly no substitute for a painstaking acquaintance with the subject matters with which discussions and fields of controversy are concerned. (p. 70)

Why should the lion's share of argument evaluation necessitate "a painstaking acquaintance with subject matters"? Winch holds that some argument forms are subject specific (p. 58). To this, he adds two more contextual factors. First, real-life reasoning is context-dependent because of implicit subject specific premises. This is the problem of reconstruction or interpretation of arguments already mentioned in relation to formal logic. Real arguments are typically in need of interpretation prior to being evaluated, part of which often involves supplying missing premises. Although, strictly speaking, an infinite number of permutations of such additions are possible, even if the interpreter is limited to missing premises that would make the argument deductively valid or inductively forceful, students of the standard approach are typically asked to interpret arguments in line with the intention of the arguer, and where this cannot be determined, to choose the interpretation that will give the conclusion the most support. The contextual complication is born of the need to have sufficient knowledge of the intention of the arguer and the differential suitability of missing premises – their acceptability, plausibility, relevance, etc. – both of which will often require much more than common knowledge and familiarity with good and bad inference types (Gardner et al., 1996, p. 450).

The need to have enough background knowledge to be able to reasonably decide about the differential plausibility of candidate missing premises applies perforce to those premises that are explicitly given. I trust no one would seriously doubt that a

prerequisite for critical thought about the causes of the first world war is familiarity with a multitude of facts about the war and much besides (Bailin, Case, Coombs, & Daniels, 1999a). This requirement will hold even if all arguments concerning alternative theories of its causes were given explicitly, at every level, *ad infinitum*. In this case, argument analysis will eventually require judging the plausibility of the premises given.

In McPeck (1990f, pp. 5–6, 10–11) the largest, most important and difficult part of reasoning correctly is said to involve the evaluation of the truth of premises rather than inferences. Assessing inferences “comprises only a very small portion of reasoning ability” (p. 5). To teach students about the assessment of inferences, and then ask them to look for the relevant information as an afterthought, is to lead them astray. The evaluation of truth is often complex and controversial, and the reliability of information questionable, especially where important public issues are concerned (p. 9). In his words:

For actual problems, the required knowledge is seldom complete, almost always problematic, and susceptible to several interpretations. Moreover, the criteria for what should count as relevant knowledge are themselves problematic. The relevant knowledge cannot be assumed to be complete or obvious. And a person’s critical assessment of things, such as knowledge claims, etc., will necessarily be influenced by their experience, understanding, cognitive perspective, and values. (McPeck, 1990e, p. 28)

These complexities mean that the needed subject specific knowledge cannot be limited to the facts of the matter, and must also include relevant know-how: “principles which govern good thinking in particular areas” that are often quite specific (Bailin et al., 1999a, p. 272). For any area, then, critical thought requires not only acquaintance with the “products” of good reasoning relevant to that area, but also the relevant “processes” of reasoning (McPeck, 1990e, p. 31). The latter requires familiarity with the epistemology of the subject because it “consists of the ability to

reflect upon, to question effectively, and to suspend judgment or belief about the required knowledge composing the problem at hand” (p. 28), including the “foundations or assumptions of that area” (McPeck, 1990b, p. 98).

The standard approach to critical thinking betrays the “informational complexity” of many of the problems that we deem important, a problem that is only intensified if, according to McPeck, most errors in thought are factual rather than inferential (Gardner et al., 1996, pp. 446–7, 453).

So much for subject specific premises. The second contextual complication mentioned by Winch is the popularity of “inductive argumentation, whose soundness will itself be, to a considerable degree, dependent on local, subject specific considerations” (2006, p. 61). That is, added to the in-depth subject specific knowledge that may be needed to ascertain the plausibility of premises – a feature shared by both deductive and non-deductive arguments – is, in the case of the latter, the question of the force of the inference. I take Winch’s usage of *induction* to mean all non-deductive argument forms. In non-deductive argument forms, good arguments with all true premises need not, and often do not, establish the truth of the conclusion beyond all reasonable doubt. Often, and especially in fields of controversy, numerous good non-deductive arguments can be found for contradictory propositions. Judging the relative probative power of these arguments will in many cases require a much more in-depth knowledge than that supplied by the standard critical thinking course and common knowledge. This is another important point, exploration of which I must delay until the centre of attention shifts to aspects of subject specificity more closely related to the kind of critical thinking with which I am concerned.

I limit my sample of moderate specificity to the common forms above, despite the fact that establishing some form of epistemological specificity would support my thesis. These should be sufficient to highlight major relevant points of contention and agreement between generalists and specifists. I now move to generalist critiques of some of the moderate specifist arguments outlined, after which I will attempt to

synthesize some conclusions relevant to the current context. Specifically, I want to touch on the generality-power trade-off, the interpretation of available evidence, the claim that there isn't enough generality for transfer to occur, the claim that the standard approach is insufficient for critical thought, and lastly, the claim that knowledge outstrips the inferential component in importance.

Sharon Bailin (2002, p. 366) gives the following example to illustrate one extreme of the trade-off between generality and power: "The procedure 'bring to bear the theoretical knowledge relevant to the problem' . . . could be applied to any thinking task whatsoever and is virtually useless in terms of providing any help in particular cases of interpretation." Here the general procedure is "virtually useless" because the tasks of finding, studying, and understanding both the requisite theoretical knowledge and the manner of its application to the inquiry at hand – tasks that can be incredibly taxing – are not advanced one iota by it. Imagine, however, a case in which a student forgot the procedure, and failed to bring to bear the relevant knowledge. In this case the power of specific theoretical knowledge was nullified because the "weak" general procedure was not kept in mind. One possible way, then, in which general critical thinking procedures could survive the current critique, lies in their managerial role – switching on more specific and more powerful procedures when the need arises. In such cases the managerial role confers usefulness on the general procedure indirectly.

If the procedure like the one above was one that people tend not to be aware of, giving it educational attention – that is, teaching it as a general mnemonic or heuristic – should not be dismissed out of hand, even if it is "trivially obvious" when consciously entertained. Much of what is taught in the standard approach is not so trivial "because numerous people seem not to employ them in important situations" (Ennis, 1990, p. 13). Ennis recommends a case by case evaluation: "In deciding whether a general ability is trivial, we should also consider whether it is important and whether people make mistakes of the sort condemned" (p. 16).

Lastly, I doubt the word *important* in the quote above refers only to power exercised indirectly, as it seems to me that argument analysis and fallacy identification skills represent a genuine exception to the generality-power trade-off principle. At least in some cases, these skills offer appreciable shortcuts in thinking. Where and how this happens, is, again, a legitimate empirical question.

In relation to this and other empirical questions that seem relevant to the generalizability debate, Gardner's (1996, p. 452) assertion that "the bulk of the evidence is overwhelmingly against the existence of general thinking skills of the transferable variety" is little different to McPeck's disavowal of empirical input. Both seem to ignore important evidence to the contrary. The evidence is as yet inconclusive (Ennis, 1989, p. 7), and amenable to widely varying interpretations. Gardner's judgment seems to be premature, as is his concomitant claim that the supposed failure to find transferable thinking skills cannot be explained by problems in current educational practices.

Weinstein's interpretation of the fruits of philosophy of science seems to me to be equally problematic. Philosophers will argue about the minutiae of such things as causation and induction *ad nauseum*, aware of the fact that practice happily soldiers on unencumbered by their misgivings. So while philosophers of science are hammering it out, in what, from a pedagogical perspective, can seem to be a game of diminishing returns, it is important to ask what exactly is it in the standard course that reasonable disciplinary practitioners would reject. Bringing in these philosophical disputes to the pedagogical and practical level seems somewhat pedantic. One cannot object, on the basis of the problem of induction, to the practical reasonableness of believing the sun will rise tomorrow, even though the problem of induction is a legitimate philosophical question. Of course, it is not my intention to devalue what are undoubtedly very important advances in twentieth century philosophy of science. A century that has seen the likes of logical positivism, incommensurable paradigms, and everything in between, surely ranks as an exciting period for the field if ever there was one. Nevertheless, when the dust has settled, most would agree that there

was nothing so revolutionary as to demand the wholesale abandonment of that old time Enlightenment rationality, the general principles that it espouses, and the general skills and criteria that generalists draw from it.

McPeck's point regarding "psychological transfer" – that is, that whatever generality does exist is insufficient for actual transfer – brings empirical questions to the fore yet again. Both Siegel and Ennis distinguished this strand of McPeck's reasoning from the epistemological and conceptual strands. There are two distinct senses in which any aspect of critical thinking may or may not be generalizable: the theoretical sense and the practical sense. The first refers to their applicability (or similarity) across subject or domains. The second refers to their pedagogical usefulness, that is, to the possibility of teaching them in a general course, and the reasonableness of the expectation that students will then use them in all relevant domains (Siegel, 1991, p. 19). A skill or standard that is general in the theoretical sense may or may not be generalizable in the practical sense.

Ennis (1997, p. 4) distinguishes between a strong and a weak version of this "practical" or "empirical" subject specificity. Any aspect of critical thinking is subject specific in the strong practical sense if "even with teaching for transfer, the transfer does not occur," and in the weak practical sense if "transfer can occur if properly pursued in teaching, but . . . does not automatically occur." By his reckoning "transfer for some students usually occurs without teaching for it. For other students, transfer rarely occurs, even if we teach for it. Most of my students fit into a continuum in between." Notice that Ennis makes no reference to any particular subject or topic, and transfer may be more forthcoming in some areas than others. For this reason his recommendation is all the more apt: "All of this needs to be sorted out with the help of extensive empirical research."

What do generalists have to say about the sufficiency of the standard approach? Recall that Weinstein, McPeck, Barrow, Winch, and Gardner all believe that the standard course does not, in itself, make for critical thinkers. The "longstanding

frailty of human judgment” simply cannot be fixed with one course (McPeck, 1990f, p. 4). Even if the students take to the skills well, these are still “far from sufficient for regarding a person as a critical thinker in all (or even most) domains” (McPeck, 1990e, p. 26). According to Winch and Gardner generalists are, on the main, committed to the sufficiency of the standard approach.

Winch believes that most members of the critical thinking movement hold a version of critical thinking that sees it as a completely general set of skills in which only the inferences or structure of arguments are assessed, and subject specific knowledge ignored (Winch, 2006, pp. 53–5, 59, 61). This is the pure generalizability described above. Gardner also takes pure generalizability to be the leading view of critical thinking. To support his claim Gardner ascribes it to Scriven, one of the leaders of the critical thinking movement:

This notion is consonant with a prevalent view of CT as expressed, for example, by Michael Scriven, who describes CT as “a finite set of skills in using a finite box of tools,” skills that, he claims, “can . . . be taught without the need for delving into vast subject matters.” On this view, CT offers the bonus of being able to think critically in many domains without the chore of detailed learning. (Gardner et al., 1996, p. 441)

This interpretation should be contested. A more charitable interpretation of Scriven’s words would have him intend that a manageable number of much needed skills can be introduced beneficially in a general critical thinking course – but while they can be taught without the need for delving into vast subject matters, they may need such augmentation when applied to some arguments, issues or subjects.

In “Critical Thinking: Its Definition and Assessment” (1997) – a book Scriven co-authored with Alec Fisher – one can find a genuine openness to both general and subject specific aspects of critical thinking. According to Fisher and Scriven, thinking in any subject, if it is to qualify as critical thinking, must adhere to a minimum of

relevance, accuracy, fairness, and adequacy, these being universal standards of good thinking that are, nevertheless, context dependent (p. 21). Fisher and Scriven also grant the knowledge component of critical thought, writing that “subject matter competence will often be required in order to do critical thinking about a particular item or topic” (pp. 21–22). They see subject specific knowledge as a multiplier of critical thought: “The more knowledge one has about a topic or problem, the more powerful is the critical thinking one can bring to bear on matters connected with that topic” (pp. 54–5). They also see skills as varying across contexts. The more technical and scientific the context is the more skilful the thinker has to be to think critically in it (p. 23). But these allowances do not detract from general aspects of critical thinking. The standard course can help teach an important logical vocabulary that is implicit in both the natural languages and academic disciplines, but is unrefined even in most educated people (p. 29). They write:

General critical thinking skills . . . can be taught directly, to very great advantage Those skills do apply across a wide range of subjects. They will still need extensive amplification and refinement before they will consistently yield high level payoffs in one of the highly-developed conventional specialty subject matters, but they can immediately pay off even there, in terms of spotting some flaws that would not otherwise have been so easily spotted. And they will immediately pay off, and pay off handsomely, in the great expanses of knowledge that are not part of standard disciplines. (p. 50)

In his own interpretation of Scriven, it seems as though Gardner believes that asserting the usefulness of teaching general skills in a general course implies that these skills can always be applied without regard to contextual factors, but an inference from the level of tuition to the level of application is not called for. In fact, it is doubtful whether pure generalizability can be attributed to any serious generalist. According to Siegel “McPeck and other specifists are right in pointing out that subject specific content knowledge is frequently necessary for thinking critically

within a subject. But this . . . is compatible with the generalist's position, and indeed is acknowledged by most generalists" (Siegel, 1991, p. 27).²⁵ For this reason, attempting to fault generalists for pure generalism is attacking a straw person (Ennis, 1990, p. 15). Despite the caricature, I must again stress, that pure generalism can still be found in "enticing promissory notes" (Gardner et al., 1996, p. 453) of textbook covers and course descriptions, in the "hidden curriculum" of the standard course, and in the minds and actions of students. For these reasons alone, the critique from insufficiency is still an important one, perhaps important enough to reconsider the practice of naming a course in argument analysis and fallacy identification *Critical Thinking*.

Before moving on to the last objection, a small qualification is in order. When Siegel says that generalists acknowledge the importance of subject specific knowledge he does not go as far as agreeing with Winch that such knowledge is always necessary for critical thought (Bailin and Siegel, 2003, p. 184; Siegel, 1990, p. 82). In many cases structural argument analysis and fallacy identification skills, perhaps supported by common knowledge, will be enough. Just what mix of subject specific knowledge and general skills will do the job is, I suspect, influenced by context. If an argument contains only common inferential errors, and no problematic or exotic claims, then its evaluation will justifiably rely on general skills alone. Could it be that some contexts lend themselves more readily to common inferential errors than to factual complexities? If so, it might be wise to spend less energy on subject specific knowledge in that area, and more on general inferential skills. I will expand on this question later on, in relation to the kinds of objects of thought to which this thesis is devoted.

If subject specific knowledge is not always necessary, what could be said about its relative importance? Is Winch correct about critical thinking involving mainly subject specific knowledge? Is McPeck right in claiming that the most important and difficult part of reasoning correctly involves the evaluation of the truth of premises rather than

²⁵ See also Bailin and Siegel (2003, p. 184).

inferences? Is it true that most errors in thought are factual rather than inferential? Again, these broad claims are as yet premature. All too often the necessary information is already held, but structural analysis skills are deficient. Just how big is the informational element, and how complex or problematic it is, is not a forgone conclusion. It is also unclear if this question is amenable to a single answer – it may need contextualization itself.

For now, I would like to end this foray into the generalizability debate and take stock. The reader may recall that lack of generality of the skills and standards taught in the standard course was offered as a possible explanation for lack of transfer: for a lack of effectiveness in the sphere of deeply held beliefs. Has the generalizability debate helped in establishing this? What exactly can be drawn from it as far as the standard course and deeply held beliefs are concerned?

I think it is relatively safe to conclude that both the case for pure specificity and pure generalizability are weak. Critical thought has both general and specific aspects, neither of which will always be sufficient in itself. Specifists have not shown the standard course to lack general application, and they have not been able to defend the assertion of sufficient difference between disciplines/subjects/topics as a general claim. The fact that we can distinguish *deeply held beliefs* or *religious beliefs* or *fundamental beliefs* as a domain of thought does not necessarily mean that principles of critical thought are different there.

On the other hand, the specifist case is strong enough to merit the suspicion that the standard course leaves something amiss in our area of concern. The standard approach is doing students a disservice where it contributes to a conception of critical thought that is neglectful of context specific needs. What exactly needs to be added to the standard course so that students will be inclined and able to think about their own fundamental beliefs critically, however, is as yet unclear.

Still, the generalizability debate has been instrumental in bringing several important questions to the fore – questions with the help of which I hope to offer something of an answer. For example, do the relevant expert communities approach deeply held or fundamental beliefs in a distinct, perhaps unique way? What is considered successful thinking in this area by the relevant scholars? In what ways does it differ from the skills and standards of the normal critical thinking course and in what ways is it similar? To the extent that general standards and skills are adhered to, are they adapted in any way to make them fit better the needs of this particular sphere of thought? Is there anything in the standard course that reasonable disciplinary practitioners reject? Just how far does structural argument analysis and fallacy identification take the student in this area?

Particular attention should also be given to questions of content: What is the body of knowledge that expert communities consider important or crucial? Are there special concepts involved, or particularly complex or esoteric information that students do not typically possess? Do factual problems present a bigger obstacle to reflexive critical thought than inferential ones?

Since the objects of thought are the students themselves, consideration should also be given to the vagaries of the inquirer that are specific to reflexive critical thought. Is there anything in the beliefs and attitudes of students that is of particular hindrance, requiring a peculiar addition to the standard course? Perhaps as far as fundamental beliefs are concerned, the “longstanding frailty of human judgment” is in some way different – more obtuse than run of the mill credulity, involving unique biological, psychological, or social mechanisms? Are there reasoning errors that are specific to or more common in our area? And lastly, are there particularly big deficiencies in education in this area that a critical thinking intervention must not ignore? In the next chapter I begin to look into some of these questions by delving into explanations for lack of transfer to deeply held beliefs that are suggested in critical thinking literature. Later on I will be looking for input from much further afield.

Chapter 3 Critical Thinking and Worldviews

The generalizability debate highlights the possibility that the standard approach to critical thinking instruction lacks the wherewithal needed for teaching critical thought in the area of deeply held or fundamental beliefs. Perhaps the ingredients of the standard course do not straightforwardly apply to these kinds of beliefs. Perhaps more skills need to be taught. Perhaps the problem is one of motivating students to use what they have learned where it might hurt. Just how far the specificist critique applies in our neck of the woods is a question that the generalizability debate – because of its own generality – does not answer. To answer this question inquiry must inevitably deal with the peculiarities of deeply held or fundamental beliefs. In this chapter I comb critical thinking literature for discussion of such peculiarities.

The sections titled “Richard Paul and Worldviews” and “Worldview Related Limitations of the Standard Approach” assert that an appropriate treatment of worldviews is the standard approach’s Achilles’ heel. In the section “An Objection from Deep Disagreements and Strong Relativism” the possibility of rational thought about worldviews is defended. The penultimate section, titled “Dealing with Worldviews: Some Themes,” surveys extant approaches to critical thinking that, in one way or another, already attempt to deal with worldviews. The chapter ends in a section devoted to the introduction of the academic study of religion as a viable source of contribution for a critical thinking pedagogy that is intent on giving worldviews the emphasis they are due.

Richard Paul and Worldviews

First among those in critical thinking who highlight the peculiar difficulties involved with critical thought applied to one's own deeply held or fundamental beliefs is Richard Paul. In the main, his contribution revolves around the concept of worldview. With the help of his work I will contend that, as far as the generalizability of the standard course is concerned, it is the workings of worldviews and their effects on reasoning that make the reflexive application of critical thought into its own specific critical thinking domain. I will recount his argument here, starting with an outline of the concept.

Although it is undoubtedly Paul who is the champion of the line of reasoning I will describe below within the critical thinking movement, his argument, or parts thereof, has been an educational mainstay from Socrates on. A survey of historical precedents would take me far beyond the scope of this work, but my account of his argument will have to be complemented by, at the very least, similar material from within the critical thinking movement. This should help to show that Paul's basic conception of the difficulties involved in critical thinking about our own beliefs, and in education for that purpose, is far from an isolated case.

As indicated, worldviews are central to Paul's thought. Worldviews, Paul writes, are "our system of values, meanings, and interpretive schemes" (1990, p. 109). They are "the fundamental logical structures – the assumptions, values, and beliefs – that shape our own thought, our own feeling responses, and our own moral judgments" (Paul, 1993b, p. 192). Four important characteristics can be extracted from Paul's elucidation of worldviews: (1) Worldviews are implicated in reasoning, (2) they exert a strong influence on reasoning, (3) this influence is normally uncritical and deleterious, and (4) it is mostly unidirectional. That is, while our worldview exerts a

strong influence on our reasoning, any instance of reasoning is unlikely to make an impact on our worldview.²⁶ Each of these will be expanded on in turn.

First, then, what do I mean by “implication”? In what way are worldviews implicated in reasoning? Broadly speaking, to say that worldviews are implicated in reasoning is to say that evaluating an argument is an act that, in theory (and often in practice), cannot be divorced from consideration of the worldview from which the argument emanates and the worldview within which the evaluation takes place. The beliefs that we take for granted, the inferences we consider appropriate, and so the conclusions we draw, are – Paul highlights – “the tip on an intellectual iceberg” (Paul, 1993b, pp. 105–6). Our thinking is embedded in a system of logical and semantic structures that, for the most part, remains implicit (p. 154). This substratum determines much of what goes on in the visible surface of reason giving and reason evaluation.

Trudy Govier makes a similar point in two papers she devoted to the defence and articulation of Ralph Johnson’s notion of a *dialectical tier*. Johnson distinguishes between two structural tiers of arguments. The more familiar tier is the premise-conclusion or logical part of the argument. It is this tier that receives the bulk of the attention in the standard approach. Less familiar – and at times, wholly absent from standard critical thinking courses – is the dialectical tier, which includes addressing alternative conclusions and objections to the original argument. According to Johnson (1992) argument evaluation needs to take account of both tiers.

Govier and others have pointed out that the notion of a dialectical tier leads to an infinite regress. Evaluating how well an arguer meets her dialectical obligations, that is, evaluating the quality of her response to objections and alternative positions, involves the evaluation of supplementary arguments that come with attendant dialectical tiers of their own, and so on *ad infinitum* (Govier, 1999a, pp. 215–6). Because of this regress Johnson’s recommendations with regard to evaluation have

²⁶ I illustrated these characteristics in the opening pages with the case of Major Trapp and the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101.

been criticized as onerous at best, and at worst, absurd. In her defence of Johnson, Govier prefers to give a benign interpretation to this regress, seeing it rather as an indefinite progression. She writes:

Any argument and any conclusion is challengeable. When challenges arise the arguer should if possible respond. A sequence of challenges can go on indefinitely. For example, one might first argue that abortion should be legally permissible in some circumstances. One might then reply (step one) to an objection that abortion should never be legally permissible because the fetus has a right to life by contending that the fetus has no right to life because it is not a person and only persons have a right to life. One might then (step two) respond to the objection that fetuses are persons because neurosurgeons have so testified by contending that neurosurgeons are not the relevant experts on such matters as what constitutes personhood. One might then (step three) respond to the counterclaim that neurosurgeons are the relevant experts by arguing that neurosurgery is a biological discipline and there is a central distinction between the biological category of human being and the moral category of person. On each step, we can move forward onto another step. (1999b, p. 235)

As indicated, Govier's benign interpretation is meant to be a defence of the importance of Johnson's dialectical tier to reasoning and its evaluation. But calling it indefinite progression rather than problematic infinite regress does not make argument evaluation any less problematic, nor does it make a difference to the validity of Johnson's suggestion. The difficulties and complexities in argument evaluation that Johnson's dialectical tier points to are born of the fact that their justification lies in a network of related and mutually supporting arguments: "The fact that supplementary arguments may be questioned and may themselves require further support is only realistic, and quite plausible when we reflect on the history of actual controversies about important matters" (p. 236).

Thinking that Johnson's conception of a dialectical tier is in some way amiss because it points to such complexities is akin to killing the messenger. It is not necessary, then, to take issue with the phrasing *problematic infinite regress*. Just how problematic this infinite regress or indefinite progression is, we shall soon see. For now, what I wish to highlight is that Johnson and Govier, like Paul, put forward a conception of argument that sees it less as the stand alone item of the standard approach and more as a node in a huge amorphous maze of thought. Also – again, like Paul – Johnson and Govier claim that ignorance of this maze of thought can lead to bad argument appraisal.

Still on the subject of the implication of worldviews in reasoning, I wish to extract four important points, each of which follows from those that precede it. First, what is considered irrational, unjustified, implausible, etc. from the perspective of one worldview can be quite the opposite from the perspective of another. This is not to say that rationality with a capital R is a useless fantasy. It is not. The point is that what is actually considered a legitimate or illegitimate move in reasoning differs among worldviews.²⁷ This still applies where there is an agreement between worldviews about the propriety of the general standards of critical thinking as promulgated in the standard approach, but the manner of their application is differently conceived (Brown, 1998, p. 36; Paul, 1990, p. 105). In Richard Talaska's words, worldviews are "the very matrix within which logical skills and cultural knowledge operate" (1992b, p. xxiv). What is considered an acceptable proposition or logical step is only so relative to a worldview.²⁸

Second, the plausibility of a claim, or the quality of an inference or an argument, depends on the plausibility of the worldview on which it relies (Paul, 1992b, p. 145). This point was alluded to above in relation to Johnson's dialectical tier. Similarly, in Jewel (1991) we find that cross-model controversies revolve around the acceptability

²⁷ This sort of claim should be distinguished from the stronger claim that it is the actual quality of the argument that worldviews determine.

²⁸ See also Brown (1989) on how a suspected fallacy can be reasonable given the worldview of the student.

of model-specific propositions. Which worldview-specific beliefs are in fact correct should determine the appropriate resolution of the controversy. Andrew Chrucky (1992) implies this point after he describes Brand Blanshard's metaphor for understanding as "spanning bridges from a continent to outlying islands." The model, Chrucky writes, "presupposes the adequacy of the continent, i.e. the stock of presuppositions or a *Weltanschauung*." Suppose, he adds, "the *Weltanschauung* contains false beliefs" (p. 50). Of what value is comprehension or judgment if it is limited by reliance on false beliefs? Another parallel can be found in Gardner (1996, p. 446). In an attempt to show that detecting inconsistencies is not a general skill Gardner asks his readers to consider the proposition: "There is evil in the world and an omnipotent and all-good God." Whether or not an inconsistency exists here, Gardner writes, has been much debated, and is a complicated matter that cannot be answered by reliance on the face of things. The matter centres on the plausibility of various theodicies and the religious worldviews of which they are a part.

Third, argument evaluation implies worldview choice. Argument evaluation implicitly relies on a judgment, by the evaluator, of the propriety of both his worldview and the arguer's. That is, if I judge an argument to be faulty because it fails to comply with the standards of rational thought as they are understood within my worldview, but the argument actually complies with the standards of rational thought as these are understood within another worldview, then, knowingly or unknowingly, I am of necessity also judging my worldview as rationally superior.

Lastly, good argument evaluation will at times require good worldview evaluation: "We must choose among a variety of possible systems for thinking about things," Paul writes, and we must do so wisely (1993b, p. 155). This is where rationality with a capital R comes in: The more truly rational our worldview is, the closer our standards of reasoning will approximate the ideal, and the better our reasoning will be, all else being equal.

The second major aspect of worldviews with which Paul is concerned is the incredibly strong hold that worldviews tend to have on reasoning. What we think we see, what we experience, is often nothing more than what our worldview allows us to see and experience. What we think is moral behavior, is similarly often nothing more than a derivative of our worldview, a phenomenon so invasive and integral to our thinking and perceiving, that it routinely allows the perpetrator of unspeakable evil to see himself as an agent of the good and worthy.²⁹

The third aspect of worldviews – their uncritical and deleterious effects on reasoning – is where Paul lays most of his emphasis. According to Paul those who come to study critical thinking often have firmly held but uncritical and biased worldviews, a consequence of which is uncritical and biased thinking. Paul talks of two broad sources of worldview bias: egocentrism and sociocentrism.

Egocentric biases are those that prejudice our thinking in our own favor. According to Paul “we reflexively and spontaneously gravitate to the slant on things that justifies or gratifies our desires” (1992a, p. 14). We tend to remember evidence that supports our views more than evidence that contradicts it; we tend not to notice inconsistencies in our thoughts and actions while being sensitive to the inconsistencies of others; we tend to think that those who think differently are not as reasonable as us, and so on (2002, p. 181). The list of such biases known to psychology is by now very long.

Sociocentric biases are those that prejudice our thinking in favour of our group. The tendency to “confuse group mores with universal moral standards” is an example of a sociocentric bias (Paul, 1992a, p. 14). Groups, Paul writes, tend to “develop one-sided thinking in support of their own interests” (1993b, p. 137). Sociology can supply critical thinking educators with an equally long list of biases of this sort (Paul, 1985, p. 46).

²⁹ Similar points can be found in Aikenhead (2004), Brezinka (1994, p. 40), Douglas (2000, p. 140), Mezirow (1990a, pp. 1–3), and Talaska (1992a, p. 251).

Egocentrism and sociocentrism do not seem to represent an exhaustive list. I believe Paul's intention with these concepts is twofold: first, to highlight two of the most educationally important worldview related biases, and second, to point educators to the related and pedagogically useful social-scientific literature. This approach can be identified time and time again in critical thinking literature in papers devoted in part or in full to the importation of familiarity and consideration of various sources of bias or error from social-scientific literature. Many of these fall neatly within Paul's classification or else sufficiently close to amplify the thrust of his argument.

One tendency that, depending on context, can be either egocentric or sociocentric, and that has received ample attention in the literature (even though it has yet to graduate to "standard approach status") is the tendency to undervalue arguments or evidence that put our own beliefs in question. Keith Stanovich and Richard West (2008), for example, concluded after looking at three disparate experiments using a large number of participants that an unmistakable *myside bias* exists: "Participants gave higher evaluations to arguments that supported their opinions than those that refuted their prior positions." The bias correlated with the strength with which prior beliefs were held. Henry Markovits (2003) talks of *belief bias*: "the tendency that people have to accept a conclusion as logically valid to a greater extent if they also believe that the conclusion is empirically true." It has been established, Markovits writes, that "people will reason less well when influenced by their prior beliefs as to the truth (or desirability) of the outcome" (p. 174). And again, in Gehrke (1998, Vernon Cronen cited) we find that "students who display knowledge and ability in logical techniques still have difficulty distinguishing between arguments they agree with and arguments that are logically valid." The same can be said of arguments with propositions students find questionable. In my own teaching using Tracy Bowell and Gary Kemp's textbook "Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide" (2005, p. 73) I found that students who were acquainted with the valid logical form *modus tollens* as well as techniques for judging deductive validity still had a very hard time recognizing the validity of the following argument:

P1) If the guerrillas have left the area, then there is traffic on the roads.

P2) There is no traffic on the roads.

C) The guerrillas have not left the area.

Students take issue with P1, but often fail to see how this has nothing to do with the validity of the argument. Data similar to these seems to show that familiar or emotionally or motivationally invested contexts can be detrimental to thought because they prompt inappropriate but familiar or pleasing reasoning schemata (Bullock, Nunner-Winkler, Stern, Lopez, and Ziegler, 2003, p. 123). These, in effect, make it very hard for new concepts to replace old ones when this necessitates a change in personal attitudes (pp. 140–1).

Another tendency is failing to consider contrary evidence. Ignoring counterarguments is, in a way, simply an extreme form of undervaluing. In effect, ignored evidence is evidence valued as having no probative force. Paul and many others in critical thinking contend that – in Govier’s words – “the most common flaw of informal reasoning is the failure to consider lines of argument supporting conclusions contrary to the one in fact reached” (Finocchiaro, as cited in Govier, 1999a, p. 219).³⁰

From concepts like egocentrism and sociocentrism, and the tendencies to devalue and ignore incongruent information, it is possible to abstract a broader category of relevant bias. Extending Paul’s nomenclature we can name it worldview-centrism. It means simply that worldviews are biased towards their own truth – they are geared for self-preservation. Under worldview-centrism I would include all the obstacles to reflexive critical thought that Paul bemoans, as well as many others that have found their way into critical thinking literature, and which I take as furthering his cause as well as my own.

³⁰ See also Govier’s description of work done by Deanna Khun to this effect (pp. 208–12).

Belief perseverance – again, a concept critical thinking writers were bequeathed by the social sciences – comes very close to worldview-centrism in its inclusivity: A long list of social, psychological and cultural phenomena have been identified that, singly or en masse, allow belief to survive what can amount to overwhelming counterevidence.³¹

Under the heading worldview-centrism, or perhaps worldview perseverance, one can include contributory phenomena the likes of confirmation bias (Browne & Freeman, 2000), conformity and obedience to authority (Mechanic, 1991), rationalization and apologetics,³² popular beliefs like belief in the right not to have one's beliefs challenged (Trosset, 1998), personal attachment to beliefs – the tendency to see beliefs as inviolable parts of our and others' identity (Lugenbehl, 2007), and many other phenomena that have similar uncritical effects.

Not all sources of bias need be cultural, for there could be some that are pan-human and part of our biological inheritance. But cultural influences cannot be ignored. This cultural element is also given to us largely by a process of inheritance – a cultural inheritance. Our fundamental beliefs, replete with biases and falsehoods, are not so much rationally thought through as they are uncritically accepted by us – handed to us by the groups within which we were brought up as children and to which we belong as adults (Paul, 1993b, pp. 192, 259, 463).³³

The fact that worldviews are more an inheritance than a set of true beliefs that we have accepted through good judgment on our part is not one that is commonly acknowledged. No estate executor came knocking on our door proclaiming that a

³¹ See Douglas (2000) for a good example of an attempt to bring belief perseverance into the critical thinking context.

³² See Richard Paul's *weak sense critical thinking* below.

³³ See also Brezinka (1994, p. 40), Kornblith (1999, pp. 185, 190), and Mezirow (1990a, p. 3; 1990b, p. 364). The importance of problems revolving around cultural inheritance to education has been a source of much heated philosophical debate. Of particular relevance to the issues I raise are works on indoctrination, e.g. Dearden, Hirst, and Peters eds. (1972), Doyle ed. (1973), Nyberg ed. (1975), Snook (1972b), and Snook ed. (1972a), and the debate on religious upbringing carried out between Peter Gardner, Eamonn Callan, Michael Hand, William Hare and others, much of which can be found in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* from the 1980s on.

deceased family member has bequeathed us their worldview. The process is largely invisible and the result is likely hidden from our view (Paul, 1993b, p. 192). We do not typically realize that we are applying a particular logic to the world, and we do not understand the process by which this logic has come to be our own (p. 155). No matter how full of error or prejudice our worldview is, it will still seem to us to be correct and fair. No matter how parochial, it will still seem to us to be the world in itself, rather than one of many possible perspectives on it (Paul, 1992a, pp. 14–5).³⁴

On top of the fact that worldviews are for the most part inherited replete with error and bias in a non-critical process of socialization, worldviews, then, are able to both validate themselves in our minds and still remain hidden from view. All this amounts to, Paul writes, “the most formidable barrier to critical thinking” (2002, pp. 160–1). If we do not notice major influences on our thought, we cannot put them to criticism, and so, in a sense, we are victims of our own thinking (Paul, 1993b, p. 51).³⁵

The fourth and last major aspect of worldviews that I want to abstract from Paul’s works is the claim that the major direction of influence flows from worldviews to reasoning and not the other way around. This follows the anti-critical defences worldviews exhibit so competently. If worldviews are anti-critical; if they are socialized, hidden, and self-validating, then they will also be hard to dislodge. From the perspective of the worldview, these are defence mechanisms that keep our own reasoning benign in relation to it. Still, there will be times when we do turn a critical eye onto our own fundamental beliefs, and there will be times when these beliefs are criticized by others. What psychology and sociology have made abundantly clear, however, is that a litany of defence mechanisms is always ready to come into play when the flow of influence threatens to change direction (Paul, 1993b, p. 328). Worldviews are part of our identity. They are part of our self-conception. They are very hard to shake off, very hard to put at arm’s length. Critical arguments are rarely

³⁴ See also Brezinka (1994, p. 40) and Segal (1998).

³⁵ A similar point is made in Campolo and Turner (2002), Jewell (1991), and Talaska (1992a, p. 251).

able to move them, or even, it often seems, to put a dent in their armour (Paul, 1993b, p. 257; 2002, p. 165).³⁶

³⁶ Similar points are made in Campolo (2002), Jewell (1991), Segal (1998, pp. 36–41), and Siegel (1988, p. 16).

Worldview Related Limitations of the Standard Approach

Now that I've outlined what I take to be the four most important aspects of worldviews in Paul's works – namely, their implication in reasoning, the strong but uncritical and deleterious influence they exert on reasoning and the relative inability of reasoning to change worldviews – I am able to get to the heart of the matter: the relevant limitations of the standard approach.

There is little doubt among writers that critical thinking instruction should include dealing with pervasive obstacles to critical thought (Hale, 2008, p. 44). Ideally, Paul writes, “the critical thinker is aware of the full variety of ways in which thinking can become distorted, misleading, prejudiced, superficial, unfair, or otherwise defective” (1993b, pp. 23, 154, 185). This is the “negative” side of critical thinking instruction, which aims to give the student the wherewithal to avoid falling prey to the many pitfalls or fallibilities that plague human reasoning. In the standard approach, this negative side is most visible in instruction about fallacies.

Similarly, there is little doubt that instruction should give the student the ability to analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments reasonably. This is the “positive” side of instruction. In the standard approach this element is readily appreciable in the teaching of the standards of good deductive and inductive reasoning and in practical tools like argument diagramming.

Now, if genuine disagreements between worldviews about the quality of an argument or the plausibility of a claim are commonplace, and if justifiable doubts about the standards of judgment we or others are using are pervasive, it seems that these negative and positive requirements, when combined with the four aspects of worldviews outlined above, make the inclusion of worldviews in education for critical thinking a matter of necessity. Because worldviews are implicated in

reasoning, and judging an argument well may necessitate a reasonable choice between worldviews, the positive requirement tells us that a world in which disagreements between worldviews are numerous and important will be one in which instruction for critical thought will have to supply the tools necessary to analyze, evaluate, and choose between worldviews reasonably. Because worldviews can exert a strong, uncritical, and deleterious influence on reasoning, and because our reasoning is normally relatively impotent against this influence, the negative requirement tells us that in such a world instruction for critical thought will have to teach students how to protect their reasoning from these influences.³⁷

The only question that remains is just how much of the important reasoning students will need to do in their lifetime is susceptible to the detrimental effects of worldviews, and just how much of the quality of their reasoning will depend on an ability to evaluate worldviews well. Here Paul is unequivocal. Far from being a negligible part of reasoning, worldviews take the lion's share. Citing Blair and Scriven, he writes:

Multilogical problems, whose fairminded treatment requires us to suspend our egocentric tendency to confuse the framework of our own thinking with "reality" and reason within opposing points of view, are among the most significant human problems and among those most resistant to solution. The problems of human understanding, of war and peace, of economic, political, and social justice, of who our friends and who our enemies are, of what we should accept as the most basic framework of our thinking, of our own nature, our goodness and our evil, our history and that of those we oppose, of how we should interpret our place in the world, and how to best satisfy our needs and critically assess our desires – all such problems are at the heart of the basic frustrations and conflicts that plague human life and all require multi-system thinking. (Paul, 1993b, p. 205)

³⁷ Similar arguments or recommendations can be found in Brookfield (2003), Browne (1999), Fisher and Scriven (1997, pp. 28, 31), Gehrke (1998), Govier (1999a, pp. 208–9), Jewell (1991), Talaska (1992a, pp. xxxi–xxxii, 256), and van Gelder (2005, p. 46).

What we have here is not only a stress on the importance of dealing with worldviews in critical thinking instruction, but also an indication of what this would entail. Teaching students how to deal with worldviews should involve teaching them how not to confuse their worldview with reality, how to suspend it, and how to “reason within opposing points of view.” Reasoning within opposing points of view well means being able consider them sympathetically (Paul, 1993b, p. 124). It means following a dialectical motion back and forth between the relevant perspectives, looking at the issue from within each, raising objections from within each, and seeing what follows from within each (pp. 191–2). It also means holding the biases of each at bay, requiring, at the very least, acquaintance with these biases. Students also need to know how to evaluate different perspectives or worldviews, judging their relative credibility, their vested interests and their track records (Paul, 1992b, p. 145). All this “demands exacting and discriminating restraint and self-regulation,” which education for critical thinking should somehow foster (Paul, 1993a).³⁸

The problem, as far as critical thinking applied to our own deeply held or fundamental beliefs are concerned, is that these and similar requisite competencies are not generally taught in school or in the standard critical thinking course, and they are not the likely result of schooling or instruction along the lines of the standard approach. The typical critical thinking student would have had no meaningful instruction in worldview evaluation and the relevant fallibilities (Paul, 1993b, pp. 125, 192, 283–4). As far as the vast majority of school curricula are concerned the subject is basically missing in action (Fisher et al., 1997, p. 107). Most students who come to study critical thinking, then, have very little with which to tackle the implication of worldviews in reasoning or their harmful effects, and this is true just as much after instruction in the standard approach as it is before it. The typical critical thinking textbook provides little or no space to the subject.³⁹ The vast majority of

³⁸ More detailed suggestions along these lines by Paul and others will be dealt with under a separate section below.

³⁹ See Tindale (2007) for example. Tindale’s contextual approach to fallacies is an appreciable advance on the average textbook from our perspective, because it lends itself to consideration of the implication

what goes on in critical thinking classes today still involves assessing the arguments of others (Gehrke, 1998); doing so superficially, without getting into the complexities of reasoning that real controversies display (Barrow, 1991, p. 15); skirting over the important business of how to choose reliable sources of information (Carlson, 1995), especially where worldviews are concerned;⁴⁰ and dealing with only the most immediate assumptions.⁴¹ The search for a minimum set of practical critical thinking skills seems to have left students' deeply held beliefs and worldviews by the wayside.

Worse still, Paul's treatment of what he termed *weak sense critical thinking* suggests that the standard approach not only fails to bring about reasonable thinking about students' own beliefs, but actually puts this goal further beyond their reach. To varying degrees, those who come to study critical thinking have firmly held but uncritical, biased, stereotypical, egocentric, and sociocentric worldviews. They process their experience in an illusory self-serving manner by misrepresentation of incompatible ideas, and they protect their deeply held and fundamental beliefs from criticism. Most students, Paul writes, "find it easy to question just, and only those beliefs, assumptions and inferences that [they] have already 'rejected' and very difficult, in some cases traumatic, to question those in which they have a personal, egocentric investment" (1992b, p. 136). Teaching these students the skills of the standard approach gives them the tools they need to think critically about straight-

and effects of worldviews on fallacious or seemingly fallacious reasoning. Tindale's own comments about our subject are, however, limited to a few scattered words and the following paragraph: "One obvious occasion when the possibility of fallacious reasoning arises is that when we are closely attached to an issue that is being argued. . . . we should try to monitor our attachments so that we avoid falling into error. When we feel strongly about a topic we may rush hastily to defend a position, drawing a conclusion that is not fully warranted; or we may not listen carefully to what another person is saying and assume that his position is something it is not; or we may be inclined to engage in personal attacks on the one who holds a contrary view to our own" (p. 15). Tindale can't be blamed for not including more in his book – the subject requires, at the very least, a textbook of its own – but the same can't be said for education for critical thinking generally.

⁴⁰ Choice of worldview is probably the most important choice when it comes to reliable sources, but this is a point that Carlson does not consider.

⁴¹ Ennis (1982) shows that the importance of identification and choice of assumptions for critical thinking has long been recognized. Ennis' emphasis is on supplying individual assumed and presumed propositions in the process of argument reconstruction, rather than sets of propositions or theories, worldviews etc., but he says nothing against these being possible, and indeed, it seems to me that these are a natural extension of his work on the issue. Criteria he proposes for choice of assumptions should also be good for choice of sets of assumptions.

forward worldview-neutral arguments. But where the arguments encroach on anything sensitive, the very same skills give those who possess them a greater dexterity in their criticism of other points of view, and in defending their own. The students' natural inclination to protect their beliefs, to rationalize their biases, to practice sophistry, is actually advanced. Students become

more skilled in rationalizing and intellectualizing their biases. They are then *less* rather than *more* likely to abandon them if they later meet someone who questions them. Like the religious believer who studies apologetics, they now have a variety of critical moves to use in defense of their *a priori* egocentric belief systems (p. 136).⁴²

For Paul, and many others who have since adopted his terminology, critical thinking properly so called is *strong sense critical thinking*. It is fairminded, not sophistic (Paul, 1993, pp. 137–8). Failure of the standard approach with regard to this would make it seriously deficient.

⁴² See also Paul (1993b, pp. 57–8, 137, 206–7, 329–30). Similar or supporting words can be found in Adler (1994, p. 108), Hahn (1992, p. 165), Irving (1995), Johnson (1992, pp. 73–4), and Kornblith (1999, p. 183). Brookfield (2003), Govier (1999c, pp. 248–50), Mezirow (1990a, p. 4), and Segal (1998) illustrate the connection between the stresses involved in having one's beliefs criticized and defensive reactions.

An Objection from Deep Disagreements and Strong Relativism

There is a presumption in the argument above that reasonable evaluation and choice is possible in the sphere of worldviews – that rationality is a term that makes sense in the nether land between worldviews, and that students can actually make appreciable strides towards it. Since these are claims not everyone would grant – including many of those who come to study critical thinking (Trosset, 1998) – some defences offered in the critical thinking literature are in order. But first a closer look at the objections as articulated by Robert Fogelin and Haithe Anderson. Fogelin’s paper: “The Logic of Deep Disagreements” (2005), was the subject of a special issue of “Informal Logic,” several criticisms from which will appear below. Anderson’s “What do Pragmatists Have to Say About Critical Thinking?” (2001) gives a succinct summary of the kind of relativism a good number in critical thinking take to be most destructive to efforts such as Paul’s, and to which they therefore tailor their responses.⁴³ Both papers, then, present convenient targets.

Fogelin offers the following argument. Argumentative exchanges can be classified along a continuum that lies between what he calls *normal disagreement* and *deep disagreement*. Where disagreement is normal participants can rely on “a context of broadly shared beliefs and preferences” that includes agreement over procedures for resolving the disagreement. It is in normal or near normal disagreements that the skills of the standard approach have their primary application and where their usefulness is apparent (Fogelin, 2005, p. 6). However, the deeper the disagreement is, the more immune it will be to rational resolution, and the less potent the constituents of the standard approach will be (p. 7). Deep disagreements cannot be resolved through recourse to rational procedures because there are no rational procedures on

⁴³ Anderson’s criticisms are directed at Barbara Thayer-Bacon’s “Transforming Critical Thinking: Thinking Constructively” (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000), where she gives recommendations that are in some important ways similar to Paul’s. See p. 213 of Anderson.

which participants agree (p. 9). What participants deem rational is determined by their background beliefs or framework propositions. But bringing these propositions to the argumentative fore will not help. These beliefs are part of “a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (and paradigms, models, styles of acting and thinking) that constitute . . . a form of life,” and in deep disagreements these forms of life (worldviews to us) are not shared (p. 9). The content of the standard approach – argument analysis and fallacy identification – cannot bridge this gap. This is readily apparent in the many intractable controversies raging between seemingly equally capable arguers. Because deep disagreements are not amenable to rational resolution Fogelin concludes that one may justifiably have to fall back on non-rational persuasion (p. 11).

Anderson reaches a similar conclusion. For him the term critical thinking is nothing more than a self-addressed honorific used primarily in academic discourses, equivalent to all the other terms with which worldviews refer to their peculiar codes of “good” thinking. I put good in scare quotes because for Anderson there is no good thinking *simpliciter*. Good thinking is anything that is sanctioned as such within a particular worldview. Terms like critical thinking, rationality, reasonableness, and antonyms like bias have their proper place only within worldviews, which give them their meaning. There is no way of judging rationally that one worldview is better than another because there is nothing but worldview-internal conceptions of rationality to go by:

Questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity, and clarity can neither be posed nor answered in reference to some extracontextual, ahistorical, nonsituational reality, or rule, or law, or value; rather, . . . all of these matters are intelligible and debatable only within the precincts of the contexts or situations or paradigms or communities that give them their local and changeable shape. (Fish, as quoted in Anderson, 2001, p. 210)

According to Anderson “no segment of society fails to exemplify good thinking because each way of thinking . . . is embedded in an interpretive framework that determines, by reference to local criteria of evaluation, what counts as good thinking and worthwhile knowledge” (pp. 214–5). On this view, no worldview is more reasonable than any other. No worldview can reach for justification outside of itself. The space between worldviews is empty. For Anderson, claiming that one viewpoint is better than another is playing with metaphysics, a misplaced and fruitless effort.

For Fogelin and Anderson there is no such thing as critical thinking about worldviews in the sense Paul uses, that is, thinking that is more reasonable than the common worldview-specific sort. If this is true the standard approach could not be faulted for any deficiencies with regard to worldviews, as this would amount to blaming it for not imparting to students something that does not exist.

There is a broad agreement that all beliefs are perspective dependent, that perspectives vary, that they can be incompatible, and that belief is “historical, contextual, partial, and fallible” (Anderson, 2001, p. 209).⁴⁴ The claim that worldviews are implicated in reasoning is not at issue. Both sides agree that what is considered a good argument in the context of one worldview can look bad when viewed from another. The disagreement arises when it comes to drawing implications from this sort of perspective dependence.

In Fogelin’s case, rational resolution of a disagreement demands at a minimum a coherent set of non-controversial procedures capable of its resolution. These do not exist for deep disagreements, and so it necessarily follows that rational resolution of deep disagreements is impossible. In Anderson’s case, for talk of critical thinking to make sense “cross-culturally” there has to be access to “extracontextual, ahistorical, nonsituational reality” (Anderson, 2001, p. 209). Since such access does not exist, again it follows by necessity that critical thinking is mute as between worldviews. Since both arguments are deductively valid, and both sides agree on the truth of the

⁴⁴ See also Ennis (1996, p. 317).

two second premises, the criticisms that follow concentrate on the two first premises. Anderson's argument, however, goes further than this. He also draws from perspective dependency the implication that critical thinking is "just another way of doing things," no more valuable than the next (Trosset, 1998). The fact that we cannot agree or provide a proof for a "universal standard to measure cultures cross-culturally" implies for some that "all cultures are equally valid" and that judging others from a cultural perspective that is different to theirs is ethnocentric (Steffy, 1991, p. 104). This connection will also have to be loosened if critical thinking about worldviews is going to be saved.

Beginning with the latter, according to Henrik Bohlin (2009) the problem may be Anderson's failure to distinguish between justification and truth. Although justification is perspective dependent, it does not follow that truth is perspective dependent as well (pp. 193–4). This objection helps as far as the equality of all worldviews is concerned. Even if we cannot legitimately justify one worldview as superior to the rest, it does not mean that it is not, in fact, superior.⁴⁵ If we assume no access to reality as such, it may follow that all worldviews are equally justified, but not that they are equal with respect to truth. This would be a claim about reality that contradicts the initial assumption about lack of access.⁴⁶

There is a limitation to Bohlin's criticism that is problematic. Critical thinking has more to do with justification than truth. Although critical thinking aims at truth, it does so via rational justification, which is considered a fallible indicator of truth (Siegel, 1991, pp. 24–5). If rational justification of critical thinking is impossible, what good is the off chance that it may actually be a better way to look at and investigate the world out there? Anderson may well respond that while it is possible that the scientific worldview is superior to all others, there is no way for us to know

⁴⁵ For more examples of this point see Siegel (1997, pp. 19–20), Siegel (1999, p. 193), and Wagner (1991, p. 69).

⁴⁶ Bohlin's criticism, of course, has a background of its own. If there is no lawful world out there, a world that in important respects coheres to the picture painted for us by science – if we inhabit a miraculous formless cosmos where resemblance between worldview and reality is never more than momentary and tangential – then Bohlin's criticism loses its force. Needless to say, there is no need to go that far here.

that, and so, for all intents and purposes, it is no better than all the rest: We are not justified in putting more confidence in it than in any other way of looking at the world. What we need is not only to establish the possibility of superiority, but also the possibility of rational justification of superiority.

This brings us back to the two first premises above. Is there no problem in claiming that rational resolution or choice is possible only if there is access to some accepted or infallible Archimedean point? I believe the best responses to this question revolve around a more inclusive conception of rational resolution and choice than Fogelin and Anderson seem to allow. Even if Fogelin and Anderson would not deem it legitimate in the required sense, they would no doubt accept that cross-worldview reasoning and criticism is possible. All I really need to do in order to reason across worldviews is to give one reason why someone else's worldview is wrong according to my own. In the absence of ideal criteria, several writers recommend taking a subset of these criticisms as constitutive of rationality.

For one, the critiques learned in the standard course can still be applied to any and all worldview propositions: "Propositions may be interrelated in a complex web of support, but they are still uniquely identifiable objects of belief that can be independently discussed (or discussed with reference to their supporting propositions, which may in turn be discussed, and so forth)" (Phillips, 2005, p. 98).⁴⁷ Comparisons of perspectives from various positions are also possible, as well as comparison of these comparisons (Kock, 2007, p. 238).⁴⁸ For some intractable controversies suspension of judgment may be a rational resolution (Feldman, 2005, p. 21).

In these cases and others,⁴⁹ the very plurality of perspectives can be used as a critical tool. This is, of course, the Gadamerian solution to the historicity of knowledge: A critical perspective is achieved not through a chimerical neutral God's eye view, but

⁴⁷ See also Feldman (2005, p. 18) and Siegel (2007, pp. 214–5).

⁴⁸ Kock's argument is about political policy debates and practical arguments, but at bottom, his argument relies on aspects these debates share with debates over worldviews, and so his argument is easily generalized to our sphere.

⁴⁹ See for example Turner and Write (2005, p. 25).

through study and consideration of different points of view and through an openness to the insight alien points of view may give us about our own assumptions (Hostetler, 1991). The Gadamerian stance gives us, “not an absolute objectivity but a limited, historical objectivity.” Although not absolute, this is still a legitimate sense: “It is synonymous with ‘reflexivity’ [. . . in] calling overt attention to the process of production of a specific interpretation . . . and in laying ideological pre-suppositions on the table” (van Veuren, 1995).

The intuition that suggestions such as these aim to satisfy is that, in the absence of the perfect algorithm, it is still reasonable to go for the next best thing. If students can criticize and transcend particular perspectives, perhaps abandoning hope in favour of non-rational persuasion or silence is as yet premature, perhaps even irrational. In the sphere of worldviews, then, Fogelin’s concept of productive argument, and similarly, Anderson’s concept of rational choice, are unsuitably restricted (Phillips, 2005, p. 90). Instead of limiting these concepts to a focus on “the right answer” in an area where such an answer can never be conclusively proved, they should be loosened to an achievable focus on “educated judgments” (p. 93). Howard Sankey writes: “We must readjust our concept of rationality to cohere with variation in scientific methodology. The result of coming to grips with methodological variation is not total relativism, but a more sophisticated view of objective rationality.” We should have a “non-algorithmic, methodological pluralist account of the nature of rational scientific theory choice” (Sankey, 1997).

Again, it must be stressed, there is no proof in the matter. There is no deductively sound argument favouring either conception of rationality, that is not also – and at some remove – tautological. But if we choose not to forgo educated judgment where perfect proof does not exist, then there are a few more arguments worth considering. Here, by the way, the literature turns from defence to attack. Why might we not want to choose the restrictive sense of rationality over the inclusive one? To begin with, there is the problem of incoherence that features almost everywhere the issue comes

up. Siegel has written extensively about this particular critique. The following passage provides a suitably succinct account:

By denying the possibility of overarching, transcultural principles of argument evaluation and criteria of argument quality, the advocate of a culturally relative view of argument quality denies herself the ability to criticize particular, culture-bound argument-related principles and criteria; and, in doing so, likewise denies herself the ability to criticize alternatives to her favored culturally relative view, and to defend as rationally superior to its alternative that view itself. But her whole purpose, *qua* advocate of that view, is to establish its superiority. Consequently she must, in order to advocate it, accept rather than deny the possibility – and indeed the actuality – of overarching, transcultural principles of argument evaluation and criteria of argument quality. That is, she must . . . therefore reject the culturally relative view of argument quality.⁵⁰ (Siegel, 1999, p. 196)

Notice that the contradiction arises only when the position is claimed to be true. This does not mean that the position is necessarily false. The fact that it is logically contradictory to advocate a position does not mean that the position itself is not correct. However, even though there is no knock down argument here, the problem that this critique raises is not ephemeral. Responses similar to Anderson's, which amount to accepting the contradiction with indifference, do not do this critique justice.⁵¹ The nub of the argument is that arguing and evaluating arguments according to mainstream intellectual criteria is unavoidable, even when it is these criteria that are the target of critique (Siegel, 2006, p. 9).

⁵⁰ Here is Ennis on this point: "That a person is willing to take a stand and give reasons implies that the person thinks there is at least some justification for the position and that the position is better than the alternatives" (1996, p. 313).

⁵¹ Anderson accepts that his arguments should only move those who are already predisposed towards them by accident, but his paper can hardly be interpreted as an attempt to preach to the choir. See Anderson (2001, p. 212).

According to this line of reasoning the claim that mainstream intellectual criteria are universally assumed in no way implies that their actual, conscious, and fairminded use is similarly universal. Unfortunately, that is, these criteria are very often just implied in the act of advocacy. With this distinction between assumption and actual use Dana Phillips (2005) found what may be a serious flaw in Fogelin's argument. Fogelin's deep disagreement is offered as an explanation of common seemingly intractable controversies. Phillips offers an alternative explanation. The very same phenomena may be due not to different procedural commitments but to, *inter alia*, an untimely refusal to adhere to shared procedural commitments. Phillips agrees with Fogelin that rational resolution of disagreements depends on shared procedural commitments like a willingness to subject cherished beliefs to criticism (pp. 97–8). The existence of just such a shared commitment can be seen in the vehemence with which people from all backgrounds come to expect others to abide by this requirement. The problem is that the deeper disagreements run – that is, the bigger the conflict between fundamental worldview tenets – the lower the likelihood that participants will allow their deeply held beliefs to be so vulnerable (p. 100). The problem with intractable controversies, then, may well be one of execution rather than incommensurability. For Phillips, the problem of deep disagreement points not to an impasse, but to an urgent need for education about barriers to reasoning that crosses worldviews (p. 101).⁵²

Another pair of cross-culturally shared beliefs brings us to a second oft-cited critique of the position held by Fogelin and Anderson. The critique is based on the common intuition that a valid conception of rationality must not lead to absurd moral consequences and that “everything goes” is just such a consequence. By allowing that every conception of rationality is as good as the next, the floodgates for morally repugnant ventures like “Nazi history” are opened (van Veuren, 1995).⁵³ We allow this at our own peril. Ennis' treatment of the issue reminds us that it is not only the

⁵² Looking at this problem from the point of view of worldviews and their goal of self-perpetuation, it becomes clearer why both the demand for openness and its one-sided denial are so popular in practice.

⁵³ van Veuren's reference is to a Nazi version of history taught at school as a legitimate history. Needless to say, the support the Nazi case lends to this critique does not end there.

hard-fought status quo that is at stake, but also future moral reform. Even here, however, the long arm of worldviews tinkers with perception. Absurd moral consequences are never quite as absurd as when our own interests are at stake. Perhaps this would help explain why by and large, as Ennis' observes, "adherents of this view do not actually accept it when dealing with things that really matter to them" (1996, p. 313).

Does the prospect of Nazi history at schools clinch the deal? Just as with the incoherence of advocacy, the answer must be "not necessarily." In this matter, there is no logically necessary link between belief and truth. But this lack of logical necessity presents yet another difficulty for Anderson and Fogelin. Their arguments, recall, are just as guilty on this account. Even worse, unlike critical thinking orthodoxy, which holds that criticism must use epistemologically justifiable criteria that are nevertheless fallible, and so should be held tentatively and with an eye to their limitations (Siegel, 1997), Anderson and Fogelin seem to think that theirs is the only game in town. They seem to take the lack of rational criteria to be an established truth, without giving due notice to the fact that they too are playing in the game of metaphysics.⁵⁴ If there are important options or factors to consider, other than that conceptions of rationality are worldview dependant, then ignoring these is unwarranted (van Veuren, 1995). If there is a possibility that there is more to say about beliefs than that they are influenced by history, culture, and psychology, and so on, but we always fall short of going past these influences, then we are in danger of losing something of importance: truth. Just as epistemology cannot ignore the fact that the social sciences have important things to say about knowledge, there is more to knowledge than the latter. Knowledge cannot be reduced to either perspective (Wagner, 1991, pp. 67–9). Because incontestable proof will never be available between metaphysics, the enlightenment epistemology underlying critical thinking must be taken as a live hypothesis.

⁵⁴ Anderson cannot object to my account on the ground that he explicitly treats his view as just one of many legitimate alternatives, for in this very assertion we find the over-confident metaphysical claim.

The last critique of the radical relativism of Anderson and Fogelin to be included here is not far removed from the one just sketched. It too concerns the possibility of losing something important. Henrik Bohlin (2009) and David Adams (2005) argue that where disagreements seem deep, and the question of the existence of a shared basis for rational discussion arises, the only practical route to take is to assume that such a basis exists. Bohlin draws a parallel between this question and the scientific search for natural explanations or laws. Even if an area of inquiry persistently fails to reveal any regularities, it behoves scientists to assume that such regularities exist. The opposite hypothesis – that the subject obeys no natural laws – is hard to substantiate, for it is always possible that the relevant science has not matured enough. Although not finding regularity is a weak indicator of lawlessness, finding regularity is a strong indicator of lawfulness. Although I will not go as far as agreeing with Bohlin that unlike lawfulness, lawlessness cannot be corroborated, I agree with him that the probative force of failing to find a natural explanation for a natural phenomenon is, considering the current state of science, significantly lower. What Bohlin draws from this inequality is a methodological priority for the lawfulness hypothesis: “there is no other way to answer the question whether the laws exist than by searching for them, assuming, as a methodological device, that they exist” (p. 199). Because of the inequality in probative force, accepting the lawlessness hypothesis on the basis of lack of results is, again, akin to ignoring a live hypothesis.

According to Bohlin something similar occurs when disagreements seem to run deep:

Since background assumptions are often implicit, it is difficult to imagine any other way for the participants in a discussion to determine whether they share an underlying perspective or not, than to simply discuss the matter and, to the best of their ability, try to reach agreement on rational grounds. If they eventually do, they have reason to conclude that, despite initial appearances, they did share a common perspective. . . . If the discussion concerns a matter of greater complexity, then it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to exclude the possibility that the disagreement is due to some cognitive mistake

by one or more of the participants; even if they fail to reach agreement despite their best efforts, they do not know whether they have fundamentally different perspectives, or have not thought of all the relevant reasons pertaining to the matter, have not been sufficiently open-minded, or have otherwise made a cognitive mistake. If so, the only possible way to search for an answer to the question whether a fundamental perspective difference exists is to carry on critical discussion, proceeding from the methodological assumption that the participants have the same fundamental perspectives.” (pp. 199–200)

Even though it would be impossible, in a confined space such as this, to give anything but a cursory account of the relativist critique (a critique that spawned numerous philosophical debates and has had a significant influence on subjects as remote from epistemology as physical education), this brief overview focusing on critical thinking theorists still manages to provide some important insights.⁵⁵ First, the critique is not fatal. Although it is not without merit, it is problematic, and it has yet to gain the overwhelming support it would need to discredit the conception of critical thinking on which this thesis is based. I therefore follow Paul (and critical thinking orthodoxy) in granting an important role for critical thinking also between worldviews, accepting whatever limitations this choice involves.

On top of this there is a further appreciation of the complexity and the difficulties involved in thinking critically about worldviews. Although the point was to show that thinking critically about worldviews is a viable possibility, several of the writers above paint a picture only a shade less bleak than that painted by our antagonists. They recognize that often there will be very little in common between worldviews with which to work, and that practical obstacles – strong passions, habits of mind, biases that are hard to resist, the sheer size of the propositional and logical mesh, difficulties in cross-worldview interpretation, the intractability of worldviews, etc. –

⁵⁵ Readers will no doubt notice that I left a multitude of important figures out of my account. This is due not to lack of interest but to a limited objective: a brief look at common arguments within the critical thinking literature.

can undo the critical potential of even substantial commonalities (Campolo & Turner, 2002, p. 13; Feldman, 2005, p. 19; Phillips, 2005, p. 100).

Although the difference between the claim that judgment in worldviews is of necessity detrimentally local and the claim that it is only normally so is not that great, these writers do not despair. The lesson they draw from all this is that there is a dire unmet educational need: teaching how to think critically about worldviews generally, and about our own worldview in particular (Phillips, 2005, p. 101; Steffy, 1991). The standard approach, if not quite entirely inadequate, should at the very least be considered as a much more modest contributor to critical thought in this sphere (Campolo et al., 2002, p. 18). According to Richard Feldman (2005, p. 22) the benefits of the standard approach have been, at times, oversold: “Some students have been misled into thinking that relatively simple applications of critical thinking methods will enable them to resolve complex moral and social issues.” Before the gaps between worldviews could be successfully and consistently bridged by the kind of epigrammatic argument analysis skills that the standard approach should impart, the gaps will have to be contracted by way of “an education, a richer life, or therapy” (Turner & Wright, 2005, pp. 29, 32), “training, practice, study, apprenticeship, immersion,” and so on. “Reasoning together, on its own, cannot bring about any of this” (Campolo, 2005, p. 45).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ See also Campolo (2002, p. 13).

Dealing with Worldviews: Some Themes

So far I have been trying to establish that lack of transfer of critical thought to deeply held beliefs is likely a result of the characteristics of this special object of thought, and that a pedagogy intent on imparting the wherewithal and the willingness to accomplish such a transfer must not ignore the considerable influence worldviews exercise on reasoning. In the section that follows I will look at existing approaches within the critical thinking literature that attempt to deal with worldview related problems. The work of Richard Paul will again feature prominently. Two of my aims for this section are to show that there is a genuine recognition of the importance of dealing with worldviews or deeply held or fundamental beliefs in critical thinking, as well as a broad agreement on how this could be done. To these ends, I will also outline arguments by several writers whose work on this subject is quite similar to Paul's. Since the uniform nature of current critical thinking instruction seems to point – wrongly to my mind – to contentment with regard to the standard approach, I hope the repetition will be excusable. This section will also see a broadening of the definition of critical thinking to include not only skills and criteria of evaluation but also critical thinking dispositions and subject specific content knowledge.

Paul's contribution goes beyond identifying a problem and offering an explanation for it. He is also keenly concerned with offering practical recommendations for dealing with the less than rational effects of worldviews. Since his work on this topic extends from primary to tertiary and teacher education, includes several curricular subjects, and spans more than three decades, a complete survey will not be possible here. Nevertheless, in the paragraphs that follow, I would like to delve into what I consider to be his most important contributions in a little more detail. As my review of current approaches progresses it should become apparent that Paul's work is representative of much of what is discussed in the field.

Since worldviews tend to present an irrational obstacle to free thinking, a relatively straightforward requirement – but one that is largely ignored in the standard approach – is that critical thinking instruction has to give students the tools with which to put worldviews and their effects on reasoning in plain view. They have to be taken out of the background, made explicit, and join the arguments in which they are implicated as legitimate objects of analysis.⁵⁷ Students should be required (through appropriate tasks and assessments, Socratic questioning, etc.) to “identify and analyze frames of reference” (Paul, 1993b, p. 353).⁵⁸ In particular, for every significant belief (or inference, question, problem, concept, assumption, etc.) they should explicate its origin, its purpose, its support, its assumptions, and its implications, and evaluate these through comparison with alternative points of view (p. 288).⁵⁹

This last point is central to Paul’s approach. The reasonability of a worldview is a complex multi-system (multidimensional/multilogical) question. It cannot be settled by reference to facts or subjective preferences alone, although it presupposes both (Elder & Paul, 1997). It cannot be settled with reference to a single set of criteria that is agreeable to all worldviews. Nor can it be settled by reference to one subject-matter – it is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. In a sense, it cannot be settled at all. There is no simple non-circular algorithm that yields a straightforward answer to this question. A degree of uncertainty always remains (Paul, 1993b, pp. 140–2). Because of these complexities, any legitimate approach to worldview evaluation must be deeply comparative. For Paul, one cannot understand or evaluate one’s own or other worldviews in isolation from competing frames of reference. Rational thinking about worldviews is of necessity multi-system thinking. It must be at its core a dialectical process: A movement back and forth between an empathetic understanding of multiple conflicting insiders’ perspectives, and an educated (if uncertain) judgment based on that dialectical movement (pp. 420–1).

⁵⁷ See for example Paul (1992b, pp. 143–4) and Paul (1993b, p. 185).

⁵⁸ See also Paul (1992a).

⁵⁹ See also Paul’s *elements of thought*, an important analytical classification in his system, representing a crucial ingredient in the broadly conceived *background logic*, a concept that Paul occasionally treats as synonymous with worldview (Paul, 1993a).

To be competent in this high-order thinking, students should receive instruction in the comparison of competing points of view, as well as the objections or critiques that those points of view raise against each other, and defences against these (Paul, 1992b, pp. 143–4; 1993b, p. 288). Students need to be taught how to recognize weaknesses in their own perspectives that such comparisons are likely to bring to the surface. They need to be encouraged to question their own perspectives deeply (Paul, 1993b, p. 206), and empathize with competing perspectives to a considerable degree. They need to be able to reason within perspectives that are alien to theirs, see the question with different sets of eyes, as it were, or else risk not being sufficiently informed to make a judgment (Paul, 1992b, p. 144).⁶⁰ But in this effort to teach students how to test worldviews by recourse to standards “not peculiar to any,” students should be given more than just disparate glasses. Some evaluative criteria are part of all reasonable perspectives, and these universal intellectual criteria must assist the students’ deliberations every step of the way.⁶¹ Such competencies require prolonged and demanding practice that is not typical of schooling or university studies (Paul, 1985; 1993b, pp. 141–2; 1993a).

Because of the non-algorithmic nature of critical thought at this level, and because of the tendencies for one-sided defensive evaluation of worldviews, instruction must impart critical dispositions. According to Paul, neither the micro-skills taught in the standard approach, nor the dialectical skills described above, are sufficient for consistently high quality thought when it comes to worldviews. Both sets of skills can be consciously manipulated or applied unconsciously in a differential manner to produce biased results. Students must be inclined to use these skills in certain ways, and not others. For example, an inclination to learn about and compare different worldviews is not enough. Students need to be motivated to do it fairly. Such investigations are likely to encounter obstacles along the way, like anxiety or social pressure to conform. Students must therefore have the courage to carry on and trust that in the long run this inquiry will have its dividends. The complexity of the task

⁶⁰ See also Elder and Paul (1997) and Paul (1993b, p. 321).

⁶¹ These include clarity, relevance, accuracy, depth, consistency, logicalness, significance, justifiableness (Elder et al., 1997), credibility, vested interests, and track records (Paul, 1992b, p. 145).

demands a considerable amount of perseverance as well – there is no quick fix here – and while the inquiry progresses along its own sluggish and serpentine route students will need a considerable amount of intellectual humility. They must be wary of the limitations of their knowledge and the very real possibility of premature judgment (Paul, 1993b, pp. 325–7).

By way of practical suggestions, Paul recommends that teachers model these dispositions. The teacher should be less a judge ruling what is true or false, and more a referee facilitating a fair encounter between alternative perspectives. Questioning and an open and non-judgmental classroom environment should be the teacher's main tools (Paul, 1993b, p. 209). To these he adds assignments that require critical thinking in the strong sense, and many of them. For instance, student work should include plenty of in-depth empathetic reconstructions of alien perspectives (p. 321), analysis of the students' own changes of mind (p. 330), and a strong emphasis on teaching about and avoiding one-sidedness and self-deception (pp. 139, 225). Hard questions should not be avoided. On the contrary, difficult ethical dilemmas are ideally suited for this kind of practice because, on the one hand, they tend to bring about many of the problematic uses of critical thinking skills, and on the other, they provide plenty of opportunities to deal explicitly with such behaviors (Paul, 1992b, pp. 146–7).⁶²

Needless to say, one course in critical thinking, whether of the standard variety or tweaked along the lines just described, is unlikely to take the students very far towards the goal of strong sense critical thinking about a subject as involving as worldviews. According to Paul, the dialectical thinking skills and related dispositions should not simply be added to the current content of critical thinking courses and textbooks. This move would be a first but still inadequate step in the right direction. In addition to such a course, its content and principles should be infused throughout school and university curricula (Paul, 1992a; 1992b, p. 139; 1993b, pp. 183–4). In

⁶² Testing must also go beyond the skills and criteria paradigm. The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal or the Cornell Critical Thinking tests, and the typical standard approach tests that follow a similar schema, cannot be used to differentiate between students that have taken the critical attitude to heart, and those that picked up on the skills and nothing more (Paul, 1993b, pp. 329–30).

particular, Paul highlights the important contribution teaching social studies, history, ethics, and philosophy, when it is so infused, can make towards our goal, especially as far as dialectical thinking skills and dispositions are concerned (Paul, 1993b, pp. 214–5). By studying different perspectives on history, ethics, society, politics, the mind, and philosophical systems and methods, and by reasoning dialectically about them over a period that would ideally extend to several years, substantial improvement in thinking about worldviews should no longer be an unrealistic expectation (Paul, 1993b, pp. 197, 308, 310–2, 406, 418–21).

Many other critical thinking writers repeat suggestions such as these at length. Since I am arguing that there is a burgeoning consensus against an approach to critical thinking that is otherwise accepted as standard, I will take some time furnishing prominent examples to this effect.

In a paper titled “Teaching Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum” (1992b) John Chaffee advocates a model of infusion that is largely commensurate with Paul’s. Supported by evidence gathered from the interdisciplinary critical program at LaGuardia Community College, Chaffee recommends a two pronged approach to infusion, consisting of separate instruction of critical thinking, coupled with a change in disciplinary teaching from an almost complete reliance on covering a particular body of knowledge (the coverage model) to a greater emphasis on appropriate disciplinary thinking (the critical thinking model). Applying the latter to the teaching of history Chaffee writes: “a critical thinking approach in history will emphasize the intellectual skills used to evaluate the reliability and accuracy of eyewitnesses, of observation, and of sources of information in constructing our ‘knowledge’ of historical events” (p. 122).

The rationale behind Chaffee’s mixed model of infusion⁶³ is deeper comprehension of disciplinary knowledge, and an increase in intellectual ability brought about by the

⁶³ A mixed model of infusion includes separate tuition in critical thinking, while a pure model of infusion teaches critical thinking only through the various disciplines. See Ennis (1997).

mutually reinforcing learning of various modes of disciplinary thinking and general critical thinking skills, concepts, etc. (pp. 122–3). These are gains that are unlikely to materialize otherwise. By themselves, critical thinking courses can provide only modest gains. But without separate critical thinking instruction disciplinary teachers will have to add to disciplinary content and skills a new subject for which they have neither time nor expertise (pp. 124–6).

Like Paul, Chaffee makes explicit mention of the broader dialectical skills involved in evaluating and choosing between alternative perspectives or interpretations, including different disciplinary approaches (methods/theories). Chaffee would have teachers encourage perspective-taking. Students must be made aware of how their perceptual and interpretive spectacles influence their beliefs and behaviour. This is facilitated by the examination of multiple perspectives, itself dependent on an empathetic understanding of those perspectives: Students must “understand the reasons that support these alternative perspectives” (p. 127).

Chaffee gives little mention to critical thinking dispositions. The program at LaGuardia Community College provided some evidence that students are inclined to be more attentive, more confident in thinking and expressing themselves, and more persistent with difficult thinking tasks, but these results are at best preliminary and there is no indication that they occur or can be replicated in the worldview domain (Chaffee, 1992a, p. 29).

Stephen Brookfield (1987, p. 1) agrees with Paul that critical thinking “entails much more than the skills of logical analysis taught in so many college courses on critical thinking.” This is because critical thinking involves bringing our background beliefs and identities into the fore, evaluating them, and where necessary, changing them (Brookfield, 2003, pp. 144–6). Achieving this level of reflexive thought requires the learning and inclination to perform two central activities for which the standard approach seems inadequate: identifying and challenging one’s own assumptions, and exploring and imagining alternatives to these (Brookfield, 1987, pp. 7–8, 15–23).

Through the examination and empathetic consideration of alternative perspectives, students should come to realize that what they hold near and dear enjoys superlative value and reasonableness only when viewed from a particular standpoint, and that alien perspectives display the same characteristics when this standpoint is shifted. Students should also learn how assumptions are typically acquired (p. 45). They should learn how to critically question these assumptions, and be encouraged to do so (pp. 92–7, 100–4). Class exercises should include role playing and critical debates – playing the devil’s advocate to alien perspectives – but only, Brookfield cautions, after extensive preparation without which it is unlikely they would gain sufficient understanding (pp. 104–7). Again in agreement with Paul, Brookfield would have teachers model the behaviours they expect students to display (pp. 85–8, 243–54).

Brookfield believes that the demands of this kind of reflexive critical thought, and the very real potential for severe psychological and social consequences brought on by loss of certainty and reneging from culturally prescribed behaviour and belief, mean that truly critical thought is a matter best left for adult education (Brookfield, 2003, pp. 146, 149–54). I do not see this as a serious conflict with Paul’s recommendation to infuse critical thinking in primary and secondary schooling as well. Even if tackling worldview reflexive critical thought ends up being a practical possibility only in tertiary education or some advanced level thereof, earlier levels may well prove invaluable in providing the necessary basis, or in teaching imperfect facsimiles that are still valuable in themselves.

Another important element of Brookfield’s is creating a classroom learning community. Students should be involved in, and feel like they belong to an “emotionally sustaining peer-learning community.” This will help support critical thinking behaviour as well as help students to deal with some of the negative consequences of self-critique (p. 155).

Gerald Graff’s *teach the conflict* approach to critical thinking instruction involves students in important intellectual controversies: “Critical thinking means helping

them to better understand, appreciate, and participate in the intellectual and cultural conflicts that rage around them, outside as well as inside education” (Graff, 1992, p. 206). According to Graff, the very intelligibility of a subject is premised on an intimate understanding of the controversies or debates it has raised, and the alternative theoretical or ideological approaches people have taken to it (Graff, 2003, p. 271). Graff also sees integrative utility in a pedagogy in which the teaching of intellectual conflicts is central. Many important controversies cross departmental lines and could be used to integrate disparate disciplinary approaches in students’ minds (Graff, 1992, pp. 203–4). Worldview evaluation is a case in point. A reasonable position here seems to be dependent on more than an understanding of various theoretical perspectives and disciplinary contributions. One must also appreciate how all these interrelate.

Graff recognizes that intellectual and ideological conflicts are often debated very poorly. Debaters can be defensive, dismissive, and often fail to do justice to other perspectives or other participants. He does not believe that debates should be sanitized. Rather, encounters with errors or transgressions such as these have educative potential that should be exploited. They can be used to teach students about how debates (or a particular debate) can go awry, and they allow for a less taxing method of study whereby students’ understanding increases incrementally from the crude, simplistic and one-sided, to the complex, nuanced, and multi-perspectival (Graff, 2003, pp. 266–8).

Graff also recognizes that there is an emotional element to students’ involvement in intellectual conflicts that should not be ignored. Students will often take offence when beliefs that they identify with are being criticized (p. 269). The principle sketched in the paragraph above seems to apply here as well.

David and Roger Johnson have also written at length on structured classroom controversy, recommending detailed classroom procedures, and backing their claims

with extensive research (Johnson & Johnson, 1993).⁶⁴ Evidence suggests that when managed well classroom controversy increases student attention, mastery and retention of information, ability to transfer lessons learned to different domains, problem-solving in complex multi-dimensional questions, creative synthesis of various perspectives, creation of novel ideas and solutions, exchange of ideas/knowledge, perspective taking accuracy and more. These benefits seem to accrue even when all the perspectives involved in the controversy are wrong. The very processes involved in classroom controversy can lead to better thinking: thinking that can overcome the limitations of original perspectives.

As subjects for classroom controversy Johnson and Johnson recommend “the great questions that have dominated our past and determine our present and future” (What is Academic Controversy sect., para. 1). Students should discuss conflicts in their beliefs regarding these questions with the aim of reaching agreement. They have to enter empathetically into the perspectives represented and construct a charitable interpretation of opposing views. The procedure that Johnson and Johnson recommend starts with teams advocating one perspective, including defending it from criticism, and criticizing alternative perspectives, but then teams change sides and argue against their original position. In the next stage advocacy is abandoned in favour of a cooperative search for and agreement on a synthesis based on the best points of the views considered. Students’ grades depend to a considerable degree on the cooperative and reflexive aspects of this exercise.

The process can easily degrade and so has to be managed by the teacher with the help of student mediators, a role that rotates between the students.⁶⁵ Some of the requisite constituents teachers will have to establish or provide are a cooperative environment, heterogeneity of participants, and sufficient information for the issues to be reasonably tackled. Some dialogic skills and attitudes will have to be taught as well. These include some of the critical thinking skills taught in the standard approach like

⁶⁴ See also Johnson and Johnson (1988; 1994).

⁶⁵ The role of student or peer mediator is described in Johnson and Johnson (1994).

being able to deal with deductive and inductive logic. They also include being able to listen to and empathize with alien perspectives, criticizing ideas rather than people, allowing favoured beliefs to be criticized without taking personal offence, shifting perspectives, devil's advocacy, and being open to change of belief when the evidence stacks against it. The degree to which students will have to possess these skills and attitudes before classroom controversy could be attempted successfully is unclear. Since classroom controversy is supposed to improve competencies such as these, so long as the exercise is amply repeated, perhaps these requisites are only rudimentary.

In "The Teaching of Controversial Issues" (1992) D. W. Dewhurst defends the inclusion of highly morally controversial issues in classroom practice. Dewhurst argues that rational judgment presupposes dialogue and understanding of other perspectives (p. 157). Students must enter into others' perspectives both intellectually and emotionally. Looking for common grounds on which to build a dialogue can help in achieving this (p. 159), and learning relevant theory and empirical evidence is a must (pp. 160–1). That is, students' learning about the controversy must leave the confines of the classroom. Understanding alien perspectives should not be limited to perspectives and information accidentally available in the class. Understanding controversies requires understanding relevant intellectual inquiries and bodies of knowledge "involving various academic disciplines and their appropriate standards" (p. 162). I take this to be a crucial requirement in preventing this approach from degrading into the superficial "equal treatment" or "equal time" type of controversy coverage so common in the popular news media. Study must be deep and broad, and students should maintain a healthy scepticism about whether or not they have achieved this (p. 157). Although studying moral controversies in such a way is likely to bring up very powerful emotions, it also increases interest. In such a demanding inquiry teachers will have to take a very active role in bringing the relevant knowledge to the students' attention. This can and must be done in a non-indoctrinatory manner.

In “The Hidden Premise” (1991) Paul Jewell focuses on the practical question of resolving debates over controversial issues. Agreement about the quality of arguments will be very difficult to achieve in debates over controversial issues between people who hold different models of the world, and who refuse or cannot recognize the other’s model. Although they may agree on structural matters like deductive validity, they will likely not accept some of the explicit or hidden premises that their interlocutors deem important. To facilitate debate participants need to identify, understand, and be able to argue within their interlocutor's model. Interlocutors will have to be adept at shifting models. Critical thinking instruction will have to devote considerable efforts towards these goals. Once models are identified, however, there are no hard and fast rules that would show one model of the world to be superior to another. Jewell does mention the propriety of coherence, empirical accuracy, and success in prediction as criteria for choosing between models. If a recommendation for teaching is implied here perhaps it would be to teach the students about relevant criteria that are deemed important in science.

Pat Gehrke (1998) raises by now familiar objections to the dominant model of instruction in introductory argumentation courses in which argument analysis and fallacy identification skills are seen (explicitly or in practice) as tools aimed at refuting the reasoning of others. This approach lacks epistemic humility. It is dismissive of the possibility of truth or reason in other perspectives. Arguing from a position of certainty is no longer epistemically tenable, and neither is an apologetic conception of argumentation skills. Students must be shown that their arguments are dependent on a fallible point of view towards which openness to change is an indispensable attitude. Gehrke urges dialogical rather than exclusively oppositional engagement with other perspectives. They should be considered without prior opposition. At the same time, however, all perspectives are to be treated with suspicion. All perspectives have potentially dangerous aspects, and it is the duty of the teacher to help students find these out. Gehrke also suggests a shift in focus to include the application of critical tools towards the students’ own worldviews. Students should be encouraged not to identify with their current beliefs. Personalities

should be conceived as in a constant state of becoming, never pinned down to one contingent set of beliefs with ultimate finality. To achieve these, Gehrke recommends exercises in which students attempt to refute their own written arguments. Role-playing exercises would have students switch positions mid-argument. Another kind of exercise where students try to find uncertainties in a position, rather than argue for or against it, seems to me to be particularly well suited to the realm of worldviews. Gehrke recognizes that teaching along these lines “must be eternally challenging and frighteningly unstable” (Toward Argumentation Without Conclusion sect., para. 1).

Both Karl Hostetler and Jack Mezirow emphasize the importance of cooperative studies of alien cultures. According to Hostetler (1991), critical thinking – particularly critical thinking about social and moral norms – needs to be a communal inquiry into different forms of life, if it is to overcome the many prejudices and biases of our own perspectives (pp. 53, 58). Students need to understand cultures different from theirs, and in order to do so they will have to learn about and examine their own perspectival spectacles: the filters through which they study and evaluate other perspectives. Historical and cultural studies are indispensable for such an inquiry (pp. 57–8).

Jack Mezirow’s critical reflection and transformative learning require awareness and critique of the meaning perspectives with which we make sense of the world. It involves “discourse in which we bracket our prior judgments, [and] attempt to hold our biases in abeyance” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 10). It aims to make the students aware of “how [. . . their] meaning perspectives may have limited the way they customarily perceive, think, feel, and act” (Mezirow, 1990b, pp. 357–8). In summarizing approaches presented in “Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood” (Mezirow, 1990), he mentions “comparative approaches to perspective analysis; . . . understanding how we have learned and the consequences of our espoused theories; . . . opening oneself to alternative perspectives; validating beliefs through rational dialogue; and recognizing implicit assumptions” (1990b, p. 360). Another part of his work worth mentioning is the use of critical thinking triggers: triggering critical

reflection through anomalies or disorienting dilemmas, key among which are attempts to understand other cultures (Mezirow, 1990a, pp. 12–13).

Mathew Lipman wrote extensively on the kind of communal inquiry that critical thought about deeply held beliefs seems to demand. According to Lipman, classrooms in all levels of education should model themselves after a community of inquiry rather than a space where students are handed down a repository of information. Classroom communities of inquiry are dialogic cooperative gatherings that follow the dictates of critical thinking in analyzing challenging texts, and solving problems or answering questions that these texts bring up and that students find interest in (Lipman, 1991, pp. 15–6, 229, 241). The methods followed allow students' beliefs to be identified and challenged in a respectful manner and in a supportive environment. When incorporated into a sufficiently large portion of schooling classroom procedures would be internalized by students who will be able to think more self-critically without the need to be challenged by others (Lipman, 1988a, p. 41; 1991, pp. 15–6). Major elements taught for and through a well functioning community of inquiry include reasoning, inquiring, analytical, interpretive, and dialogical skills and dispositions (Lipman, 1986). Learning general scientific methodology as well as disciplinary modes of thought, including the self-critical or philosophical aspects of disciplinary thinking, is of prime importance (Lipman, 1991, pp. 263–4). All these are learned primarily through philosophically oriented studies from kindergarten on (Lipman, 1988a, p. 43).⁶⁶

Implied in much of the above is openness to, and an inclination to ask certain questions. A considerable strand of critical thinking literature puts its emphasis here. John Hoaglund (1989) sees Socratic questioning as a model for teaching critical thinking. Socratic questioning seeks to arrive at truth by showing weaknesses in the student's beliefs, chiefly by highlighting hidden unacceptable implications, and showing them better ways in which to search for true beliefs (p. 270). Through practice, students internalize the critic. The Socratic method and attitude becomes an

⁶⁶ See also Lipman (1988b) and Splitter (1995; 1991).

integral part of the way they do their own thinking. Hoaglund recommends the argumentative essay as a Socratic tool. In an argumentative essay students do not argue for a position. Rather, they attempt to evaluate all sides of an issue fairly (p. 275). It should include arguments in support of a position, objections to them, responses to objections, arguments against the position, including responses, and alternatives to the original position as well as objections to these alternatives (p. 276).

For Ikuenobe Polycarp (2001b) too, questioning is necessary for critical thought. The open-ended logic of questioning allows it to inquire further and further into background beliefs and schemas as required by Paul's strong sense critical thinking. Questioning of a person's beliefs usually engenders a defensive response because it is perceived as a rude accusation of lack of reasoning or articulation skills. Its epistemic value is not appreciated. Instructors should explain to students the epistemological basis for questioning beliefs, teach students how to ask appropriate fact-finding and analytical questions, and construct a non-threatening environment in which deeply held beliefs can be questioned without fear.

Hoaglund's argumentative essay and many of the other recommendations mentioned above bear a close resemblance to Ralph Johnson's dialectical tier. According to Johnson argument appraisal in cases where alternative seemingly reasonable positions exist implies consideration of an argument's dialectical tier.⁶⁷ This aspect of argument appraisal, you may recall, includes responses to criticisms from alternative positions, and criticism of alternative positions (Johnson, 1992, pp. 83–4). Critical thinking instruction should therefore give students the tools to be able to carry out such dialectical obligations. Arguments used to practice appraisal should make some reference to alternative positions and objections. This will give students the opportunity to practice appraisal of dialectical tiers (Johnson, 2003, p. 51).

Two more variations on the dialectical theme are recommended by Thomas Roby and Richard Talaska. For Roby (1998) autonomous thought is premised on the ability to

⁶⁷ For a contextual qualification of this rule see Johnson (2003, pp. 46, 50).

question one's own position. An important technique for teaching this is Devil's advocacy. Students must seek limitations of their views and the best arguments that are opposed to their beliefs. They should consider these arguments as if they were their own. Teachers encourage accuracy here by asking for paraphrases of opposing views that proponents of those views would accept. They should also check for student understanding of the reasoning behind opposing views. Emphasis should be put on the propriety of belief change or abandonment. This can be done by teaching the relevant epistemological issues, by giving students poignant historical examples of successful change of belief and dogmatic behavior gone horribly wrong, and by asking them to reflect on and articulate how use of the technique in class has affected their beliefs. Recording and reviewing recorded discussions may be necessary to help keep students from changing positions without noticing. Proper and timely execution of Devil's advocacy by students in and out of class takes a long time to master and depends on habits like patience and concentration that cannot be easily or quickly taught. For this reason Roby recommends incorporating the technique throughout the curriculum.

Talaska advocates for a history of ideas approach. To be able to think critically about passionately held beliefs or paradigms students must make them explicit and create some distance between them and their beliefs. This should be done primarily through the study of fundamentally different paradigms (Talaska, 1997, p. 121). Our beliefs need to be contradicted before they can be readily acknowledged and questioned (p. 126). Students need to be acquainted with the intellectual history of their beliefs. This includes the original arguments for them, and the intellectual environment from which they originated, including alternatives extant at the time (Talaska, 1992a).

Views comparable to much of the above can be found in Siegel's works. In "Educating Reason: Rationality, Critical Thinking, and Education" (1988) Siegel provides a general curricular model that we can apply to worldviews. His *reasons conception* of critical thinking puts the critical search for and evaluation of reasons at the core of all education. In order to assess reasons well students need to understand

and be able to use both general and subject specific principles and criteria for reason assessment. They need to know when and why certain principles or criteria apply. This requires some epistemological insight (pp. 32–7). Students will also need to have access to and be able to criticize and evaluate fairly alternative theories or perspectives in all subjects.

An important way in which these goals can be furthered according to Siegel is the study of the philosophy of academic subjects. For instance, in science education studying the philosophy of science introduces students to the meta-scientific study of reasons in science, the problems of evaluating conflicting scientific theories, as well as the contrast between science and pseudo-science and the issues involved in choice between the two (pp. 109–13). Here is the general form of the model:

For any curricular area X, the study of philosophy of X, the contrast between genuine- and pseudo-X, and the consideration of alternative theoretical perspectives both within and with regard to X and the problem of the evaluation of those alternatives, all promise to aid in the effort to make the curriculum in X contribute to a critical education in X. (p. 114)

Inserting worldviews as subject matter into his model results in the position that the study of the philosophy of worldviews, demarcation of the phenomenon, alternative theoretical perspectives within worldviews and regarding them, and the problems of evaluating these alternatives, are important for a critical education with regard to worldviews.

Siegel also puts considerable weight on critical thinking dispositions. A non-negligible part of instruction for critical thinking is imparting a “critical spirit”: a set of critical and self-critical attitudes very similar to that advanced by Paul.⁶⁸ For these

⁶⁸ For example, Siegel (1988, p. 39) writes of the critical character: “a character which is inclined to seek, and to base judgment and action upon, reasons; which rejects partiality and arbitrariness; which is committed to the objective evaluation of relevant evidence; and which values such aspects of critical thinking as intellectual honesty, justice to evidence, sympathetic and impartial consideration of

attitudes to be taught, education generally will have to model itself after and reinforce them. All academic subjects will have to be taught in a critical manner (pp. 45, 58).

Lastly, McPeck's instructional recommendations bear a considerable resemblance to some of the suggestions given above. McPeck sees only a very small role for argument analysis *a la* standard approach in critical thinking, and in separate critical thinking instruction. The lion's share is taken by the evaluation of the truth values of the premises, an aspect neglected in the standard approach, which is biased towards the evaluation of inferences (McPeck, 1990d, pp. 5–6, 10–11). Although he sees the purpose in infusing a critical attitude and some of the content of the standard approach into the teaching of the various disciplines, he puts more importance on immersing⁶⁹ students in these academic disciplines themselves (McPeck, 1990c, pp. 32–3; 1990d, p. 13). Students have no need for a fourth R: Separate instruction in reasoning is superfluous so long as students are given a liberal education properly so called (McPeck, 1990d, p. 38).

Instruction for critical thinking consists, therefore, in the study of the “natural and social sciences, together with history, mathematics, literature, and art” (p. 16).

McPeck, however, is no defender of the status quo. He warns against equating what commonly goes under the title of liberal education with the genuine article. The main problem with liberal education today is that disciplines are taught as if their facts and methods are unproblematic. Supposed facts are memorized but no real understanding of disciplinary thinking is imparted. This may be solved by including the philosophy or epistemology of the various disciplines starting from secondary schooling (p. 17). He writes:

The liberally educated student should understand the epistemic status of different types of knowledge claims within the different forms of knowledge.

interests, objectivity, and impartiality.” It also involves a commitment and a desire to be a critical thinker, and to subject one's own beliefs to criticism: “For the possessor of the critical attitude, nothing is immune from criticism, not even one's most deeply held convictions.” The critical thinker loves and values reason.

⁶⁹ Again, I use Ennis' terminology here (Ennis, 1997).

Liberal education is not . . . the passive acquisition of different types of information, as it is being able to enter the various forms of rational discourse as an autonomous thinker. The liberally educated person must understand the different *processes* of reasoning every bit as much as the *products* of reasoning. (p. 31)

A philosophical approach to disciplinary instruction would teach how a certain body of knowledge was constructed, its strengths and limitations, and alternatives to it.⁷⁰ It would replace the didactic method of teaching and the receptive method of learning with discussion and argument (p. 50). Through the study of the philosophy of the disciplines, students will learn when claims can be accepted, and when scepticism is called for. This applies to foundational disciplinary assumptions as well (p. 98). This philosophical approach will supply a necessary part of the considerable amount of in-depth knowledge that is necessary for critical thought (p. 117).

The number of critical thinking writers who in some way attempt to deal with students' worldviews is in no way limited to the scholars mentioned above, but adding to the list here would be needlessly repetitious. In some respects the suggestions just outlined display certain variability, and when fully fleshed out, they may not all sit well with each other. But speaking broadly, there seems to be nothing here and nothing in the wider critical thinking literature that departs from the pattern already visible in Paul's works. These and other writers share a belief in the insufficiency of the standard approach when it comes to students' worldviews or deeply held or fundamental beliefs, and are largely in agreement on the specific educational requirements of these peculiar objects of thought.

To be able to deal adequately with problems like weak sense critical thinking, the implication of worldviews in reasoning, their deleterious influence, their rigid

⁷⁰ McPeck quotes Joseph Schwab: "Let [x] be taught in such a way that the student learns what substantive structures gave rise to the chosen body of knowledge, what the strengths and limitations of these structures are, and what some of the alternatives are which gave rise to alternative bodies of knowledge" (1990d, p. 33).

insularity, and the like, there is a broad consensus that on top of the standard set of skills and criteria, subject specific skills and subject specific criteria need to be added.⁷¹ The most conspicuous of these are dialogical, dialectical, and comparative reasoning skills, especially where these pertain to evaluating and choosing between alternative worldviews; and – because these are taken as largely commensurate with established scientific or scholarly methods and methodology – relevant general and disciplinary specific skills. Part and parcel with these come the study and problematization of certain general, disciplinary, and important worldview specific criteria, that is, a worldview criteriology.

There is also agreement on the need to supplement the standard approach with critical thinking dispositions – a critical (and self-critical) set of attitudes best articulated by Paul and Siegel – and with subject specific knowledge; most notably about (1) general worldview phenomena, (2) the student's own worldview, and (3) other specific worldviews.

Again, taking Paul as representative, his recommendation to make worldviews and their effects on reasoning transparent corresponds to all three categories. Explication of a worldview and its effects on someone's reasoning implies its study. Arguably, it also implies the study of general ways in which worldviews can influence reasoning. This complies with the standard approach principle that teaching about general common and particularly deleterious ways in which thinking can go awry facilitates identification of specific instances of those mistakes. In the same way, learning about common general worldview phenomena that tend to have a particularly deleterious influence on reasoning should help students identify instances of these phenomena in their own thinking or the thinking of others. Paul's recommendation to emphasize the problems of one-sidedness and self-deception can be seen as a token of the

⁷¹ I use the term *subject specific* loosely in this context, to designate elements that seem important or even crucial to include in critical thinking instruction as far as worldviews are concerned. These elements may well be general, in the sense that they could apply equally well to thinking on objects other than worldviews.

requirement to make the effects of worldviews on reasoning transparent. As such, it also corresponds to the three categories, for the same reasons.

His recommendation to enter empathetically into alien perspectives seems largely identical with the second category – learning about other specific worldviews – at least in as much as an empathetic understanding (an understanding from the insider’s point of view) constitutes understanding *in toto*. His reference to sympathetic understanding (Paul, 1993b, p. 124 and throughout) could be interpreted as a caring (or fair) understanding from the outside, and so completes the category. Learning about other specific worldviews again implies categories one and three. An empathetic understanding of an alien worldview – to take one example – could be facilitated by knowledge of aspects of one’s own worldview that may act as an obstacle to such understanding. Again, knowledge of the latter may in turn depend on knowledge of general aspects of worldviews.

Added to these three categories is subject matter implied in the study of the skills, criteria, and dispositions already mentioned. Lastly, Paul’s treatment of the infusion of critical thinking throughout education has as much to do with skills, criteria and dispositions, as it does with subject specific knowledge. But as far as knowledge is concerned, if the principles he lays down would be incorporated in other academic subjects like social studies, history, ethics, and philosophy, and these would be more closely incorporated into a syllabus aimed at critical thinking about worldviews, the opportunities to teach students about worldviews and how to deal with them would be multiplied beyond compare.

The debate over transfer and the generalizability of the skills and criteria taught in the standard approach, and the peculiarities of worldviews as a unique object of thought that Paul and others have brought to the fore, have been leading – inexorably, in my opinion – to the following conclusion: The standard approach must be augmented with elements such as those described above if it is to be considered as a viable approach to the teaching of critical thinking about worldviews. It is unrealistic to

expect the standard approach to turn out a large proportion of students who consistently show high quality thinking about worldviews generally, and their own worldviews in particular, without such augmentation.

Critical Thinking and the Academic Study of Religion

It is at this point of the argument that the academic study of religion can make its entrance. Succinctly, I refer here to academic studies “in and around the phenomena associated with religion” (Sharpe, 1983, p. viii).⁷² The usage is very broad: inclusive of any and all scientific approaches – approaches that adhere to academic standards – that focus on religion and religion-like phenomena. This rather terse definition will be fleshed out in detail later on. For now, only one little addition needs to be made. As I hope to show in my discussion of the definition of religion below, the term “religion-like” applies to worldviews as well. So much so, that the academic study of religion is in many respects identical with the academic study of worldviews, religions being a prominent class of worldviews.

Thus defined, the academic study of religion is an area of inquiry where one would expect to find serious scholarship on worldviews, as well as on how to study and teach about them. It therefore seems to be an obvious source for contribution to critical thinking pedagogy given the worldview related problems described above. From the very beginning of the first wave of the critical thinking movement, and with no sign of dwindling interest, the problem of transfer has been a leading preoccupation for critical thinking writers and teachers. Transfer to students’ deeply held, fundamental beliefs, or worldviews, was shown to be a major component of this interest. Both empirical evidence and a voluminous theoretical debate suggest the problem cannot be solved satisfactorily without a thoroughgoing study of worldviews and their effects on reasoning.

⁷² In New Zealand and elsewhere other names have been and still are used to refer to this broad area of study, most notably, religious studies, comparative religion or the comparative study of religion, history of religion, and the scientific study of religion.

The debate over generalizability has shown that a considerable interest exists within the critical thinking community in the contextualization of critical thinking theory and practice, and in contribution from any expert community that could help in the improvement of thought where and when it matters. When it comes to worldviews, questions raised by the generalizability debate seem to cry out for serious consideration of the academic study of religion.⁷³ When these questions are tackled by those in critical thinking who recognize the vital importance of worldviews the support for this conclusion is made even stronger. Their arguments in favour of treating worldviews as a pedagogically distinct critical thinking category open the doors, in principle, to germane literature from outsiders, first among which should stand the scholarly community devoted to understanding worldviews and related phenomena, or the scholarly community devoted to the study of religion, if religion is paradigmatic of worldviews generally.⁷⁴

The suggestions given by these critical thinking writers for dealing with the implication of worldviews in reasoning and the deleterious effects they have on it, seem to show a considerable affinity to the academic study of religion. This affinity invites investigation. For example, the need to supplement the standard approach with knowledge about general worldview phenomena, the student's own worldview, and other specific worldviews, calls for input from the academic study of religion as a reliable source of data. The need to teach the dialogical, dialectical, and comparative reasoning skills needed for evaluating and choosing between alternative worldviews (and related scholarly methods) again calls for consideration of the work of scholars of religion and the skills that they value. How do scholars of religion compare, evaluate, and dialogue across worldviews? What are the related problematics, and how might these be dealt with within the academy? I will devote a sizeable portion of this work to answering these questions. Critical thinking dispositions point in the same direction. Introduction to competing perspectives, inter-disciplinarity, and

⁷³ What do experts in the academic study of religion/worldviews consider as successful thinking with regard to their object of study, and how does that compare to relevant material in critical thinking literature? What is the body of knowledge they consider important? Are there special obstacles to critical thought in this area, and how are they dealt with in this disparate field?

⁷⁴ Paradigmatic in the senses relevant to critical thinking.

methodological pluralism – suggested as conducive to intellectual humility and other laudable dispositions⁷⁵ – all point (as will be demonstrated below) to the academic study of religion as a fine example.^{76,77}

Considering the active interest critical thinking writers have shown in incorporating worldviews into their pedagogy for over three decades, it is rather curious that the same period has seen only a handful of tentative and tangential allusions to the one field whose very reason for being is the critical study of worldviews. This relative lack of input is all the more surprising given calls by prominent figures like Paul, Weinstein and others to fully integrate insight from the various disciplines into critical thinking (Paul, 1996, p. 34; Weinstein, 1989, p. 40).⁷⁸ I will defer my own attempt at explaining this regrettable but perhaps understandable omission to the final chapter. In the paragraphs that follow I would like to look at books by Richard Penaskovic, Gerald Nosich, Nel Noddings, and John Chaffee that do make an attempt to bring these two fields closer together.

In “Critical Thinking and the Academic Study of Religion” (1997) Penaskovic focuses on the infusion of critical thinking methods, concepts, and skills into religious studies instruction, and so it must be noted at the outset that the thrust of this book is opposite to my own. That is, Penaskovic is interested in contributions from critical thinking to teaching in the academic study of religion and not *vice versa*. The book contains a long list of good suggestions to this effect, drawn from both critical thinking theory and Penaskovic’s own experience as a religious studies teacher, many of which seem worthwhile pursuing. At the same time, his recommendations are not unusual, and they fail to pick up on the added complexities of thinking critically about religions and worldviews. His definition of critical thinking, for example,

⁷⁵ See for example Hoefler (1994).

⁷⁶ More such examples of *prima facie* potential for cross-fertilization will be touched on in the conclusion with my recommendations for further study.

⁷⁷ These and other examples are mirrored by positions within the academic study of religion where scholars have long been cognizant of the potential of their field for teaching students to think critically about religion or worldviews, both generally as well as their own. See for example Bianchi (1975, p. 30) and Waardenburg (1973, pp. 3, 35, 52).

⁷⁸ See also Girle (1991), Reed (2001), and Woods (2001).

includes a good emphasis on bias and the importance of its elimination. But his suggestions for how to identify and eliminate it seem simplistic considering the subject at hand. They also ignore the particular potential of instruction in the academic study of religion for dealing with worldview related biases. He writes: “Critical thinkers compare alternative sources of information, note areas of agreement and disagreement, and search out further information when the sources disagree. They are aware that preconception influences observation” (p. 10). As already intimated, I believe that the academic study of religion could make a considerable, perhaps even unique contribution to all of these, but Penaskovic is mute on the matter. He also fails to provide a sufficient emphasis on some of the biases one finds in much of what goes on under the banner of religious studies, towards a pluralist form of religiosity, for instance. This, again, ignores a very important obstacle to critical thought about religion or worldviews, this time one that is embedded less in the object of thought than in the community of experts entrusted with its study and teaching.

Nosich’s “Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum” (2009) is also devoted to the infusion of critical thinking, this time in all academic subjects. But Nosich puts equal emphasis on the importance of disciplinary thought to critical thinking outside of academia, and he explicitly brings the academic study of religion into the mix. When writing on background stories or background logic – our default ways of thinking about matters that are often false and misleading (thereby representing a common impediment to critical thought) – Nosich mentions popular beliefs about what other cultures are like and what reality is really like as examples of the encroachment of background stories and logic into the realm of the academic study of religion and other academic areas/disciplines. Where such encroachments occur, contradictions between one’s own thinking and what is accepted within the discipline must be noted and settled through a judicious mix of trust and scepticism. To a large extent expert material can be trusted. Disciplines have built-in sources of correction, but also of personal errors, and even systematic errors like the limited point of view of a discipline. Nevertheless, because the disciplines,

compared to popular alternatives, are the best sources of critical thought, they need to be taken seriously: Disciplinary thinking needs to be tried on for size. It should not be automatically doubted even when it conflicts with our own deeply held beliefs.

Nosich gives an example from religious studies here:

It is reasonable to apply a similar degree of trust even in matters that are far more controversial and deeply personal. For many people, for example, understanding the Bible is a deeply personal and intensely significant part of their lives. But, if you want to find out what the Bible is saying, if that is important to you, a reasonable way to go about it is to take a course in biblical studies. The authors you are likely to read in such a course will be biblical scholars, familiar with a wide variety of viewpoints and interpretations – not just with others who agree with them. They have read primary sources carefully. They have come to reasoned conclusions about the dating of manuscripts, and when and by whom those manuscripts were written. Most likely they know the original languages. They are intimately familiar with both the historical periods and the archaeological record. Their writings have been subjected to peer review. Such extensive research is not found in most other sources you might consult, such as television documentaries, sermons by religious leaders, evangelists on the radio, or the newest *New York Times* best seller. (p. 127)

He goes on:

Of course, the trustworthiness of the field does not imply that scholars are necessarily right. They could be wrong for any number of reasons – and you should think critically about their conclusions and their evidence, their interpretations and the context, the assumptions they make and the alternatives they ignore. They are, however, the best source you are likely to find. Moreover, if they are later shown to be wrong, it will most likely be by a

member of the same community of critically thinking historians and biblical scholars. (pp. 127–8)

Nosich recognizes both the relevance of the academic study of religion and the possibility of controversy that may necessitate a critical eye towards it, although I daresay that the field suffers from more controversy than he lets on – indeed, more than other disciplines – an issue that needs to be explored by those who would recommend it as a source of knowledge. This issue is not expanded on, and there is a similar paucity of ink given to worldview related impediments to reasoning, and the specific contribution that the academic study of religion can make here. There are three to four pages given for “egocentrism” and “previous commitments, previous personal experience” (pp. 26–8). Two more pages are devoted to “background stories, background logic” (pp. 120–2). These are barely enough to give a broad definition of the problems and a few simple illustrations.

Compared to the first two, Noddings’ book “Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach” (2006) gives considerably more attention to the contribution of the study of religion to critical thinking, devoting to it a full thirty page chapter. The book is an attempt to remedy the dearth of consideration given to controversial but important social issues in schooling.⁷⁹ According to Noddings, such lack means that deeply held beliefs or ways of life are rarely challenged, and the relevant thinking (and critical thinking) remains very poor. The questions that can be explored under the educational rubric “religion” that Noddings recommends are ones that all inquiring thoughtful humans ask and want to hear about. Relegating these questions to faith based institutions results in personally satisfying but intellectually unsatisfactory answers. She argues that it must therefore be part of public schooling (p. 250, 278).

⁷⁹ Noddings addresses American high-schools in particular but her comments can be easily generalized.

Many of the subjects she recommends are traditional Western philosophy of religion topics (although she does not use this heading): arguments for and against “proofs” for the existence of God, debates on reason and faith, religion and morality, and basic positions on religious belief like theism, deism, agnosticism, atheism, etc. (p. 255). In several places, however, she also touches on subjects that go beyond traditional philosophy of religion and into other branches of the academic study of religion. For instance, she recommends teaching about major mythological themes as well as major approaches to the interpretation of those myths and their limitations (p. 264). She touches on religious persuasion (“coercive socialization” p. 259), which brings in the psychology and sociology of religion at the very least. The same can be said of the connections between religion and discrimination or violence (pp. 266–70, 274). She also alludes to the existence of particular hindrances to critical thought in this area⁸⁰ and may also be hinting at inclusion of the philosophy of science when she recommends, as part of the design argument for the existence of God, that the conflict between evolution and creation “science” should be explored (p. 253). Learning philosophy of science generally and the philosophy of the academic study of religion in particular are two elements in education about religion that I will take as fundamental to critical thinking.

Noddings’ own examples explore answers mainly from Christianity, partly because of convenience and partly because of the dominance of Christianity in the Western world. But she adds that students should be encouraged to investigate these questions from their own religious perspectives as well (p. 252). She also writes of the importance of including secular worldviews, and also of conflicting views (pp. 276, 281).

Noddings’ approach is, in the main, commensurate with my own, and I wholeheartedly accept the bulk of her suggestions. Compared to Noddings, my own

⁸⁰ “Students should be encouraged to consider why they easily challenge claims to know God’s will when they are made by Muslims but fail even to think about such claims made in the past by members of the Judeo-Christian tradition” (p. 265). She also mentions the strong attachments students have to their own beliefs in this area (p. 280).

approach here will be directed more towards the philosophy of the academic study of religion, and my recommendations will put more emphasis on the various branches of the academic study of religion to which Noddings alludes only in passing. I also hope that what I say below is applicable to all levels of schooling and higher education, but Noddings' own recommendations can no doubt be similarly modified.

Lastly, John Chaffee's introductory textbook "Thinking Critically" (2006, pp. 302–9) includes a short reading by Frederick Streng entitled "What is Religion?" The reading mentions a handful of conceptions of religion that are not conducive to a proper (scholarly) approach to religion. Streng's reading is taken from a body of literature that I consider very useful to critical thinking, so much so that I chose to allot the next chapter to it. The pedagogical importance of this topic in my eyes, and the use to which it is put in Chaffee's textbook, seem, however, to be quite distinct. The reading brings to a close a chapter that Chaffee devotes to the basics of good conceptualization. On the face of it, the intention behind inclusion of the reading in this particular location is to illustrate the issues and principles raised within the body of the chapter (and initiate classroom discussion thereof) using an important concept. I will argue, on the other hand, that understanding several key conceptions and misconceptions of religion is, specifically, an invaluable component in a critical thinking pedagogy that gives students' worldviews sufficient attention. Although Chaffee is acutely aware of the need for critical thinking instruction to focus on students' own beliefs (this is well illustrated time and time again within the textbook) he makes no explicit connection between this goal and scholarly literature concerning the conceptualization of religion.

These four works are not the only ones by critical thinking writers that make some sort of connection between the two fields, but they do constitute the cream of the crop. While literature that attempts to justify the inclusion of a religion component in education on the basis of firm educational criteria is relatively abundant, this matter

has made very few inroads into the critical thinking community.⁸¹ It must be regretted that works such as the four above have as yet failed to spark a lively interest in the topic, and it is towards this end that I offer this thesis.

⁸¹ Of course, there is also an abundance of literature that relies on criteria that the critical thinking community will be suspicious of, and rightly so.

Chapter 4 Defining Religion and Worldview

For the academic study of religion, defining religion is no less important than answering this foundational question: “What is the object of our study?” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215) Without a definition with which to distinguish between what is and is not included in the field’s purview there is little with which one begin a scientific investigation (Spiro as quoted in Bianchi, 1975, pp. 203–4). What methods and theories are acceptable in the field is also a question that is dependent on the definition chosen (Geertz as cited in McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 157).⁸² Thus, a lack of agreement on a definition puts the very identity of the academic study of religion in question (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 205; Smith, 1975, p. 26).⁸³

No wonder, then, that no ink was spared on both attempts to define the term, and on discussions of the inability to do so successfully. Winston King (1987, p. 283) wrote that “so many definitions of religion have been framed in the West over the years that even a partial listing would be impractical.” I hasten to add that this is particularly true for this work.⁸⁴ The dizzying multiplicity of definitions goes hand in hand with the inability to reach a consensus on the matter. “The matter of definitions,” Daniel Pals wrote, “is considerably more difficult than common sense, at a first look, would lead us to believe” (1996, p. 12). The word religion has “no clear and consistent use” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 226), both in popular circles, and in scholarly work (Braun, 2000, p. 5).⁸⁵

In what follows an attempt is made to isolate three definitional failures that seem to plague the field, and that I find relevant to the pedagogical interest behind the current

⁸² See The Interdependency of Definition, Theory and Inquiry section.

⁸³ See chapter 4.2 on the demarcation of the field.

⁸⁴ For examples of surveys of definitions of the term see Dubuisson (2003, pp. 56–63) and Smith (1998).

⁸⁵ See also Arnal (1999), Geertz (2000), and Penner (1975b). For another illustrative list of citations on the lack of consensus on the definition of religion see Guthrie (1996).

work. These are undue normativity, parochialism, and simplicity. I will mention some of the criticisms that have been raised against them, and outline several definitional attempts that endeavoured to evade these limitations. I will then introduce a stream of thought from within the academic study of religion that advocates for the abandonment of religion as the foundational concept of the field, in favour of a concept that will more easily avoid the three inadequacies identified. I will then give a brief outline of three candidates for religion's replacement: Ninian Smart's *worldview*, William Paden's *world*, and Daniel Dubuisson's *cosmography*. Although it is not my intention to provide a survey of definitions of religion, in the process we would have gone through a sample of definitions that is perhaps not too far from being representative of the field. This chapter should bring to the fore a concept, and an academic discourse thereof, that has been conspicuously absent from critical thinking pedagogy, but yet shows considerable promise to this enterprise.

Normative Definitions of Religion

Our Religion, Your Delusion

In Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones" (1749), Mr. Square and Mr. Thwackum attempt to debate the possibility of morality ("Honour") outside of religion. When Square claimed that it was "impossible to discourse philosophically concerning Words, till their Meaning was first established" and that "there were scarce any two Words of a more vague and uncertain Signification" than those two, Thwackum replied: "When I mention Religion, I mean the Christian Religion; and not only the Christian Religion, but the Protestant Religion; and not only the Protestant Religion, but the Church of *England*." In Thwackum's eyes, one religion – his own – is true, and all others are relegated to "absurd Errors, and damnable Deceptions" (pp. 126–7).

Thwackum's definition of religion is far from an eighteenth century curiosity. In Jonathan Smith's words, "perhaps the most fundamental classification of religions is 'ours' and 'theirs,' [that is] often correlated with the distinction between 'true' and 'false,' 'correct' and 'incorrect'" (2000, p. 39). This was the dominant conception of religion throughout the history of the Christian West, and it had an unmistakable influence on the academic study of religion (pp. 39–43), an influence that in many ways is still there today (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 25–31, 36–7).

Another common strand of similarly normative definitions of religion can be found in the aforementioned debate when Square says to Thwackum: "You yourself will allow it ["Honour"] may exist independent of all but one [religion]; so will a *Mahometan*, a *Jew*, and all the Maintainers of all the different Sects in the World" (Fielding, 1749, pp. 126–7). Thwackum repeats the proposition with approval. In these words we have a conception of religion that presupposes the moral value of a particular faith: For

Thwackum Goodness lies within the Church of England, and Evil without. A similar presupposition can exist in definitions that allow for more religious diversity. Thus, “world-religions” can be considered as good, or a supposed common core of religions generally can be so defined, and so on.⁸⁶

Thwackum takes one particular religion as normative and relegates all else to the category of error and evil. His is a binary typology. Another, more inclusive and still common version of normative definitions of religion, allows for a degree of commonality between our right and good religion and the religions of others. Under this model there is still one “true” religion: that of the definer. But here other faiths are classified along a continuum according to the degree of similarity with that perfect example. These similarities may then be explained “by a genealogical narrative which accounts for the perceived similarities in terms of filiation” (Smith, 2000, p. 39). In this manner, a Roman Catholic may explain similarities with the Anglican Church by viewing it as an offshoot, a branch of the family tree, where his own faith is represented by the trunk. The further removed a branch is from this main trunk, the more it is in error. Alternatively, an Anglican might see Roman Catholicism as a stage in the development that led to his most perfect example of religion.⁸⁷

Typologies of the latter sort exerted a major influence on the academic study of religion, particularly in the nineteenth century (Bianchi, 1975, p. 3) when evolutionary or progressive accounts were in vogue. These typically depicted Christianity or something closely resembling it as the ultimate stage in mankind’s moral, spiritual, and cognitive development (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 77, 148–50). Which strand of Christianity served as the standard of good religion was, as expected, determined by the author’s predilection (Smith, 2000, p. 41). Although, to a large

⁸⁶ A telling example of the attractiveness of such thinking can be found in the post 9/11 attempt to define violence out of Islam: Since true Islam isn’t violent, the hijackers weren’t real Muslims (Orsi, 2003). A tendency to do the same with other faiths is documented in Avalos (2005). These represent telling examples of Antony Flew’s *No True Scotsman* fallacy (1975, pp. 47–50).

⁸⁷ Such commonalities are also frequently explained by way of a common revelation or human intuition, or some other postulated human universal, even, in contradistinction, a common human fallibility.

extent, this can be seen as an unfortunate ethnocentric episode from the field's past, the same may not be true of "Western consciousness" (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 78) or popular opinions generally. Adding to their lack of scientific value (p. 78), in the current context, it should be noted that such classifications, by relegating the exotic to inferior status, render it impotent. There can be no critical engagement with difference if the different is defined as delusion beforehand (Bianchi, 1975, p. 3; Dubuisson, 2003, p. 114).⁸⁸

Secular and Religious Definitions of Religion

Chief among the theoretical debates in the academic study of religion, and one that I shall return to several times, rages around the question of truth in religion (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 83–7, 167–76, 198; Smith, 2000, p. 39). Is religion just another natural phenomenon, amenable to a purely naturalistic explanation, and therefore – in the last analysis – false? Or is there something in addition to that, an other-worldly element, not accessible to the empirical investigation of the human sciences, which are therefore doomed, in the subject of religion, to remain insufficient methods of study (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 52)? Is religion just another cultural (psychological, historical, etc.) phenomenon? Or is it in some way wholly distinct from anything mundane, and so, to be studied by unique methods?

Mr. Thwackum and the other examples above conceptualize religion along a *religionist* (Bianchi, 1975, p. 3) line: Religion, whatever else it may be, is primarily a supernatural phenomenon. Two of the most influential conceptions of this sort in the field are those of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, who saw the essence of religion as experience of that "wholly other," which lies beyond the mundane and variegated expressions of religion. For Otto it is "awe, a unique blend of fear and fascination before the divine," that is the definitive characteristic of religion. For Eliade it is

⁸⁸ I will come back to this point when dealing with interreligious dialogue.

experience of or orientation to the sacred – a more universally applicable concept, not strictly a “God-encounter type of experience,” but an encounter with the super-natural nonetheless (King, 1987, p. 284; Arnal, 2000, pp. 25–6).⁸⁹ For both, religion, being “an essentially personalistic experience,” (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 91) is not fully accessible to interpersonal investigation (p. 60).

In contrast to such religionist takes on religion we have naturalist conceptions, which see religion as a socio-cultural/psychological phenomenon, and nothing more (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 157).^{90,91} From a naturalist point of view, religionists’ definitions of religion make it impossible to explain religion in natural terms by making a normative assumption that religion is primarily other-worldly (Arnal, 2000). Their very definition presumes religion to be an impenetrable datum for science (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 18). Worse still, religionists often fail “to acknowledge [. . . these] pre-observational theories and beliefs” (p. 154).

From the religionist perspective, however, naturalists are seen to be making a similar (if opposite) normative assumption. For the religious person “religion seems always to contain some extra-societal, extra-psychological depth-factor or transcendent dimension, which must be further examined” (King, 1987, p. 284), and naturalist definitions of religion assume this religious perspective to be false – a value judgment that is unnecessary and possibly harmful in the academic study of religion (Sharpe, 1983, p. 45).

Thus, if we take religionist and naturalist definitions of religion to be exclusionary, that is, where such definitions presume “that one theoretical position is completely adequate and makes other contributions, based on different positions and frames of

⁸⁹ Eliade’s concept of the sacred should not be confused with Durkheim’s, which, in contradistinction, lies on the naturalistic side of the fence (Arnal, 2000, pp. 24–5).

⁹⁰ A handful of the most well known are introduced in Pals (1996). Tim Jensen’s and Mikael Rothstein’s (eds.) “Secular Theories of Religion” (2000a) is a good introduction that covers more recent contributions.

⁹¹ There are weaker forms of naturalism that allow for the possible existence of supernatural elements within religion, but which see them as unlikely, or as bad science as far as current understanding is concerned. I will come to consider these in the chapter on evaluation.

reference, redundant” (McCutcheon, 1997b, pp. 18–9, 64), both positions can be seen as metaphysically reductive or metaphysically loaded (pp. 18–9): Both make an ontological assumption about the nature of the phenomenon to be investigated that is undecided on empirical grounds (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 83–5; Sharpe, 1983, pp. 63–5) – both are an instance of special pleading (Arnal, 2000, p. 26).⁹²

In the same way that Mr. Thwackum takes his own faith as definitive, normative definitions of religion of the religionist or naturalist kind have less to do with describing “a visible phenomenon” than with isolating one of its *prima facie* features (that people believe in the existence of the super-natural, or that religions have empirical manifestations) and treating it as definitive of the phenomenon as a whole (Sharpe, 1983, pp. 35, 46, 55). Because of this selective attention, normative definitions may “tell us rather more about the state of mind of their creator than about observable phenomena” (p. 35).

The Interdependency of Definition, Theory and Inquiry

In all the cases above, the truth and value of religion or of religions has already been decided by the definitional act. Though they are decried in the field, to a degree, such normative presuppositions are unavoidable (Sharpe, 1983, p. 68): They are part and parcel of some theoretical positions that are hard to escape even in scholarly study (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 83–4). The scholarly aim is to avoid a conception of religion derived *a priori*: The meaning of religion should be arrived at through inquiry. But one cannot begin the empirical investigation before some phenomena are designated as relevant, and this can only be done according to a prior concept of religion, (Bianchi, 1975, pp. 203–6; Martin, 2000a, p. 49; McCutcheon, 1997b, pp. 154, 205; Smith, 1975, pp. 26–7).

⁹² The student of religion must not “beg the question of the referential truthfulness of religion” (Arnal, 2000, p. 27). See also Sharpe (1983, p. 45) and Smart’s “methodological agnosticism” below (Chapter 5, Reduction and Naturalism section).

The problem is that by determining what data will be considered as religious, this prior conception of religion will also have an effect on the conclusions that the investigators are able to draw. Those who consider religion to be a natural phenomenon tend to select and interpret data very differently from those that consider it to be an encounter and appropriate relationship with the supernatural, and these differences will in turn corroborate diametrically opposed conceptions of religion – the very same conceptions (even if more sophisticated) with which inquiry began.

Robert Baird describes the normative connection between definition and inquiry as a tripartite affair. In the academic study of religion normative claims such as these (religion is natural/supernatural, true/false, good/amoral/bad)⁹³ are considered explanatory or theoretical. They should be the conclusions of theories of religion – that is, theories that both describe religion and explain it – that are established on good scientific grounds, not prior conviction. Thus, if having a true definition of religion means knowing what religion is, definition “involves one in an explanation of religion . . . and that in turn implies a theory of religion” (Baird, 1975, p. 118). But

theories of religion are inevitably normative, for they are concerned with offering explanations of a dimension of reality. They are not concerned merely with defining the meanings of words, but with giving an explanation of the things to which the words point. . . . This involves one directly in metaphysics. (Baird, 1975, p. 113)

Described thus, there seems to be an inescapable normative entanglement: Definitions imply choice of theory, which then guides inquiry along a circumscribed path that

⁹³ A wider parallel to these in popular culture would also include claims such as “My religion/worldview is true.” Claims like these also include an explanatory or theoretical aspect in the sense that religions and worldviews typically include explanations of their own truth, and of the falsity of their cultural rivals.

leads to the very same definition with which the whole thing began.⁹⁴ But must a good definition of religion possess an accurate understanding of religion *an sich*?

Religion as a Concept

One popular way in which scholars of religion attempt to negotiate the problem of normative assumptions has already been intimated in Baird's words above: A distinction should be made between the concept *religion* and the thing to which it points. Talk of definition should restrict itself to the concept. Definitions of religion can simply clarify word usage – they do not have to involve problematic theoretical assumptions to the degree that claims about the meaning, essence, or nature of religion-as-such do. Definitions of religion should be seen as stipulative or functional: They “indicate how the word ‘religion’ is to be used in a given context” (Baird, 1975, pp. 118, 113–8). Such definitions are hypothetical in nature: They are

only dealing with relationships – this being the case, that follows. This can be done on the descriptive level, may have no interest in explaining why there is religion, and may settle for an analysis of how religion appears or functions. Since it is only interested in studying the multitudinous forms of religion in terms of the functional definition given, it does not involve one in a theory of religion. To theorize about religion would be a further step.⁹⁵ (Baird, 1975, p. 113)

Religion, then, should be understood as a “useful heuristic, taxonomic, or analytical tool for demarcating and studying a certain aspect of human beings and communities,” and not as an “ontologically distinct category” (McCutcheon, 1997b,

⁹⁴ In the words of William Arnal, “no statement about what religion is can avoid at least partially *explaining* what religion *does*, where it comes from, and how it works,” and that “any effort to theorize religion is, concomitantly, utterly dependent on, and even derivative from, the way in which the concept is defined in the first place” (Arnal, 2000, p. 22). See also Pals (Pals, 1996, p. 269).

⁹⁵ This hypothetical nature, does not, of course, mean that any definition is academically acceptable (Martin, 2000a, pp. 48–9).

pp. 18–9).⁹⁶ In addition, one’s operational definition of religion – understood as a concept – should be held tentatively, critically, and non-exclusively (pp. 18–9, 157, 212). It should be “problematized and studied” (p. 212):

First, it is incumbent on scholars to acknowledge the culturally entrenched, and hence partial and limited, nature of their own observational starting point, that is, recognizing the entrenched nature of our idealized, prototypical notions of just what constitutes “religion”. . . . Second, because of this perspective-bound nature of our starting prototypes, we must always hold them tentatively, as exemplars instead of norms. Accordingly, we must be thoroughly familiar with their history, implications, limitations, and various uses.⁹⁷ (Saler as cited in McCutcheon, 1997b, pp. 131–2)

⁹⁶ See also Sharpe (1983, p. 33) and Braun (2000, pp. 8–9, 15).

⁹⁷ See Braun (2000, pp. 10–4) for an example of an exposition of a definition of religion that attempts to balance its own situatedness with a measure of criticality.

Parochial Definitions of Religion

A second important strand in the debate over the definition of religion concerns whether or not a definition has an appropriate level of generality. A definition of religion that is sufficiently inclusive – to the point of making religion a universal human phenomenon – goes a long way towards supporting the existence of distinct and independent university departments of religion. The goal of those who take this justificatory path is of “guaranteeing a distinctive role for religion as a universally applicable analytical concept” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215) – “a concept of religion and religiosity which picks out a universal characteristic in human cultures” (p. 233),⁹⁸ while at the same time avoiding “meaningless generalities,” (King, 1987, p. 283) that is, a concept “so indefinite that the word ceases to pick out any distinctive aspect of human culture” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215). The specifically Western inheritance of the concept, however, may be in an intractable conflict with the universal aspiration, such that religion could be taken as either a concept with very limited applicability (primarily the monotheistic traditions), or, universalized, it would be indistinguishable from concepts like ideology, worldview, or culture.

Though no consensus on the definition of religion has been reached, some definitional elements are more common than others. In the history of the academic study of religion, and in Western cultures generally, religion is often seen as “a set of beliefs and practices that are different from surrounding beliefs and practices and that embody a special relation to deity,” often including a “religious community, distinct and more or less set apart from the enviroing society” (King, 1987, p. 283). That is, there is a dichotomous emphasis or a “sharp distinction between the religious and nonreligious dimensions of culture” (King, 1987, p. 283). Religion is also commonly

⁹⁸ If religion is to be transformed from “a folk category into an analytical category,” one would have “to define the term religion so it can be applied outside the culture and period that produced it” (Saler as cited in Guthrie, 1996).

seen as essentially cognitive: a matter of beliefs – typically, belief in deities (Pals, 1996, p. 12).

Despite its popularity, this dichotomous and cognitive conception of religion may prove too parochial for scholarly purposes with universal intentions: It might be too “deeply ingrained with specifically Western cultural presuppositions” (King, 1987, p. 283) to apply outside that context. In many societies it is very hard if not impossible to distinguish between the religious and the sociocultural (p. 282).⁹⁹ Emphasis on the cognitive, that is, emphasis on beliefs about the supernatural and specifically belief in deity, are similarly restrictive as a definitional criterion, ruling out the likes of Buddhism and Taoist, Confucian, and Shinto cultures from the field (pp. 282–3).¹⁰⁰ Thus, when applied outside a very limited field, a definition that takes this criterion as essential can be seen as “too parochially tied to [the] Judaeo-Christian theistic origins of the word” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215): It is “too ‘theological’ a definition” (Pals, 1996, p. 12). Dichotomous and cognitive conceptions of religion exclude too much of what many take as religious out of the scholar’s field of view, or, where they are stretched to accommodate the heterogeneous, we may end up with an ill-fitting straitjacket (Arnal, 2000, p. 32).¹⁰¹

Religion’s Private Universal Essence

Probably the most well known route to broaden the applicability of the concept was taken by scholars like Otto and Eliade, who claimed to have found a universal

⁹⁹ Non-literate tribal or “primitive” societies (Clarke as cited in Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 224; King, 1987, p. 282) or pre-secular societies generally (Sharpe, 1983, p. 139), and even Hinduism – commonly thought of as religious – are ruled out of the sphere of religion according to the dichotomy criterion. See Arnal (2000, pp. 31–2), Dubuisson (2003, p. 15), Fitzgerald (1996, p. 233), Sharpe (1983, pp. 134–9), and King (1987, p. 282) for various explanations of the existence of the dichotomous conception of religion in the West.

¹⁰⁰ Emphasis on the cognitive, even where one does find beliefs and doctrines about the supernatural, may still be problematic. See *Simplistic Definitions of Religion* section.

¹⁰¹ “Forcing them into our categories does not always increase our understanding, and may turn out to be a kind of intellectual colonization by a provincial western tribe which has delusions of grandeur” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 229).

essential characteristic. The general and legitimate procedure is of abstracting from the data a common property that can be found outside the West. Characteristically, such approaches advanced a “profoundly individualistic vision” that reduced “religion to an interior sentiment that is inevitably born of the experience of transcendence, whether the latter be called God, the sacred, the beyond, power, mystery, or the like” (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 54).

These results, however, are seen by many as redolent of their author’s own background and partiality: They fail to escape their parochial inheritance. Dubuisson writes: “the majority of these definitions have as implicit model the Christian conception, but reduced in some fashion to its ‘ideal type,’ to its stripped down quintessence.” These scholars are guilty “of seeing as a universal notion, what is after all only the purified version of one of our old native categories,” which, he continues, “makes this spiritualized and minimalist version even less open to universalization,” and since it is not found universally the concept remains exclusionary (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 54, 63, 68).^{102,103} In effect, such conceptions find commonality between religions where there is none. I will come back to this critique in the chapter on interreligious dialogue.

Religion Applied Analogously

Another way in which scholars of religion attempt to wean religion from its parochial past is to accept its Western heritage but treat it as a concept that applies analogously to phenomena that would otherwise be excluded under traditional Western definitions: “The religious is that which has been called religious in the Western

¹⁰² This type of definitions that emphasize private experience are also seen as too simplistic a characterization of what is a complex and multi-dimensional web of related phenomena. See Fitzgerald (1996, pp. 219–21), for example, and Simplistic Definitions of Religion section.

¹⁰³ Dubuisson (2003, p. 66) takes the Christian influence on the definition of religion as an explanation of the tendency to see Christianity as exemplary and normative (See Normative Definitions section): “Under the heading of ‘universal,’ . . . we arrange facts and attitudes that are at best only abstractions constructed on the very limited basis of our own categories. This is why we so easily manage to convince ourselves that these abstractions are present among us in their most perfect form” (p. 68).

world, chiefly Christian and Jewish matters, and anything else on earth that can be shown to be comparable” (Smith, 1975, p. 26). For Wilfred Cantwell Smith the concept extends to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and beyond, through an application of the criterion of similarity to the Western religious tradition (Smith, 1975, pp. 26–7). Likewise, Ugo Bianchi wrote that the scholar of religion should

describe as ‘religious,’ using this adjective as a hypothetical term for purposes of research, all those phenomena which he has encountered in civilizations similar or dissimilar to those in which he has received his *Bildung* and scientific training, and which show an analogy, even if with a marked contrast of principles and forms, with what in his own cultural circle . . . signifies ‘religion.’ (Bianchi, 1975, p. 1)

Here religion as the Western prototype maintains a limited scope, and the adjective *religious*, referring to properties analogous to those of the prototypical religions, can apply more broadly, perhaps even universally (Bianchi, 1975, p. 30) – the breadth being dependant on which characteristics are picked out as similar.

So even though Bianchi defines religion in a way that others have identified as theistic and too narrowly Western,¹⁰⁴ he can still see secular ideologies like communism and Nazism as analogous to religions (Bianchi, 1975, p. 31). While they are not religions they do have some religious aspects, or fulfil religious functions, and as such, are substitutes for religions (pp. 167–8). Smart also uses such an approach to reach his conclusion that secular ideologies are “analogous at least to religions” (Smart, 1978, p. 11). Religions “mobilize deep sentiments and often demand great sacrifices; they give a sense of identity and purpose; they propound a theory of the

¹⁰⁴ “At the very basis of religion, we usually find belief in one or more powers, conceived as superior persons older than human beings and independent of them. Man, and the human collectivities, adopt an attitude of dependence on these beings, and this is reflected in their conduct, ethical or ritual, and in a belief in the possibility of communicating with these higher powers. Nevertheless, every interpretation of life which admits of an otherworldly life has an essential connection with religious thought. In other words, religion implies a ‘breakthrough’, in the sense that one of the first characteristics of the religious element may be discerned in the establishment of a relationship with a super-human power which is understood to condition the life of the world and life in the world” (Bianchi, 1975, p. 33).

world, a placement of men's lives in action and feeling," and so do secular ideologies (Smart, 1981, p. 208); religions possess several dimensions ("doctrine, myth, ethical teaching, ritual, experience, and social institutionalization" (Smart, 1978, p. 11))¹⁰⁵ that are similarly apparent in secular ideologies; and so, there is "much in the analysis of religion which applies to them too" (Smart, 1981, p. 208).

Can such use of the concept of religion succeed in founding a science of religion with universal aspirations? Since religion as the Western prototype maintains its limited scope, the hope is that the job will be done by the adjective *religious*, that is, by the analogy with the prototypical religions. But if a universal science is to be founded on a set of phenomena whose common denominator is similarity with the prototypical religions, the choice of a religion as prototypical will have to be defended on scientific grounds. That this is the historical baggage of the Western scholar does not suffice. If this cannot be done, a science with broader applicability could still be founded directly on those characteristics that are common to the phenomena of interest. Indeed, it will soon become apparent that some were not content to stop at the analogy between religions and secular ideologies. For Smart, to take one prominent example, it was not Western religions supplemented by analogy, but the common characteristics themselves that were foundational. If religions and secular ideologies are so similar, why not reconceptualize the academic study of religion as the academic study of worldviews – religions and secular ideologies being species of worldviews? On the basis of these common characteristics, Smart constructed a definition of religion (and worldviews generally) that takes it to be a family resemblance type of concept. But before coming to definitions of this sort, I will introduce one more common criticism of popular definitions of religion.

¹⁰⁵ See Smart's multi-dimensional definition of worldviews below.

Simplistic Definitions of Religion

The third and last of the problematic characteristics of definitions of religion that I wish to isolate here is that of undue simplicity. Many definitions of religion are seen as too simple to accurately describe or point to the complexity and variety of phenomena that are commonly referred to as religion or religious. Recall that numerous definitions take it to “primarily involve belief in, and actions directed toward, deities” (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 63). Such definitions distinguish the religious from the non-religious by a specific kind of belief. “The implication here” Sharpe writes, “is that there is in religion a central core, or essence, of belief” (1983, p. 38), and that “religion has little to do with ritual or social values, with power, hierarchy or caste” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 221) or any of the other aspects that have been attributed to religion over millennia.

For many scholars of religion such a definition is too restrictive. Too many phenomena that would otherwise be considered religion or religious are excluded by this criterion, and even where this conceptual aspect does exist, it may be eclipsed in importance or interest by other aspects of the phenomenon (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 63).¹⁰⁶ As Timothy Fitzgerald put it, “the context needed for successful understanding and description may involve a whole range of cross-cutting institutions, only some of which have anything much to do with the supernatural or the transcendent,” and so, “to isolate one’s subject matter in relation to beliefs and doctrines about the supernatural is often an artificial and distorting procedure” (1996, p. 220).¹⁰⁷

The experiential approach to definition – the second major stream of definitions that I mentioned with regard to the parochial limitation, and one that was explicitly advocated as an attempt to broaden the concept’s applicability – when it takes a

¹⁰⁶ See for example King (1987, pp. 283–4) and Fitzgerald (1996, p. 220).

¹⁰⁷ See also Neusner (1975a, p. 31) and Sharpe (1983, p. 38).

certain kind of experience as the sole definitional criterion, suffers from the same inadequacy. If “religion is never an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed apart from the total cultural matrix,” and so “many religious beliefs, customs, and rituals can only be understood in reference to this matrix” (King, 1987, p. 284), then both cognitive and experiential definitions can be criticized for overlooking the social aspects of religion.

A distinctive contribution in this respect is made by definitions offered in the social sciences (King, 1987, p. 284) typically in the form of functional definitions, whereby religion is defined in terms of the functions it performs in the lives of individuals and communities: “Certain individual or social needs are specified and religion is identified as any system whose beliefs, practices or symbols serve to meet those needs” (Clarke and Byrne as cited in Arnal, 2000, p. 24). Even here, however, one can easily use too simple a definition. This can be seen in social scientific definitions that propose (or imply) that religion can be completely accounted for in terms taken from a particular discipline (King, 1987, p. 284).

Taking Durkheim’s definition of religion as an example, if it is to be used as a definition of religion in its entirety, much that is commonly considered as religious seems to be excluded from the category solely because it is not social in character:

For Durkheim, magic, which bears many of the supernatural characteristics (i.e., content) of what is ordinarily designated as religion, is excluded from this category by virtue of its private character: as a private act, it cannot fulfil precisely the social functions by which Durkheim can identify a phenomenon as a religious one.” (Arnal, 2000, p. 25)

The difficulty, to sum up, lays in the excessive simplicity of definitions that see religion as involving or referring primarily to one thing – religion’s essential characteristic – which then acts as a necessary and sufficient condition for a phenomenon to classify as religion (Guthrie, 1996). The huge and variegated body of

data gathered in the academic study of religion (Connolly, 1995), and the variety of approaches to this subject, puts this much beyond reproach: “religion is not one simple thing, nor does it fulfil one single function” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 91). Still, so many definitions, both scholarly and popular, suffer from this weakness: The definers use religion to signify what they “consider to be most important and most essential among the welter of conflicting and contradictory human evidence” (p. 46), consigning all else to darkness (p. 48).¹⁰⁸

It is important, however, to qualify that my intention here is not to disavow of so called *monothetic* (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 63) definitions *tout court*. Excessive simplicity is so only relative to a purpose. If one’s purpose is to circumscribe a foundational concept for a field as diverse as the academic study of religion, then monothetic definitions, while they might “tell us *something* about religion in one or other of its aspects” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 35), will also exclude much that is of interest. But if one’s purpose is more limited in scope – say, the study of religion’s social aspects – and there is no intention of defining religion-as-such or religion as a whole, then a monothetic definition could still be sufficient. According to Eric Sharpe, this is in fact what Durkheim was doing: “His concern was with religious organisations, and less with whatever beliefs, experiences or convictions they might sustain” (p. 38). In such cases monothetic definitions can still be good taxonomic tools (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 63) that orient scholars and their audience towards a specific object of interest – their piece of the cake.¹⁰⁹ I will come back to this point when inquiring into the possible roles that definitions of religion could play in critical thinking pedagogy.

¹⁰⁸ Sharpe calls this the “Humpty Dumpty principle”: A “tendency . . . to make ‘religion’ mean neither more nor less than what a person chooses that it should mean, irrespective of the whole host of observables which can be identified on other criteria as belonging within the orbit of religious belief and behaviour” (1983, p. 36).

¹⁰⁹ Sharpe (1983, pp. 34–5) illustrates this point with the definitions given by William James and Alfred North Whitehead. Both are, on the face of it, quite similar, in as much as both ignore the social side of religion. But Sharpe takes only James’ definition as legitimate, because “whereas James was telling his readers what aspect or aspects of religion he was preparing to deal with in a book devoted explicitly to the study of religious experience, Whitehead was attempting to characterize something about the essence of religion as he saw it” (p. 35).

Multidimensional Definitions of Religion

The types of definitions that I now come to consider have been articulated, in part, as a response to the criticisms from parochialism and undue simplicity. I have already noted how the parochial limitation led to attempts to make the concept more inclusive by way of analogy. Accusations of simplicity provide another impetus for more broadly applicable definitions. For those whose aim is a definition of religion capable of encompassing all that goes on in the field without prejudice, approaches that are multidimensional or approaches that see religion as a family resemblance type of concept, seem to hold more potential than monothetic definitions, even when augmented by way of analogy. Peter Connolly writes:

The variety of religious phenomena has led students of religion to abandon the attempt to formulate an adequate one- or two- sentence definition of the subject. The trend since the mid-1960's has been for scholars to generate multi-category definitions. . . . They suggest that all religious systems exhibit certain general characteristics and, at the same time, that such characteristics are present in different proportions in different traditions. (1995)

Under such definitions religion is commonly understood to be a family resemblance type of concept *a la* Wittgenstein: The word religion has no essential meaning – the search for a necessary and sufficient condition is abandoned.¹¹⁰ Instead, these definitions list a number of characteristics varying combinations of which make a phenomenon more or less religion-like, thereby avoiding essentialist or necessary and parochial criteria such as belief in deity (Fitzgerald, 1996, pp. 215, 226; Saler as cited in Guthrie, 1996).

¹¹⁰ Polythetic definitions are not necessarily of the family resemblance type. See, for example, Arnal's classification of definitions and his treatment of Geertz's definition (Arnal, 2000).

One such definition was given by King (1987, pp. 286–92) in his entry “Religion” in Eliade’s (ed.) monumental “Encyclopedia of Religion” (1987). His list of “characteristic elements and categories of structures distinctively religious” (p. 286) includes

- Traditionalism¹¹¹
- Myth and symbol
- Concepts of salvation
- Sacred places and objects
- Sacred actions (rituals)
- Sacred writings (or oral traditions) and their interpretation
- A sacred community
- Sacred experience

Another polythetic definition – not less noteworthy than the first – is given by Sharpe (1983, pp. 94–105). For him there are at least four “modes” or functions to religion:¹¹²

Function	Characteristic Content
1. Existential	Faith or trust ¹¹³
2. Intellectual	Beliefs in the sense of those statements that one gives conscious assent. ¹¹⁴
3. Institutional	Organisations within which (1) and (2) are held and maintained, and by which they are transmitted.

¹¹¹ “The basic thrust of traditionalism is to maintain itself” (King, 1987, p. 287). Religions “look backward for origins, precedents, and standards” (pp. 286–7), they take for granted “the beginnings”: “the original creative action, the life and words of an individual founder, even the authorless antiquity of a tradition’s scriptures . . . are taken as models of pristine purity and power, fully authoritative for all members of the group or adherents of the faith” (p. 287).

¹¹² Table adapted from p. 95.

¹¹³ This is the experiential/individual aspect of religion. “Whatever the details, the experience itself is, so far as the subject is concerned, entirely self-authenticating. It does not permit of analysis or even discussion, though it may be compared with similar experiences which others have had” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 98).

¹¹⁴ This includes “doctrines, dogmas, theologies and philosophies” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 100).

4. Ethical Conduct *vis-à-vis* the members of (3) and others.¹¹⁵

It is important to note, however, that the polythetic approach, in and of itself, does not guarantee a holistic result. For example, Bruce Lincoln's four definitional criteria are

1. A discourse that claims its concerns transcend the human, temporal and contingent, while claiming for itself a similarly transcendent status.
2. A set of practices informed and structured by that discourse.
3. A community, whose members construct their identity with reference to the discourse and its attendant practices.
4. An institution that regulates discourse, practices and community, reproducing and modifying them over time, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value. (2000a, p. 416)

The focus here is intentionally limited to “aspects of religion that are manifest in intersubjective social relations, rather than those that are intensely personal and interior” (Lincoln, 2000a, p. 416).

Additionally, which set of criteria are taken as definitive of religion remains an open question. If the “set of features is derived from some prototype,” and if normally “the prototype for religion is the Jewish-Christian tradition” (Guthrie, 1996), this, again, will have to be defended on scientific grounds, or else the field is open to the ethnocentric accusation.¹¹⁶ Again, the adequacy of any definition will have to be judged with reference to the purpose it is meant to achieve.

The strength of the polythetic and, in particular, the family resemblance approach to definition is that it lends itself more readily to grasp the diversity and complexity of

¹¹⁵ “In the vast majority of cases, strict ethical standards have been operative only within the community of believers. Over against ‘the others’, on the other hand, no ethical restraints need apply” (Sharpe, 1983, pp. 104–5).

¹¹⁶ “If the collection does have some unity, what, if anything, underlies it other than an accident of Western cultural history” (Guthrie, 1996)?

phenomena studied in religious studies departments.¹¹⁷ This very openness, however, may prove to be an Achilles' heel. In their eagerness to broaden the concept's applicability, multi-dimensional family resemblance definitions may err on the side of inclusiveness. It is to this problem that I now turn.

¹¹⁷ This approach “corresponds to widespread usage, since the term religion is fact is used for phenomena as diverse as communism . . . and ‘civil religion.’” It “encourages us to grasp diversity” (Guthrie, 1996): “as a starting point for transcultural dialogue, . . . such unbounded categories as religion serve as the best possible bridges; from the outset, they exclude no one from the dialogue and the bridge-building game” (Saler as cited in McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 130–2).

Religion, or Something Else?

Ironically, family resemblance definitions of religion, advocated as a replacement for essentialist Western definitions in the hope of founding the academic study of religion on a universally applicable analytical concept, may end in defining religion into oblivion.¹¹⁸ By letting go of essential criteria the concept is made so broad that the religion family is no longer distinguishable from “other neighbouring families such as ideologies, worldviews, values or symbolic systems” etc. Religion “becomes so indefinite that the word ceases to pick out any distinctive aspect of human culture” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215). This was illustrated forcefully by Fitzgerald (1996) on Peter Byrne’s definition, but his arguments will apply equally well to the definitions given by King and Sharpe above.

Can the definitions by King and Sharp, if they do not “smuggle in” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215) an essentialist criterion into such concepts as “the sacred” or “salvation” by treating them “covertly in terms of belief in the supernatural” (p. 232), distinguish between religion and worldviews or ideologies? If, in King’s definition, the sacred is taken in its Durkheimian sense, as “whatever any particular social group values fundamentally” (p. 228), then “we can simply identify ‘religion’ with whatever is deemed sacred in any particular society, and the institutions and rituals related to [. . . those] things (stories, places, times, people, ideas, values and so on)” (p. 227). And if so, can such a definition found an academic discipline that is distinct from “cultural studies, understood as the analysis and interpretation of the values institutionalized by different societies” (p. 232)?

¹¹⁸ I exaggerate, of course. More appropriately – and this is a point I will arrive at shortly – such a move will require something of a Copernican revolution, whereby religion relinquishes its place at the centre of the field, even if it does not go far towards the periphery. To be sure, in the religionist camp many would consider this a great loss.

In fact, it is not readily clear whether or not these definitions sneak in such an essentialist criterion. Both definitions seem to contain contradictory remarks that render them ambiguous on this point. For example, King (1987) writes: “Perhaps religions could be seen, then, as the attempt to order individual and societal life in terms of culturally perceived ultimate priorities” (p. 285); but then he adds that “religion is the organization of life around the depth dimensions of experience” (p. 286), and that these dimensions are defined in terms of “a push . . . toward some sort of ultimacy *and transcendence* [italics added] that will provide norms and power for the rest of life” (p. 286). Further on he writes that “salvation is but another name for religion.” But then a distinction is made between religious and secular schemes of salvation, and King notes that “religious means of salvation, often indirect and extrahuman, seek to use supersensible forces and powers either in addition to or in place of ordinary tangible means” (pp. 287–8). Another indication of King’s intentions is given by the fact that in the only entry devoted entirely to the definition of religion in the colossal *Encyclopedia of Religion* he chose to exclude secular worldviews from his examples.

Similarly, in Sharpe (1983) one finds the following: “Dismiss the supernatural order from the picture altogether, and you are left with sacred symbols that refer to nothing in particular. What you have left may be moral, inspiring, intellectually or aesthetically satisfying, or what you will: but it will not be religion” (p. 48). But then Sharpe writes: “Although it is not necessarily belief in the ‘holiness’ or ‘sacredness’ of persons, places, times and seasons that makes religion, we might at least claim that such a belief is one of the most widespread signs of religion” (p. 63).

Definitions so broad that they fail to distinguish between religion and related concepts are not limited to the family resemblance type. Consider this definition:

A religion . . . may be regarded as a perspective, a standpoint, in which certain dominant images are used by its adherents to orient themselves to the present and the future . . . a way of looking at experience as a whole . . . a way of

interpreting certain elemental features of human existence. (Harvey as quoted in Neusner, 1975a, p. 31)

Clifford Geertz's definition of religion – one that has been very prominent in the field – seems also to be inclusive of such things as ideologies or secular worldviews (Arnal, 2000, p. 26; Hewitt, 1999). Under Geertz's definition religion is:

1. a system of symbols which acts to 2. establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in [human beings] 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. (Geertz as quoted in Hewitt, 1999)

Is there any way to avoid including communism and nationalism under the religion rubric according to these definitions?¹¹⁹

Durkheim's definition, which sees religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to *sacred things*, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden” (Durkheim as quoted in Arnal, 2000, pp. 24–5), shares this trait. This inclusiveness seems to be a general property of such functional definitions (Arnal, 2000, p. 27; Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 332). It is not limited to a single or isolated definitional approach, and accords with actual scholarly usage (Fitzgerald, 1996, pp. 215, 226).¹²⁰

Assuming that no uncontroversial line of demarcation between religion and similar concepts is forthcoming, that is, assuming that there are “no scientific criteria by which religious representations could be differentiated from non-religious ones” (Anttonen & Pyysiainen, 1999), or at the very least that “there is no clear demarcation between religion and so-called secular world-views and systems of practice” (Smart, 1996b, p. 193), as Fitzgerald's argument continues, we are led “away from any

¹¹⁹ See also Fitzgerald's discussion of Milton Yinger's definition (Fitzgerald, 1996, pp. 232–3).

¹²⁰ See also (Guthrie, 1996).

particular significance for religion or religions, and towards the contextual interpretation of values and their institutionalization” (1996, p. 231). In other words, if there is no way to distinguish between religion and ideology, worldview, culture, etc., then “the concept of religion has no distinctive theoretical property and therefore cannot supply the basis for an academic discipline” (p. 233).

This definitional dilemma, and the wide use to which the category religion is put in the field, leads Fitzgerald to the conclusion that “there is an obligation on the community of scholars to reconceptualize the wide and valuable range of work which is being carried out in ‘religion’ departments” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 215). The questions, as he put it, is this: “could we not reconceptualize the study of religions as the study of cultures or ideologies or ‘worldviews’” (pp. 215–6)? In this he is not alone. Several other notable writers argue for the term’s replacement.¹²¹ Since my aim here is not to argue for such a reconceptualization, but simply to introduce this as a legitimate stream of thought within the field, I will not survey any more arguments to this effect, and instead turn to three concepts that have been offered as religion’s replacement.

Ninian Smart’s Worldview

One often finds references to worldviews in the writings of scholars of religion. Hans Penner goes so far as to say that the term “is a central concept for most approaches to the study of religion” (Penner, 2000, p. 61). Smart did much to popularize and articulate the term in the context of the academic study of religion and education about religion. As noted earlier, for Smart it is worldview that is the foundational concept of the academic study of religion. Smart’s worldviews include both those schemes that in the West were traditionally designated religions, and secular schemes of similar nature (Smart, 1978, p. 11; Smart, 1981, pp. 20–1, 64–8). He distinguishes

¹²¹ For more examples see McCutcheon (1997a, pp. 452–5; 1997b, pp. 123, 128–9).

between religious and secular worldviews by appealing to the idea of the transcendent: Religions are transcendental worldviews – they are worldview that are oriented towards the supernatural (Smart, 1981, pp. 19, 54). But this is not as problematic as it may seem. Smart is not “sneaking in” an essential criterion, since, for him, religion is replaced by worldviews as the universal and foundational phenomenon. Religion is not universal – humans are no longer *homo religiosus* – and so limiting religions to transcendental worldviews is not exclusive in the negative sense discussed above.

The six “chief dimensions” (Smart, 1987b, p. 108) in Smart’s multidimensional schema of religion and other worldviews are doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experience, and social or institutional embodiment. Here is a brief description of each.

The doctrinal or philosophical dimension

This can be found in those schemes of beliefs that, among other things, prescribe, “a certain way of looking at the world” as well as protect, and regulate such a view (Smart, 1996a, p. 56). Worldviews legitimize certain ways of thought and action and involve “a kind of world-construction” (Smart, 1973, p. 88). They create a contextually and culturally dependent rationality and demand commitment to it (Smart, 1981, p. 46): “They call for commitments; they underpin security; they speak of certainty but often tremble; they are seen as treasures, and the guard dogs growl” (p. 46). Typically, the doctrinal dimension also includes accounts of outsiders (pp. 33–4) and of science.^{122,123}

¹²² See Smart’s (1973) discussion of “compatibility systems” page 82 on.

¹²³ In Smart’s conception of worldview, this conceptual view of the world is but one aspect of the category. Smart’s conception must therefore be distinguished from views like that of Geertz who take this conceptual component as comprising of a worldview by itself (Geertz as cited in Pals, 1996, pp. 245, 255). Smart’s worldviews are not purely conceptual – they include affective and other dimensions.

The mythic or narrative dimension

This dimension includes highly significant stories of gods or founders, or official versions of history, such as those found in the various nationalisms (Smart, 1996a, p. 10; Smart, 2000, pp. 9, 71–2). These are often treated as paradigms that offer “patterns for the faithful to follow” (Smart, 2000, p. 71) and help structure the group and individual identity (p. 85).

The ethical or legal dimensions

This refers to ethical or legal imperatives (Smart, 1996a, p. 11), values, and legal systems (Smart, 2000, p. 9) that are usually seen as integral parts of the wider worldview, and without which order and morality are perceived to give way to chaos and evil.

The ritual or practical dimension

This dimension “involves such activities as worship, meditation, pilgrimage, sacrifice, sacramental rites and healing activities” (Smart, 1996a, p. 10). These “communicate” or express feelings “such as awe, [. . . or] reverence for the divine Being, as in the Mass; or homage to the national spirit, as in a military parade” (Smart, 2000, p. 126).

The experiential or emotional dimension

Here we have both “visionary and meditative experiences” of a Buddha or Muhammad, but also more ordinary “emotional reactions to the world and to ritual” (Smart, 1996a, p. 11).

The organizational or social dimension

The organizational or social dimension includes those aspects emphasized by the aforementioned definitions of religion taken from the social sciences, like the social manifestations of worldviews (institutions like the Rabbinate or the Communist Party for example), social influences on worldviews and *vice versa*, etc. (Smart, 1996a, p. 11; Smart, 2000, p. 10).

This list of dimensions is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it meant to provide necessary or sufficient conditions for inclusion in the category. Smart, as a methodological pluralist, was adamant that “there can be more than one fruitful way of analysing religions and, more generally, worldviews,” and so these dimensions should not be seen as “set in concrete” (Smart, 1996a, p. 15). His list merely intended to provide “a kind of functional delineation of religions in lieu of a strict definition.” As befits an open-ended family resemblance type of definition, it aims “to provide a realistic checklist of aspects of a religion so that a description of that religion or a theory about it is not lopsided” (pp. 8–9).

William Paden’s World

Paden (2000b) defines worlds as “universes of language, behavior and identity.” More precisely, they are “the operating environment of linguistic and behavioral options which persons or communities presuppose, posit and inhabit at any given point in time and from which they choose courses of action” (p. 335). A world is “the totality of things” as understood, felt, represented, and acted by a particular individual or group (pp. 335–6). Paden did not articulate the concept explicitly in terms of a particular set of dimensions, but like Smart’s worldview, he aims the concept to provide “an integrative matrix in which the particular, faceted contributions of various disciplines can find their places:” Things like “culture, discourse, ideology,

cognition, structure, myth, gender and classification” or “physical geography, language, social class, historical change, economics and even individuality” are “dimensional components or factors of world construction and lenses to analyze it” (p. 336).¹²⁴

From the influences Paden identifies in his attempt to fashion world into a concept fit for the academic study of religion, those particularly important to mention here are social scientific approaches that have long explained knowledge or belief systems in terms of social mechanisms, and those that, while allowing for general mechanisms, emphasized the cultural specificity of the phenomenon (p. 338). In streams from all the concept’s major genealogical inputs one can find, Paden writes, “that ‘the world’ is a product of the instrumentations and modes through which it is apprehended and inhabited, and that world describes versions of life-space without reducing those versions to an independent norm” (p. 336). The concept of world, then, “does not assume a single, *a priori* system of knowledge in terms of which all human experience should be described” (p. 336).

Another major influence – Eliade’s treatment of sacrality – is how Paden (much like Smart) differentiates between religious and other worlds. Religious worlds are those that include belief in and orient themselves towards superhuman agency (p. 335).

Paden writes:

Religious worlds form around particular objects believed to be sacred. The objects come in various genres – not only as names of gods, but as the manifestations of superhuman power or authority in places and times, endowed authorities, sacraments and rites, icons and symbols, scriptures and mythic words, teachings and precepts. Sacred objects may be tangible or mental, spatial or linguistic, but they will tend to have a centripetal, centering function, serving as openings to a nonmaterial zone. They thereby become

¹²⁴ “The notion of world provides an integrative matrix for linking concepts, insights and explanatory frames from the work of humanistic, social and even biological sciences” (Paden, 2000b, p. 346).

forms of bonding and reciprocal empowerment. Around them, with all their mystery, charisma, inviolateness and attention-demanding obligations, religious worlds and the logic of religious behaviors arise. (p. 341)

The distinction, however (and here Paden seems to part company with Eliade), is not a sharp one:

If all religious worlds create and transmit sacred pasts, construct sacred objects, absolutize or cosmicize their moral orders and forms of authority, and periodically renew their commitments to sacred objects with calendrical and passage rites, these features are also but mythically explicit versions of themes that appear in the world making of any social group. (p. 344)

Sacrality comes in a variety of culturally specific forms:

Religious objects receive their sacrality from the collectivities they belong to. They are marks of membership or social identity. The Pope, the Ganges river, the mandalas of Soka Gakkai Buddhism, the Qur'an are holy only within their own world frames, and not in others. The absolutes, the cosmic maps, the reigning authorities, and the holy of holies of one group are irrelevant or nonexistent in other systems. Thus, thousands of "Centers of the World" sit side by side. Each group or sub-group elevates and absolutizes its own authoritative objects. (p. 341)

Religious worlds are not just one unremarkable subcategory, they are "one of culture's primary systems of world definition" (p. 335). Furthermore, they are some of the "more far-reaching forms of world stability" (p. 342): They are "highly defined and developed versions of the tendency of all human worlds to seek self-preservation

against threats of violation” – to defend tradition and loyalty (p. 342), a tendency that has to be problematic in the critical thinking context.¹²⁵

A related characteristic that is common in (but not unique to) religious worlds is “a tendency to spread their effects through an entire world system, and thus to totalize and universalize their influence,” as can be seen in those religious worlds “which set out to win the allegiance of all cultures” or those that wish to extend their authority “to the entirety of educational, political and even aesthetic systems within its own cultural world” (p. 343). Religious worlds, then, provide a more pronounced case – perhaps paradigmatic – for the study of such characteristics, lessons from which can then be more easily applied to other worlds.

In addition to helping in “identifying the thematics of world building as a universal human activity” (p. 346), like their “self-positing nature” (p. 334), religious worlds, or the general category, help in dealing with the cultural specificity of such systems, and the situatedness of the scholar or student. The identification of common features *vis-à-vis* the comparative nature of world analysis, facilitates the discernment of differences: “Identifying patterns of world orientation . . . can actually enhance or highlight differences relative to that pattern, showing what makes a world its own and not another” (p. 344). That is, “the idea directs attention to the lived context, categories and realities of ‘insiders,’” – a crucial precondition for the universally agreed upon goal of “understanding the other” (p. 335).

For many, however, “the study of religion is not limited to simple reiteration of the religious insider’s self-description, but also involves a representation of that world, or aspects of it, within a broader repertoire of conceptual, comparative and analytical resources” (p. 345). To this end, Paden adds that “to label the insiders’ systems ‘worlds’ is not to simply validate them, admire them, or give them voice” (p. 335). The concept allows both for a description of the insider’s perspective, and for its

¹²⁵ That worlds need to be defended from violation, and that the terms and procedures with which this is done displays a considerable degree of specificity (Paden, 2000b, p. 342), raises comparative questions of pedagogical import. I will get to these shortly.

analysis, explanation, and evaluation from within the world of the scholar (pp. 335, 345), without setting either as normative. In and of itself, the concept of world does not set any perspective as authoritative ahead of time (p. 334).

Daniel Dubuisson's Cosmographic Formation

In “The Western Construction of Religion” (2003) Dubuisson makes ample use of the category *world*,¹²⁶ but prefers the terms *cosmography* or *cosmographic formation* as a replacement for religion. He advocates for a reconceptualization of the academic study of religion along a similar line to Smart's, into “the study of cosmographic formations” (p. 203).¹²⁷ The aim of the concept of cosmography, Dubuisson writes, is of

subsuming the totality of the global, comprehensive conceptions of the world, whatever their philosophical orientation (atheist, theist, materialist, fatalist, cynical, indifferent, or agnostic), the diversity of the elements whose existence they recognize (supernatural beings, cosmic, natural and historical laws, universal principles, vital forces or energies, transcendental concepts, ethical or political ideals, etc.), and the nature of the practices, the rules for living, and prescriptions that they imply. (p. 17)

Elsewhere he writes that the concept is meant to designate “the totality of human activities whose objective is the creation, preservation, or consolidation of all-encompassing symbolic universes, capable of receiving and lending sense (value, orientation, and a rationale) to the totality of human facts” (p. 51)

¹²⁶ It seems that he takes it as a rough equivalent for his own “cosmography”, for example: “Every cosmographical formation is a world, its own world” (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 201).

¹²⁷ Such studies will concern themselves, among other things, with “what people do in [. . . their] world, how they have constructed it, and what they expect of it” (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 203), and to compare these systematically (p. 51).

Unlike popular conceptions of religion, which Dubuisson regards as “no more than the expression of the Western equivalent of cosmographic formations” (p. 51), the latter “does not itself presuppose specific orientations or values” (p. 46). It does so partly by stipulation, and partly because the notion of cosmographic formation is not drawn from any one of them (pp. 101–2, 197–8), and so is relatively free of the normative assumptions that are found in native tokens of the category.

Here are some of the characteristics of Dubuisson’s cosmography that I find particularly relevant to the current pedagogical context:

Cosmographies *describe and give meaning to the world*. They are our “referential centres” (p. 11) – “universes conceived of by human beings wholly in order to inscribe their persons and existence therein and thereby give them meaning” (p. 17).

They are *total* descriptions. They are “all-encompassing symbolic universes, capable of receiving and lending sense (value, orientation, and a rationale) to the totality of human facts” (p. 51). A cosmography is “able to order in relation to itself all domains of knowledge . . . all practices, [. . . and] to incarnate itself in each point and each instant of the life of individuals (gestures, thoughts, dreams, wishes, etc.)” (p. 100). In other words, people’s cosmographies are “co-extensive with their sphere of the thinkable” (p. 100).¹²⁸

By providing such a total description and meaning to the world cosmographies thereby *prescribe a way to live* in it (pp. 17–8): “The step from cosmographic description to injunction, from speaking-the-truth to ought-to-be-the-truth, is often very short” (pp. 17–8). This, for McCutcheon (citing Geertz’s definition) is one of the defining characteristic of the religious perspective: “Religions – among other symbol systems, to be sure – are systems that effectively enable human communities to make the ideological slippage from descriptive is to prescriptive ought, thereby

¹²⁸ The way we conceive and perceive ourselves (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 210–3) and others (p. 11), is thus also a function of our cosmographic formation.

normativizing current practices associated with one gender, class, ethnic group, nation; and so on” (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 156).

For the insider, the cosmographic representation is *real and tangible* – not so much a representation of reality, but reality as such (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 17). This is the “uniquely realistic” component in Geertz’s definition of religion above. “A human existence is always . . . a certain ‘way of being in the world conceived as THE world’” (pp. 208–9).¹²⁹

While “it never appears as such to the individuals who comprise it” each cosmography is *contingent* and arbitrary: it “might not have existed or might have been different” (p. 17). Cosmographies are “the result of an incalculable number of choices, accidents, conditions, and successive adaptations.” They are not “derived from some kind of absolute, preexistent necessity – whether we call it destiny, providence, history or, even worse, essence – that is exterior to the changing world in which each culture finds itself entirely immersed” (pp. 18, 205–6).¹³⁰

Cosmographies are *fantastic* universes. The innumerable “destinies, providential events, signs of all kinds, symbolic orders, rules or supernatural laws, innumerable myths, mysterious mechanisms, hidden meanings, strange figures, unknowable powers, simple, global explanations, . . . gods, angels, demons, spirits, souls, ghosts, chimeras, genies, monstrous animals, . . . mysteries, possessions, mutilations, trances, dialogues with the beyond, hallucinations, ecstasies, interpretive deliriums, ravings, mortifications, compulsive ritualization, superstitions, magic practices, asceticisms, privations, etc.” (pp. 19–20) are by and large seen as strange and never quite credible to “all those who view it from the exterior” (p. 20).

¹²⁹ “A given person’s reality and representations . . . are not two distinct entities. The representation is situated in reality, on the same level as it – to such a degree that it is indissociable from it. We do not live in reality with our conceptions of it as some kind of intellectual baggage, but in the lived representation of reality or, if you like, in the living reality of representation” (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 178).

¹³⁰ To understand this, Dubuisson adds, “it suffices to observe different human cultures” (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 18). Note that he is making a normative assumption here, in accordance with his naturalistic perspective.

Cosmographies are *metaphysical* and *circular*. People's lives exist, not in reality as such, but in their own representation of it, or perhaps in a mixture of the two. Reality as such "remains for the greater part inaccessible to us" (p. 204). This predicament can only be reconciled with the cosmographic requirement to appear as tangible – as an authoritative representation of reality – by the assumption of a "transcendent principle" (p. 210). All cosmographies, that is, "draw their premises from conceptions that are in the final instance metaphysical in nature" (p. 83). Since cosmographies are founded on "unverifiable conjecture" (p. 209), they are all equally "circular, self-fulfilling systems, enclosed within limits that they themselves have defined and erected" (p. 21).¹³¹ Worse still, cosmographies are generally not reflexive on this point: They "do not speak of the production of their own discourse. Such discourse always seems 'decontextualized,' external to the history (social, economic, ideological, institutional) of its own formation" (p. 124). This is a cosmographic necessity, for "If we were suddenly, to divest them of this constituent paranoia" – the universal "claim to possess the one true and exact vision of things" – "all cultures would immediately collapse into themselves" (p. 49).

Cosmographies are both *a social and a psychological necessity*:

Every human group, in order to exist and to perpetuate itself as such, is obliged to develop and preserve a set of ideas, opinions, and diverse theses, themselves passed on and deepened by images, symbols, and myths concerning humankind, the world, and society. And this complex set, formed of a tangled multitude, is so indispensable, so intrinsically tied to the existence of the group itself that it finally appears (even if it is, from a metaphysical point of view, perfectly contingent) as its exclusive reference. A fortiori, this

¹³¹ "Having recourse to a transcendent principle is a logical characteristic, inherent in cosmographic formations, for every construction of this kind is condemned to making its point from outside its immediate environment, putting it outside the course of things, as otherwise this point would seem to share in their fate. To mix this necessary artifice with the existence of a true transcendence is the most visible effect of the power of these cosmographic formations on the minds of human beings" (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 210).

illusion is fundamental for its proponents, who have no other way to think themselves and the world than to draw from its own repertory of ideas and notions. (p. 69)

No person, Dubuisson writes, not “even an honored academic, can do without such a global vision” (p. 84). Humans have, for lack of a better word, a “cosmographic instinct,” whereby they “continuously resituate their humble condition, their lives, and their bodies in cosmographic constructions in order to suppress discontinuities or incoherences and to forget their pitiless, bitter brevity” (p. 209).¹³²

While inhabiting a cosmography is a necessity of the human condition, one’s cosmography is, in a way, *inescapable*. It is a world “sufficient unto itself, and it is normally sufficient for the person who lives there” (p. 207). Once more, it is not a reflexive enterprise, and will not readily allow us to see the world through the eyes of another. A cosmography “never succeeds in getting away from itself. At the very most, it can transform itself, modify itself” (p. 206).

Cosmographies are *unique*, and yet, *similar*. No cosmography is identical to its neighbour (p. 201).¹³³ Yet underlying such uniqueness, there exists a functional and structural similarity (p. 201):

Their richness, complexity, the almost infinite number of their rules, their practices, and their beliefs, which are directly responsible for this situation—these possess a remarkable point in common in the sense that they all

¹³² “Without [. . . cosmographies], life would be even more anxiety-ridden. The human condition would crush the individual” (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 207).

¹³³ “Certain cultures assign greatest value to scars cut into the skin, others to the horsepower of their automobiles, still others to the recitation of incomprehensible formulas. Some sculpt grains of rice, while others erect cathedrals in stone. Some live with the imminence of a final conflagration and others with the certainty of being immortal. Some believe in the virtue of asceticism; others celebrate the occult powers of trance and possession. Some advocate intoxication, others silent withdrawal and the strictest abstinence. From these differences and so many others, each more outlandish and exotic than the preceding one, to which it would be only too easy to add in order to make the picture even more comical and bizarre, how could we possibly not conclude that each culture, each world, is an original creation?” (p. 205)

contribute, in their own place and according to their means, to constructing a particular world. The homology does not concern the level of liaisons and observable elements, their superficial similarities if you like, but that of their function, the ultimate finality. (p. 202)

Definitional Dos and Don'ts, Worldviews, and Critical Thinking

This chapter began with two aims in sight, both of which ought to garner further support for my thesis that the academic study of religion represents an important resource for critical thinking pedagogy. One aim was to show the reasoning behind a credible stream of thought that equates the academic study of religion with the academic study of worldviews. This is because my argument for the relevance of the academic study of religion to critical thinking – and in particular, to a pedagogy that does not turn its back on worldviews – relies to a considerable extent on the authority of this specific scholarly community when it comes to worldviews. My survey of the definitional difficulties with which scholars of religion have been struggling has shown a progression toward a reconceptualization of the object of study of this field. No more a study of our true religion and its counterfeits, but instead, a heightened sense of normative entanglements and the need for an epistemologically respectable foundational concept. No more Western Judeo-Christian theistic conception of religion, but rather, inclusivity intent on shedding accidental inheritance. No more superficial treatment and reductive ignorance of religion's variegated characteristics – religion is now a multi-dimensional phenomenon. And to top it all, a realization by some, that thus conceived, not much is lost (and perhaps more is gained) if religion is relegated from the position of founding concept to a species of worldview. I hope to have shown that a respectable stream within the academic study of religion considers the fruits of its inquiry to be relevant to worldviews generally – religion being in important ways analogous to, and even paradigmatic of worldviews generally – and further, that a number of prominent scholars consider their field to be concerned primarily with the critical study of worldviews. This being so, it becomes incumbent on critical thinking educators (given the reasoning outlined in the previous chapter) to look at this field a little closer.

Surveying definitional difficulties serves another purpose as well. My second aim for this chapter was to show that the debates over definitions of religion and worldview are in themselves good material for critical thinking instruction. Recalling my discussion of critical thinking, I take it that solving problems like weak sense critical thinking, the implication of worldviews in reasoning, their strong deleterious influence, their rigid insularity, and the various worldview related biases, requires teaching about general worldview phenomena. Most notably, it requires teaching about general ways in which worldviews influence reasoning, about the student's own worldview, and about other worldviews that can act in a dialectical capacity.

The definitional don'ts that scholars of religion have identified must not be taken as an esoteric academic preoccupation. In their attempts to articulate an academically respectable conception of religion and worldview they were struggling with biases and misconceptions that are common in popular thinking. What the relevant scholarship has chanced upon may well be worldview fallacies: mistakes in reasoning about worldviews that are common enough and deleterious enough to require specific designation and educational attention.

Undue normativity in the perceptual apparatus people use to think about worldviews, or insufficient appreciation of the normative entanglements thereof, often makes the fair consideration of alternative perspectives all but impossible. The same can be said for a truly critical evaluation of one's own worldview. The issue here is in the problematic use (implicit as it may be) of a single worldview to think about and judge itself and others: Sticking to our own worldview as sole arbiter of truth and value.

The parochial bias has a similar effect. When taken out of the academic context and into the wider culture, it could be seen as a failure to recognize commonalities, and so reason, in the worldviews of others. By emphasizing, exaggerating, and inventing differences between our worldview (taken as *the* standard) and others – by making

other perspectives exotic – we banish these perspectives from the realm of the possible and divest them of their dialectic potential.¹³⁴

Popular conceptions of religion and worldview are also simplistic in many ways. With critical thinking pedagogy in mind, I would like to point out two particular problems. First, undue simplicity in popular conceptions of religion and worldview seem to me to be, at the very least, one of the major causes for the lack of appreciation – the common underrating – of the stranglehold these phenomena exercise on our own reasoning. This dimension has to be understood and internalized for critical thinking about our own worldview to be feasible. And second, although monothetic definitions may well play an important role in teaching about this or that aspect of these phenomena, ultimately, critical thinking pedagogy must be concerned with their global evaluation. The critical thinker has to be able to judge entire worldviews, and do so reasonably. A conception of worldview or religion that does not give sufficient attention to all their relevantly important aspects makes for an incomplete comparative lens – and as I already suggested in the previous chapter, since as far as worldviews are concerned evaluation is intimately connected to comparison, an incomplete comparative lens makes for an inadequate evaluative one as well.

Knowing where one is going askew is only half the matter. There is also the need for an epistemologically acceptable and pedagogically useful conception that will do the necessary work. Here I am referring to the definitional dos, and in particular, the realization that religion and worldview can act as critical thinking concepts (rather than as designators of reality as such), as well as the concept of worldview (or some cognate) as it is understood within the field. The constructs offered by Smart, Paden, and Dubuisson highlight normative complexities and allow for their negotiation, they apply to any and all cultures, and they are sufficiently open-ended when it comes to the multi-faceted nature of the subject-matter. Furthermore, because every one of the dimensions that they mention has been written on extensively, they represent a

¹³⁴ I will come back to this issue when discussing comparison and interreligious dialogue.

gateway to a wealth of scholarship that is not available within critical thinking literature – information not only about general worldview phenomena, but also about particular worldviews and the manifestations of general and specific phenomena within them. Lastly, they all emphasize the problematic capacity for self-preservation that worldviews display so well, and which is probably their most problematic feature as far as critical thinking is concerned. They could therefore aid the study of worldview persuasion generally, as well as lend themselves to use as an analytical tool with which to pry open the persuasive and anti-critical mechanisms of specific worldviews.

Smart's doctrinal dimension, for example, seems to beg us to ask not only what the fundamental tenets of any particular worldview are, but also by what reasoning are these defended? Are these fundamentals absolutized – taken out of mundane existence and made infallible? And if so how? What is considered rational/irrational and why? How is disbelief and desertion understood? How does it describe its relationship with science, and does this description accord with accepted conceptions within the history and philosophy of science? What kinds of criticisms are likely to trigger a defensive reaction? What are the sanctioned defensive reactions? If worldviews are co-extensive with their adherents' sphere of the thinkable, then what does a worldview keep hidden (unthinkable) from its followers? How does it construct or influence the identity of its adherents, and the identity of outsiders? How easily will a worldview allow its adherents to suspend its status as "uniquely realistic" and attempt to view reality with different spectacles? Does it invest sufficient resources in the investigation and correction of its own limitations? How self-critical or reflexive is it? And are there cross-worldview similarities with regard to all of these?

Similar questions also arise naturally from a proper investigation of the other dimensions in Smart's schema, for example: What is considered true history and how does this affect other aspects of the worldview like the doctrinal and the ethical? What grounds are there to believe in this history? What serious criticisms can be

raised against it? What is considered good/bad moral reasoning and why? How is morality connected to appropriate belief? Is ritual used as a persuasive tool, and if so, how? Are prescribed experiences and interpretations thereof used as proofs for the truth of that worldview, and if so, are they capable of doing the required work? How do these compare to similar justifications in other worldviews? How does a worldview use groups and organizations to create, maintain, and defend prescribed belief? And so on.

To sum up, when taken together, the aspects of the definitional debate that I described above could be made to go a long way towards an introduction of worldview as a general phenomenon. They outline basic pitfalls and provide a substantial list of academically acceptable frames within which inquiry can progress further, not only into the various aspects of worldview as a general phenomenon, but also into particular worldviews and their comparison.

Chapter 5 Comparison of Religions and Worldviews

The academic study of religion involves comparison, some would say from the bottom up, in all levels or areas of the scholarly endeavour, so much so, that the academic study of religion has been, and is still seen by many, as synonymous with *comparative religion* (Martin, 2001, p. 290), or *the comparative study of religion* (Sharpe, 1987a, p. 578). Paden, for example, claims that comparison is “central and intrinsic” to the academic study of religion (1996a, p. 42).¹³⁵ Elsewhere he writes that it “is the central and proper endeavour of religious studies as a field of inquiry and the core part of the process of forming, testing, and applying generalizations about religion at any level” (1996b, p. 12). There is no universal agreement here. There are those who, like Donald Wiebe (1996, p. 24), see it simply as one component in the mix, and others who are highly critical of it, or who disavow it altogether (Wildman, 2006, p. 88).¹³⁶

To say that the academic study of religion is (in whole or in part) comparative, is in an important sense to say that it is cross-cultural (Smart, 1987a, p. 572). There is, in principle, a cross-cultural openness or inclusiveness. Any and all religions and religious phenomena (Sharpe, 1987a, p. 578) and their secular analogues (Paden, 2005, pp. 223–4; Smart, 1987b, p. 3) are (at least potentially) amenable to comparison with any other (Segal, 2006b, p. 260). This does not mean that all such comparisons are in any way interesting, but to fail altogether to put religions and religious phenomena side by side is to forgo much that is.

¹³⁵ Paden has written extensively on comparison in the academic study of religion and I will rely on his work to a great extent in this chapter.

¹³⁶ The latter opt for detailed studies of single religious groups in their particularity.

I will begin my foray into comparative religion with four common reasons that are given in support of the comparative enterprise – reasons that are as relevant to critical thinking as they are within departments of religious studies. Then some criticisms of comparison in religions and worldviews will be presented. These will centre on the problems of biased and premature comparison. I will then look at attempts to deal with these problems, and present some commensurate recommendations before revisiting critical thinking.

First, though, a brief clarification: In what follows I will take comparison to have the following structure. First, there are the things that are being compared. These may be two or more religions, worldviews, or parts thereof. On occasion they will be referred to as the *comparands*. The comparands are never compared to each other in their totalities or in a conceptual vacuum. Only some aspects of the comparands are compared, these being determined by a *comparative category*, and interpreted by a wider conceptual, and sometimes normative and affective *comparative framework*. This wider framework will be referred to as the comparative lens, theory, perspective, worldview, etc. To illustrate, John Hawley tells us that “no religion curriculum . . . should be without a comparative course on religious violence” (2006, p. 141). Suppose we compare Christianity and Islam with respect to religious violence, from a non-confessional social-scientific perspective. In this case Christianity and Islam will be the comparands, and religious violence will be the comparative category, which, when combined with the non-confessional social-scientific perspective, will make up the comparative framework. On occasion *comparative perspective* will mean the perspective implied by the scientific, scholarly comparative method within the academic study of religion, and not the framework of any one particular comparison. This alternative usage will be noted in the text.

The Propriety of Scholarly Comparison

Understanding Religion and Religious Phenomena

Friedrich Max Müller's much quoted saying "he who knows one, knows none," has become a motto of the academic study of religion (Geertz & McCutcheon, 2000). Working at a time when religious data available to scholars was multiplying exponentially (not least because of his own efforts), Müller and other pioneers of the field were motivated to do comparative work, at least in part, by perplexing religious diversity. It seemed that religion and religious phenomena were recognized wherever scholars cared to look. If religion is a common phenomenon, restricting its study to a single or a small number of species becomes epistemologically unwarranted.

Scholars also recognized that "questions were raised which could not be answered by the study of only one or a few facts in their precise historical context" (Waardenburg, 1973, pp. 52–3). The academic study of religion aims not just at understanding particular religions, but also at understanding religion *per se* (Paden, 1994, p. 1). The questions "What sort of a thing is a religious system anyway, and how does it provide us with knowledge about ourselves and our world?" (p. 170) are questions about religion as a genus, and to learn about the genus, we need to look at a plurality of species (p. 1).

The same goes for religious phenomena that cross the boundaries of particular faiths. Religious diversity highlighted the need to seek out and investigate religious analogues, similarities, commonalities, structures, functions, dimensions or themes, and to do so cross-culturally (Paden, 1996b, p. 8). One of the purposes of comparison, then, is to promote generalization and explanation (Poole, 1986, p. 414), and it does so by providing fertile ground for the discovery and clarification of the

comparative category or frame. That is, comparison can help us in “revising concepts, [. . . or] filling out their meaning with qualitatively differing cases and thereby illuminating them” (Blasi, 2006, p. 7). If we are interested in religious socialization or inculcation, for instance, our understanding of these concepts “evolves with our understanding of historical cultures whose versions or permutations of these topics may be quite different” (Paden, 1996a, p. 44).

Müller’s dictum – he who knows one, knows none – receives all the more force if without comparison some general religious phenomena remain invisible by necessity or as a matter of fact. Without knowing “what is common and what is different about any particular religious phenomenon . . . one might not be able to see certain transcultural structures and functions in a given religious system” (Paden, 2005, p. 208). The religious or worldview insider may not see or be able to see the commonalities that the comparativist finds: “a crab does not see itself as a crustacean” (James as cited in Paden, 2005, pp. 219–20), and it should be added, does not have the wherewithal to do so. Paden described this problem as *opaque embeddedness*. The comparative perspective of the academic study of religion provides “a wider (and sometimes wider means “human”) context to the otherwise singular, opaque embeddedness of the object [of interest] in the cultural horizon of its adherents.” This object of interest “might otherwise seem unintelligible, or remain underestimated, miscontextualized, and distortively compared” (1996b, p. 10).

Testing Hypotheses

A cross-cultural perspective provides not only fertile ground for discovery of general religious phenomena but also for the justification of such general claims or theories. Hypothesis testing, that is, the testing of comparative categories or frameworks, “ultimately constitutes the main purpose for doing comparative studies” (Strenski, 2006, p. 272). Phenomenon X is a general religious phenomenon only if it is sufficiently widespread and cross-cultural. A comparative inquiry is needed to

ascertain this. Furthermore, an explanation for phenomenon X in group Y will only suffice if it would also suffice as an explanation for phenomenon X in group Z, so long as groups Y and Z are relevantly similar. Ignoring other groups means forgoing an opportunity to check one's hypothesis (Segal, 2001, pp. 352–8). The academic study of religion uses cross-cultural comparison, which is an analogical substitute to the experimental method in a social-scientific context, where the experimental method is hard to apply directly, as it would be in the laboratories of the natural sciences (Smart, 1973, p. 159; Strenski, 2006, pp. 283–4).

Understanding Other Religions or Worldviews

The comparative perspective need not be used solely for the purpose of discovering commonalities and the elucidation and testing of general claims or theories. It can also provide keys for the discovery of differences – for understanding phenomena in their particularity (Paden, 1994, p. 5). “Many worlds,” Paden writes,

are the very stuff of our world today, and their respective mythologies are exactly and urgently what we must learn to comprehend. The comparative study of religion, accordingly, is part of this education to diversity. . . . Toward that end, knowledge about others plays its indispensable role. (p. 170)

One way in which the comparative method can be used as inquiry into a particular religion is in helping to isolate those aspects in which it is different from others. One could not know what is distinctive about a religion without first discounting the ways in which it is similar to other religions (Paden, 2005, p. 208). Another way is with the help of general categories – religious commonalities – used as interpretive schemas: “It is through the properties common to all thought that we can most easily begin to understand forms of thought which seem very strange to us” (Levi-Strauss as quoted in Martin, 2000a, p. 50). For example, looking at a particular religious group through

the lens of Paden's concept of world (itself born of comparison) "makes the world-specific nature of religious existence [of that group] intelligible." It brings a modicum of normalcy to the typical, yet unique, way in which that group "configures and experiences the universe" (Paden, 1996b, p. 12). Similarly, we can look at a particular religious group with the concept of socialization in mind to discover not only how that group follows general principles of socialization but also how that group differs from others with regard to these principles – how these principles are tweaked to suit specific circumstances.

Other religions can also be used as schemes of inquiry. In this case, one tradition provides the lens through which another is viewed: "The religious tradition being brought for the purpose of comparison serves to provide a new perspective on the tradition being examined, to raise new questions or offer new possible ways of understanding the target tradition" (Freidenreich, 2004, p. 91). There is a real danger here, however, of misconstruing and prejudging the target tradition by misuse or undue reliance on the religion that acts as an interpretive lens.

A Seed of Doubt and Reflection

If comparison can be used for discovering, testing, and revising general concepts or theories about religions or worldviews, important pedagogical implications can be drawn. There is a potential in these for "deprovincializing" the student (Paden, 1994, p. 1). The comparative perspective of the academic study of religion can act as an impetus for doubt and self-reflection. Smart believed that the radical break between traditional methods for conceptualizing and studying religion (that tend to take our own worldview as normative) and the comparative perspective – the perspective of the academic study of religion in its comparative capacity – has the potential to revolutionize the way we study and understand our own worldview (1987b, p. 59). Anthony Blasi and Jacques Waardenburg reached similar conclusions: "Exposing students to a number of different religious traditions as part of their general

education” may help to “relativize” their perspective and “invalidates any legitimation based on an absence of questioning” (Blasi, 2006, p. 3). This means that “comparative studies . . . could indirectly be used against the absolutist pretensions of [. . . any] given religion” (Waardenburg, 1973, p. 52).

For many students a degree of doubt represents an important educational leap. But still more is to be gained by comparison. Doubt can combine with the tools of comparison to produce reflection about one’s own worldview:

The comparative study of religious worlds invites self-reflection about the nature of our own cultural systems. . . . Our own world, instead of being taken for granted, becomes exposed as a world, its contents get held up to the comparative mirror, and we become a phenomenon to ourselves. (Paden, 1994, p. 165)

We discover our own situatedness as we discover others’. Fish, Bruce Lincoln (1999a) wrote, “do not begin to know water until they break the surface of their liquid environs and for the first time encounter air.” He explains:

The experience of any entity in isolation is sterile and produces neither reflection, nor the capacity for reflection, since that isolate will be taken for granted and mistaken for “nature”, i.e. the sole extant possibility, which simply *is* and cannot be otherwise. As such, it will remain virtually invisible and provoke no comment. It is the recognition of other comparable entities that changes this situation. (pp. 42–3)

The limitations and effects of students’ own worldviews on their reasoning is often as invisible to them as *water* and *crustacean* are to fish and crab. It is hoped that something of the comparativist outsider perspective will stick (Paden, 1994, p. 167;

2006, p. 62) and that the student will be (in Smart's jovial words), at the very least, "comparatively religious" (Smart as quoted in Strenski, 2006, p. 276).

As was hinted at the outset, the comparative method also has its detractors. Having outlined some of the prominent aims of, and reasons for comparison in the study of religion, it is only prudent to look at those criticisms that are most relevant to my project.

Bias and Premature Comparison

Comparison of religions is at least as old as history itself. This long heritage provides an inexhaustible spring for examples of comparisons gone wrong. Comparisons slanted towards Christianity are a conspicuous and ill-begotten inheritance from the pioneers of the academic study of religion,¹³⁷ and much effort has been put towards analysis and rectification of this tendency. Of course, comparisons that are biased towards a particular religion or worldview can come from any quarter.

One common strand of traditional Christian comparisons of religions assumes and supports an exclusivist view of Christianity, whereby Christianity is taken to be the only true and good religion. All other faiths are seen as false creations of ignorance or evil other-worldly interference. Another common comparative strategy follows inclusivist lines. Here we find other faiths as sharing – but only in a limited way – in the value of Christianity. The differences between Christianity and other faiths are then used to show how, in each case, Christianity comes out on top.¹³⁸

If comparison can be used to support the superiority of Christianity over other faiths, it can also be used to support the superiority of one branch of Christianity over another. In “Drudgery Divine,” Jonathan Smith (1990) recounts in detail how deistic and Protestant thinkers used comparison in order to show that Roman Catholicism was a religion contaminated by foreign influences – a Christianity unfaithful to Christianity – thereby establishing their own superiority.

¹³⁷ See for example Freidenreich (2004, p. 86) and Thomas Ryba’s treatment of C. P. Tiele and P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (2001).

¹³⁸ Two brief but illuminating descriptions of such comparisons – one by C. P. Tiele in his entry “Religions” in the ninth edition of the “Encyclopaedia Britannica,” the other by James Freeman Clarke in his popular book “Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology” – can be found in Segal (2005a, Classification sect.) and Paden (1994, pp. 24–5) respectively. These illustrate well the ease with which religions can be swept, individually or *en mass*, under unthreatening carpets, allowing Christianity to reign supreme: Buddhism is lacking in valuable property X; Islam is lacking in valuable property Y, and so on. See also Paden (1994, pp. 17–26).

Pluralist use of comparison was also a popular preoccupation throughout the history of comparative work within the academic study of religion (Martin, 2000b).¹³⁹ On the basis of commonalities between religions, these attempt something of a “pure” and “global theology” – stressing the existence of a divine or spiritual reality underlying various religious manifestations. The different religions are seen as different, perhaps somewhat tainted, paths or pointers to the sacred (Paden, 1996b, p. 7; 1994, pp. 17, 29; 2005, p. 209).

Generalizing from the Christian case, three aims for use of comparison can be identified: (1) attempts to establish that X is the most valuable religion/worldview; (2) attempts to establish X₁ as the best version of religion/worldview X; and (3) attempts to establish that some or all religions are imperfect manifestations of an underlying sacrality – attempts, that is, to establish a pluralist religious worldview as superior to other religions as well as to a worldview that posits no supernatural elements. To these I should now add another popular aim: the affirmation that (4) all religions are false (Paden, 1994, pp. 16–7, 26–8).

The first comparative problem then, is that in comparison after comparison, whether exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist, whether religious or anti-religious, the same culprit is often found: Comparison is used as the handmaiden of apology. Comparison is seen, either explicitly or in effect, as a tool that is useful in the degree to which it can defend the comparer’s beliefs – the comparer’s prior judgments (Paden, 1994, p. 26; 2005, p. 209; Weckman, 2006, p. 18).

Such a one-sided use of comparison is often supported with a variety of other problematic practices. For example, the beliefs of others can be described in such a way as to make them “appear manifestly perverse and absurd” (Paden, 1994, p. 24), sometimes to the point of demonizing or de-humanizing others (Jensen, 2004, p. 36).

¹³⁹ See also Martin (2001, p. 292) and Paden (1996b, p. 7; 2005, p. 218).

It is also common for people to compare the ideals of their religion with the realities of others' (Weckman, 2006, p. 21).¹⁴⁰

Also – and perhaps less visibly – it is often our own native or folk concepts that are used as comparative categories or criteria (Martin, 2000a, p. 47; Paden, 1994, p. 52; Urban, 2004, p. 25). The value we assign to our own classificatory categories is then translated into a judgment of value of the other religion or worldview, according to its “relative fulfilment” of our comparative category (Jensen, 2001, pp. 238–9). This process tends to leave others at a disadvantage. To illustrate, if we compare religions with regard to the category *saviour* (Paden, 2001, p. 277), and if we hold the idea of a saviour to be of superlative value, a vast number of traditions can be dispensed with as deficient (Juschka, 2004).

Like the proverbial mongrel canine litter, the apologetic, one-sided use of comparison is the child of many fathers. First and foremost, it should be noted that there is an important element of self-defence involved. The effect, in this case, is an indication of a need: Our metaphysical assumptions require protection, and comparison can be manipulated to provide the required metaphysical safeguard (Ryba, 2001, p. 336). The proximate existence of radically different and contradicting perspectives puts our own commitments in doubt.¹⁴¹ This is a direct threat to our existential habitat. Comparison can defuse this threat by explaining difference away in terms that sit comfortably within, and in a way that satisfies our worldview.¹⁴²

Our existential habitation of our own worldview points to another imbalance: Comparison of our worldview to others is often done from a position of personal commitment, whereas other worldviews tend only to be entertained cognitively (Blasi, 2006, p. 5). Then there is also the matter of availability. How, Paden asks, “can Columbus ‘know’ a wholly new continent other than through his own projected

¹⁴⁰ “Christianity is about Love, and Islam promotes terrorism” or some such.

¹⁴¹ Whether the enormity of the difference is real or imagined is of no consequence here.

¹⁴² In Paden’s words, biased comparison “obviates the chaos of stark, anomic diversity” (1994, p. 16). See also p. 25 and Wildman (2006, p. 94).

categories” (Paden, 1994, p. 64)? What could act as guide to our comparisons, as comparative categories and frameworks, other than our own beliefs or schemas?¹⁴³ Differential visibility also confounds comparison and may help explain the comparison of ideals to realities: In our daily encounters with religions and worldviews other than our own, it is the behavior of their adherents, rather than their ideals, that are more readily visible. The opposite is often true for our own worldview, where “one is more focused on the ideals of the good than the failures in practice” (Weckman, 2006, p. 21). A host of other social and psychological factors are likely involved, a discussion of which will take us deep into the sociology and psychology of religion and beyond. Instead of attempting a more comprehensive list, I move back to the criticisms themselves.

The very fact that comparison can and often is (Paden, 2005, p. 210) used to defend so many conflicting perspectives means that the question of bias is unavoidable. One must inquire into the association of comparison and bias. In particular, the following questions seem pertinent:

- To what extent are the *aims* of comparison complicit in bias?
- To what extent are the *methods* with which comparison is undertaken complicit in bias?
- To what extent are the theoretic or conceptual *frameworks* used for comparison complicit in bias?
- To what extent are its *results* complicit in bias?

Very often – especially where popular comparisons of worldviews are concerned – one will find all four areas wanting. Comparison is often motivated by a self-interested desire “to bring comfort and assurance,” to “rationalize desired actions” (Wildman, 2006, p. 84), to defend our beliefs, and to condemn, exclude, and

¹⁴³ See also Blasi (2006, p. 7), Martin (2000a, p. 46), Paden (2005, p. 210), Saler (2001) and Wildman (2006, p. 94).

subordinate others (Hewitt, 1996, p. 17; Paden, 1994, pp. 2–3).¹⁴⁴ Such aims are conducive to and rely upon a rigid (Wildman, 2006, p. 98) and unreflective methodology (Martin, 2000a, p. 47). The comparative “method of choice” is often no more than the ill-fitting classification of phenomena under stereotypical categories supplied to us by our own worldview, combined with disregard to anything that does not fit or contradicts those stereotypes (Paden, 1994, pp. 2–3). This reductive impulse, and the concomitant myopic selection of data, means that there is a failure to “accommodate the things we are interested in comparing” (Wildman, 2006, p. 81), that is, there is a lack of responsiveness to the data – a rigidity of perspective (pp. 95, 98).

And what of perspectives? Here, again, whether inside or outside of the academy, comparison of worldviews is too often excessively conditioned by the perspective of the comparer (Paden, 1994, p. 6). The grounds for comparison, that is, the theoretic or conceptual framework through which two worldviews or worldview phenomena are compared, is more often than not going to be a derivative of the comparer’s larger perspective. Error or bias in that larger perspective may trickle down to plague the comparison itself (Wildman, 2006, p. 81). As was the case with the category of saviour above, some categories are problematic for universal comparative purposes because they end up shoring up the superiority of their parent perspective. Categories can be too tied up to their indigenous perspective, and thus too “ill-fitting,” or alternatively, too speculative to act as universal comparative categories (Jensen, 2001, pp. 238–9). There is also a problem of insularity – of comparisons based on comparative frameworks that never leave the confines of a single religion or worldview. No matter how diligently carried out, comparison should not remain bound by the standards and categories of one religion or worldview. Academic analysis, that is, cannot be limited to insider categories. The insiders’ perspective constitutes the data to be analyzed, and cannot, by itself, substitute for a scientific perspective (Martin, 2000a, pp. 48–9).

¹⁴⁴ See also Paden (1996a, p. 39; 2005, p. 217), Urban (2004, p. 32) and Wildman (2006, p. 89).

The net result of all these is that comparison can be distortive in the extreme (Wildman, 2006, p. 89). Important commonalities and differences in that which is being compared to one's own perspective are ignored or neutralized so that the validity of the comparer's perspective will remain intact (Juschka, 2004, p. 17). Whole worlds are thus consumed and explained away – judged according to what they conveniently mean within our worldview (Paden, 1994, p. 52).

Adding to the effect of these pervasive biases is the remarkable haste with which comparison is usually carried out. Once the comparative framework takes shape within the worldview of the comparer, the process of explaining away other worldviews often takes place in the blink of an eye. Wesley Wildman (2006) writes:

Untrained human beings are too ready to find similarities on the basis of a quick glance. This maximizes vulnerability to error due to over-confidence, and marginalizes the careful observation and analysis of theoretical frameworks that we need to save comparative conclusions from becoming victims of casual hubris borne of over-active pattern-recognition skills. (p. 84)

Wildman takes issue with the hasty and wrongful recognition of similarities – the false positives of our fallible pattern-recognition tendencies – but the criticism applies to false negatives as well: There is a substantial particularistic tendency, both popular and scholarly, to find differences where there are none, or to treat trivial differences as significant – a tendency that is often used in the interests of apology to demonstrate the superlative uniqueness of a particular religion (Jensen, 2001, pp. 239–40; Juschka, 2004, pp. 15–6; Segal, 2006b, p. 259; Smith, 1990, pp. 37–42, 116). James Hanges (2006) illustrates this in his research on Pentecostal Christians who reject scholarship on glossolalia, which takes the Pentecostal phenomenon to be an instance of the general phenomenon, and thus comparable to non-Christian glossolalia past and present. Such comparison is taken as “a clear threat to Christian uniqueness” (p. 192).

Coming back to hasty comparison, some scholars maintain that over and above the human tendency to do so, in the field of religion cross-religious generalizations are perhaps by necessity premature. This is because knowing enough about a religion demands so much that familiarity with a sufficient number of them as to merit a comparison is unlikely (Segal, 2001). Referring to Müller's dictum that to know one religion is to know none, Thomas Idinopulos (2006) writes that "anyone who has struggled for years to master the elements of one or two religions, cannot but see comparing different religions as a task fraught with peril. . . . Most of us would [. . . admit] we know none" (p. 52).

Defence and Recommendations

Given these difficulties, it is hardly surprising that not everyone in the academic study of religion takes comparison to be “central and intrinsic.” Suspicion seems to be justified here. Still, comparative studies are far from being an endangered species. In some respects comparison is an inevitable and important part of human cognition (Carter, 1998, pp. 134–6; 2004; Lawson, 1996; Lincoln, 1999a, pp. 42–3). Comparisons, and generalizations based upon these comparisons, are fundamental ways through which the mind guides interpretation and constructs beliefs (Martin, 2000a, pp. 45–6). Our religious (or world-) views are “motivated, figured, and constrained by our understanding (and misunderstanding) of other religious complexes” through an unavoidable process of comparison with previously held beliefs that act as cognitive schemas (Saler, 2001, p. 269). Thus, a simple exposure to other worldviews, whether cursory and superficial or meticulous and thoughtful, involves us necessarily in comparison (Smart, 1981, p. 48). Attempting, however, to insulate oneself from cross-cultural comparison only leaves us with “one brand of parochialism or another” (Lincoln as quoted in Braun, 2004, p. 1).

If comparison is unavoidable, why not attempt to improve it? For many, comparison is simply in need of some “tightening up” (Wiebe, 1996, p. 26). The problem is not so much with comparison, then, but in the way in which comparisons are done, and we can and should teach students how to do it better (Martin, 2000a, pp. 45–6; Paden, 1994, p. 3; Saler, 2001), notwithstanding the many difficulties that comparison of worldviews would entail (Lawson, 1996, p. 32). In the current context, then, the accusation of bias is a valuable invitation for critical thought to be applied to our students’ own comparative reasoning.

Dealing with bias, however, can only be attempted if we recognize at the outset that it is not a disembodied objectivity or a completely neutral God’s eye view that we are

after. This would be a chimera. Religion, Smart writes, “has necessarily to do with subjectivity, and the study of religion is full of value judgments.” A more modest “descriptive success” or “relative neutrality” will have to suffice (Smart, 1987a, p. 572).

It must also be recognized that not all biases are born equal. Not all comparisons are biased or interested in a devastating way (Strenski, 2006, p. 274). Some biases – and related frameworks – are morally legitimate, and some are not (Wildman, 2006, pp. 89–90). Some serve racism, sexism and hate, and some equality, justice and reconciliation. Some act in opposition to cultural tribalism and others are arrogant (Smart, 1996a, p. 6). The charge of bias, then, is not a debilitating one. It is a call to arms: “If comparison has been used to signify and classify other cultures in oppressive ways, it can also be turned into an instrument of cultural critique and a means of unmasking oppressive power relations in our own world” (Urban, 2004, p. 32).

There is also a disparity in epistemological justification. Some comparative frameworks sit on a more solid basis than others. Some can be fruitful sources for insight, and others degenerative (Poole, 1986, p. 438; Smart, 1996a, p. 6). Some perspectives, it should be added, are more conducive to self-criticism than others. The quality of the comparison is often directly related to the quality of the theoretical framework from which it is undertaken (Lawson, 1996, pp. 33–5), and so we should attempt to embed our comparisons in “superior theoretical frameworks” (Wildman, 2006, p. 84).

There is no shortage of argumentation for and against the moral and epistemic suitability of this or that perspective as a platform for inter-cultural comparison. Adherents of every religion and worldview argue in support of the intellectual respectability of the comparisons garnered by their own beliefs. Pluralists take the ubiquity of religion as support for their own comparative perspective and the truth of an underlying or hidden divinity. But in an academic scientific context, isn't the

naturalistic perspective the only respectable one?¹⁴⁵ Paden and others see the “panhuman, naturalistic worldview” as the one that should supply and judge the criteria, theories and methods used in a sound comparativism (Paden, 2005, p. 213). A good comparison should be secular or agnostic, that is, non-theological (Paden, 1996b, pp. 6–7). This means that the value or truth of religion (or a religion) must not be presupposed; religions should be studied as natural, not otherworldly phenomena (Paden, 2005, p. 213); and the insider perspective and that of the academic comparativist should remain distinct (p. 219). There is also this pedagogical incentive: Since comparison is so often used to defend prior religious convictions, an assumption of naturalism, or a methodologically agnostic stance, would be a counterbalancing point of entry.

From a scientific point of view, and in contrast to the myriad insider perspectives, the naturalistic and agnostic approaches seem to have the upper hand due to their public and open nature. But they are also more genuinely cross-cultural because of their greater amenability to the use of cross-cultural categories. Mirroring Müller’s dictum, Paden writes that “one cannot generalize about religion on the basis of the language and norms of just a single case” (Paden, 2005, p. 208). Native categories tend not to signify well for phenomena external to their origin and so tend to be ill-fitting or distortive when used for cross-cultural comparison. In a Shi’a mosque, the Imam may want to compare English and Iranian law using Sharia as a comparative lens. But in the academy “comparative work needs to go beyond approaches that simply set out to show how others approximate [or fail to approximate] our own religious categories” (Paden, 1994, p. 8).¹⁴⁶ A “new” comparativism should rely instead on comparative categories that are “derived inductively” or cross-culturally, “not deductively from one’s own philosophy” (Paden, 1994, p. 5). The aim is to use pan-human or near-universal patterns, identified by the human sciences, explained by our common biology and cognitive makeup, and that underlie – and, in turn, contextualize – the

¹⁴⁵ I discuss this question in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ See also Juschka (2004, p. 17).

myriad religions and worldviews (Luther, 2004, pp. 41–2; Paden, 2001, p. 277; 2005, pp. 220–3; 2006, p. 61).¹⁴⁷

Another requirement that is even more prevalent in the literature is the need for an increased sensitivity to the purpose of comparison. “One must always remember,” Lincoln (1999a) writes, “that it is the comparer who selects the things compared and brings them together in such a way as to serve his or her purposes” (p. 43). For this reason David Cave (2006, p. 35) encourages us to ask: “Is the purpose of my comparison to establish or uphold the prominence of my position? Or is the motive to trust the pursuit of truth as paramount”? The purpose of comparison should not be rationalization of prior belief. Rather, it should be “insight and theoretical advance” (Poole, 1986, p. 417). Whatever the aims chosen, academic standards require that they will be articulated clearly (Blasi, 2006, p. 6; Carter, 1998, p. 146; Paden, 2005, p. 219; Smith, 1990, p. 53).

The same explicitness and reflexivity, and the same rigor and criticism, that are demanded with regard to aims, should also be directed at the comparative framework and method used. Serious distortions are more likely to creep in when our comparative model, our questions, our selective and evaluative criteria, are not brought to the fore (Paden, 2005, p. 219; Smart, 1981, p. 48).

Being upfront about possible sources of bias – while helpful in allowing the comparer and his or her audience to discount the results – does not make the comparison itself any better. Transparency should go hand in hand with criticism. “A new comparativism is conceptually self-critical,” Paden (1996a) writes, because it “builds category criticism and methodological self-awareness into the concept of comparison itself” (p. 40). This conception of comparativism behoves us to keep in mind that comparison in religion is “an interested and political enterprise, one that always

¹⁴⁷ This issue came up in the definitional debate concerning the cross-cultural applicability of the term religion as a native category. The quest for universal applicability saw the substitution of religion with world, worldview and cosmography by Paden, Smart and Dubuisson respectively. The very field of inquiry that was the academic study of religion is then reconstituted comparatively, that is, through cross-cultural comparison, into the academic study of worldviews (Smart, 1987a, p. 572).

reflects the position, biases, and commitments of the scholar in relation to real material and cultural contexts” (Lincoln as cited in Urban, 2004, p. 32). This, of course, applies performative within the critical thinking classroom.¹⁴⁸

In Martin (2000a) we find brief mention of some “empirical and theoretical tests” with which to differentiate “valid and invalid” comparative generalizations (pp. 47–8). Similarly, Fitz Poole (1986) writes that comparative theories can be evaluated

in terms of their formal structure, their clarity and precision in focusing and delimiting comparison, their possibilities of extension and generalization, their imaginative formulation of interesting and important puzzles and problems, and their implications for charting future directions of analytic inquiry. (p. 438)¹⁴⁹

I have also mentioned several moral and epistemological criteria above. There is no comprehensive attempt in the literature to list all relevant criticisms, and indeed, this is to be expected. The assumption seems to be that the full gamut of social-scientific and philosophical criticisms can be used as and when appropriate.

Vulnerability to empirical correction is one of those criteria that do receive concerted attention. There is a need to look for the anomalous, that which does not fit the comparative framework, and use it to refine – or, if need be, abandon – that framework (Wildman, 2006, p. 84). A genus “concocted” (Segal, 2005a, Native Categories sect.), either deductively from a theory, or more inductively “on the basis of similarities among constituent species” should be subjected to “limitation or destruction . . . on the basis of differences among these species” (Freidenreich, 2004, p. 90). Paden writes of the need to allow “generalizations to be falsified by

¹⁴⁸ In Urban’s words: “It is therefore all the more critical . . . that we be as open and up-front about our political commitments as possible, submitting them to constant scrutiny, critique, and the possibility of change” (p. 32). See also Lawson (1996, p. 35), Weckman (2006, p. 21) and Wildman (2006, pp. 86, 93).

¹⁴⁹ See also pp. 417, 431.

contradictory ethnographic or historical material” (1996a, p. 41), and the important function of comparative analysis in revealing such anomalies (1996b, pp. 7–8).

Over and above the differential justification that comparisons receive from the comparative framework and its parent theory or worldview, there is the differential justification they receive from their fit and responsiveness to the data. Comparisons that fail to pursue and follow up the implications of anomalous data succumb more easily to rigidity and error, and any justification they might have received from the data becomes tainted (Wildman, 2006, pp. 94–8). How to determine the degree of fit between genus and supposed species is a problem in itself. The fact that comparisons often impose an alien perspective on the comparands means that from the insiders’ point of view the comparison may look distortive (lacking in fit).

To illustrate, suppose one compares Jesus and Vishnu (the comparands) from a social-scientific perspective with the comparative category *anthropomorphic deities* (together comprising the comparative framework). Such a comparison, while likely to reveal important similarities, is also likely to be seen as distortive and even offensive to many insiders (both Christian and Hindu). One likely objection they would raise is that the comparison fails to account for many differences between Jesus and Vishnu, not least of which is the fact that only one is a real deity. This, however, will not be a legitimate objection, at least not solely by virtue of the supposed authority of the insider. What determines the quality of the comparison with respect to fit and responsiveness to data is not simply the existence of differences (however important they may seem to the insider). Such a requirement would make all comparison problematic since no two things are exactly alike. Only relevant differences are of interest (Segal, 2006b, pp. 258–9) – relevance being determined by a host of criteria (like the purpose and audience of the comparison) none of which is under the special authority of insiders. Fit, then, should be determined within the sphere of outsider, scholarly perspectives (Segal, 2005a, Native Categories sect.).

From the requirements that have been listed so far it should be readily apparent that many students will find it very hard to accommodate the kind of loosening of commitment that the comparative perspective of the academic study of religion demands (Paden, 1994, p. 169). If one cannot presume the superiority of one's own perspective (Weckman, 2006, p. 21); if one needs to relativize and suspect this same perspective (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 21–2); that is, if one needs to be sensitive to, and be able to suspend, one's own commitments, then a sound comparativism seems to have as a prerequisite a certain capacity for open-mindedness, without which exposure to other worldviews could be felt as too big an affront to one's deeply held beliefs (Paden, 1994, pp. 168–9).

The same open-mindedness that is required in the case of the comparer's perspective is also required in the case his or her results. First, in every comparison “there is always a ‘with respect to’.” This “with respect to” is usually the comparer's perspective – the comparative framework or lens (Smith, 1990, p. 51). This means that comparison is always aspectual or incomplete – it refers to this or that aspect of the comparands. The comparands are similar in this or that respect, from this or that point of view, assuming this or that limitation. The comparison does not apply *in toto*, and from different points of view the similarities and differences identified may dissolve. Thus, Vishnu and Jesus, alike in some respects, are still different in others. The comparer needs to keep this aspectual limitation in mind (Paden, 1996b, p. 9). A second qualification that applies to the results of comparison is recognition of their tentative nature. We must “treat comparative judgments as fallible hypotheses, not indubitable propositions” (Wildman, 2006, p. 86).¹⁵⁰

Treating the results of comparison as tentative gives also a limited answer to the problem of premature comparison. If we do have a tendency to generalize prematurely, this must be mirrored by an appropriate tentative stance (Segal, 2001, p. 351; 2006b, p. 260). This, of course, does not mean that we need not worry if our knowledge of the religions being compared is sufficient in depth and breadth (Paden,

¹⁵⁰ See also Weckman (2006, p. 20).

2005, p. 213). On the contrary, we need to “look at cross-cultural data closely and carefully” (Jordan as cited in Wiebe, 1996, p. 25), and we need to be sensitive to context, choose data carefully, and study it in depth (Durkheim as cited in Strenski, 2006, p. 283). The fact that the “more adequate comparison of religion is possible the more one knows empirically about religions” means that “area studies logically should precede comparison as ‘data’ upon which the comparativist draws” (Idinopulos, 2006, p. 55).

But just how much data of particulars is required before one can attempt a comparison? How many religions or worldviews do we need to study (Sharpe, 1983, p. 91)? How “right,” Jeppe Jensen (2004) asks, “do we have to be about matters before we can compare them on scholarly terms,” and how could that degree of rightness be measured (p. 56)? We cannot wait until *all* the facts are known because one could never know if all the facts are in. We accept this as we accept induction (Segal, 2006b, p. 260).

There is more than just a logical difficulty here. There is also a difficulty in practice, as it may well take a lifetime to master the study of even one average religion or worldview (Sharpe, 1983, p. 91). Neither scholar nor student can wait that long. The time when encyclopaedic knowledge of the fruits of the academic study of religion was even a remote possibility is long gone. Again, “recognizing the sheer difficulty of gaining adequate knowledge to make comparisons forces us to take seriously the limits of comparison itself” (Idinopulos, 2006, p. 56). But the question of sufficiency remains.

Jensen’s (2004) own answer is that this is a question that needs to be kept in mind, but ultimately one that should not cripple us as long as proper academic procedures and virtues are followed (pp. 56–7). Lincoln (1999a) points to the scale or level of the comparison, its purpose, and its audience, as contextual variables that help determine sufficiency (p. 44). A higher level or scale of comparison will demand broader expertise. A scholarly audience will demand more in terms of depth, and so on. These

variables, then, should be added to the list of things to be clear and explicit about (Carter, 1998, p. 146).

One level of comparison – the highest in our context – was already judged to be of interest to us. Smart, Paden and Dubuisson generalize across the board. The concepts that they advocate apply to every tradition, and every person – they are pan-human phenomena. Any one of the general characteristics of worldviews can be found in many or nearly all of them, and even universally. This level of generalization is not one with which all scholars are comfortable, and indeed, comfort at such a demanding level of generalization, considering all the difficulties above, should raise some suspicion. Nevertheless, the overwhelming mass of data gathered about an abundance of religious traditions under the auspices of the academic study of religion led Smart to conclude that the field is ripe for comparisons even on this largest of scales (Smart, 1987a, p. 574).

Considering the current interest in worldviews generally, and in some of their universal or near-universal characteristics, and keeping in mind all the difficulties that dealing with common tendencies for biased and premature comparison entail, it seems that an adequate engagement with worldview comparison would be quite a tall order even for a religious studies graduate, let alone the average critical thinking student. For this very reason Wesley Wildman (2006) advocates the establishment of “social arrangements” (p. 89) – “a corporate effort to make and improve comparisons, to assemble and analyze data, and to root out bias and short-sightedness” (p. 79). The Cross-Cultural Comparative Religious Ideas Project (CRIP), in which Wildman held a formative role, attempted to build and operate a community of inquiry that is committed to the ideal of scientific comparison (p. 112), and “that stabilizes comparative judgments for investigation, capitalizes on diverse insights and types of expertise, and introduces novices into procedures and habits of thinking that facilitate effective comparison of religious ideas” (p. 111). Here is his compact definition of the CRIP method: “a dialectic of theory and data sustained within a large-scale social process devoted to the discovery, improvement, and correction of comparative

hypotheses” (p. 87). The academic study of religion itself, or at the very least, its comparative dimension, seems to fall quite comfortably within the bounds of these definitions. The CRIP project had more than just scientific goals – it also had pedagogic intent. It was used as a process of apprenticeship and initiation into a scholarly comparative method. Some of Wildman’s main pedagogic recommendations include the creation of functional communities of inquiry in graduate programs of religion that would be focused on concrete comparative goals – communities where students and teacher-scholars take advantage of a variety of backgrounds, interests, and expertise, but also share an acquaintance with “the classic works in comparative religion and the central methodological debates that arc across and through its various disciplines (pp. 112–3).”

So much for religious studies graduates – but what about lower levels of instruction? Wildman does not believe that many novices to comparative religion will be able to participate meaningfully in functional communities of inquiry, but introductory studies are still recommended. For religion majors, however, especially in later years of study, programs that approximate the graduate’s involvement in a community of inquiry should be attempted (p. 113).

Wildman’s arguments make for an enticing advertisement for advanced academic studies in religion. But what about lower levels still? Jonathan Smith is more optimistic about comparison at the lowest levels of tertiary education. Smith too believes comparison to be intimately connected to criticism. Even in introductory courses he recommends that all students be paired with conversational partners for the purpose of comparison and argument (Smith as cited in Hanges, 2006, p. 181).

James Hanges provides another recommendation that I deem important: He wants students’ exposure to comparison to be explicit: “Exposing students to the enterprise of comparing comparisons might serve as an important step in their introduction to comparison in the study of religions” (2006, p. 181). This might allow students to “recognize the structure of an apologetic comparison and its function” (p. 182).

Before I move on to ask what all this could mean for critical thinking instruction, a brief summary is in order. The chapter began with an outline of four grounds on which the importance of comparative studies within the sphere of religion and worldviews is defended. Comparative studies can help us understand religious phenomena and religion itself, or worldview phenomena and worldview as a pan-human phenomenon, and to do so in a way that is not possible without the cross-cultural perspective that scientific comparison entails. Comparison is also useful as a tool for testing generalizations about religion, and it provides a key with which to understand individual religions or worldviews, both in their particularities and with respect to those features that they share with others. Lastly, comparison may sow a seed of doubt and reflection in a realm of thought marred by dogma and apology. I have suggested – but have yet to argue – that these also provide a justification for comparative engagement with religions and worldviews within critical thinking education.

Unfortunately, comparisons in worldviews all too easily fall short of even basic academic standards. There are strong social and psychological forces pulling comparison in this direction. Comparisons, it was said, often appear to aim at a defensive rationalization, even subordination, rather than at fair inquiry. The methods used are often one-sided and unreflective. They are rigid and reductive, hasty and overconfident. The comparative frameworks used may also lack epistemic and moral justification. Not surprisingly, the results of such practices are distortion and ignorance of others and of common grounds, and an insularity of belief. All of these are the very opposite of what critical thinking education aims at.

These problems are so damning that a reconciliation of potential and practice might have seemed almost impossible. Such reconciliation had to await a rejoinder: Comparison of (and in) worldviews was said to be the only game in town. We compare worldviews whether we like it or not. And bias creeps in whether we like it or not. But, as Paden writes, “while there is no innocent eye, there is an educated eye,

or so we tell ourselves, and there are eyes open to testing their lenses” (Paden, 1996a, p. 40).

From then on I have been occupied with this optometric theme. I have noted the corrective importance of clarity, explicitness, openness and reflexivity or self-criticism, with regard to comparative aims, methods, frameworks, and results. I have also noted the need to treat comparison as aspectual and tentative; to choose the comparative framework carefully; and with the same care, ensure the depth and breadth of inquiry. Lastly, it has been suggested that where one person fails, perhaps a community will succeed.

Comparison of Worldviews and Critical Thinking

In this last section critical thinking will come back to the fore. My survey of approaches to critical thinking instruction that focus on worldviews or deeply held beliefs revealed a comparative theme. I would like to recall the main elements in this theme, and clarify what I see as the major connections between the two areas of interest. There are two questions at hand: How is comparison in the study of religion (1), and method and theory debates thereof (2), relevant to critical thinking pedagogy? I will begin answering the first question with reference to the four justificatory strands sketched earlier in this chapter. Notice, however, that these justifications are themselves an important ingredient in the philosophy of the academic study of religion – an ingredient that I consider of value for critical thinking instruction. My attempt to answer the first question will therefore naturally spill over into a consideration of the second question. Discussion of the latter will then expand to include the two other important ingredients I abstracted from the methodological literature: the comparative dos and don'ts.

First, then, what were the main references to comparison in the relevant critical thinking literature, and how are they related to justification of comparison within the study of religion? One of the main conclusions I drew from the discussion of critical thinking was that the standard approach needs to be augmented with the teaching of worldview relevant criteria, content knowledge, dispositions, and skills. Critical thinking writers associate comparison with all four categories.

As far as criteria are concerned, comparison of worldviews exposes limitations of given criteria and can therefore act as an impetus for the problematization of students' own criteria, as well as the study of relevant criteria generally. It is an impetus, that is, to engage in criteriology, in an area where partial and faulty criteria are usually taken for granted. On top of this, it is a source for necessary criteria in itself. No set of

criteria, it was said, can be used to evaluate worldviews without some degree of circularity. Worldviews are forever involved in their own comparison and evaluation, and usually detrimentally so. Proper comparison of worldviews allows them to act as criteria, but under controlled circumstances. The natural inclination to use one's own worldview to judge others needs to be replaced with pluralistic engagement, whereby several worldviews are used to highlight each others' limitations through a comparative process. Beliefs are then validated or criticized by way of dialogue with other perspectives. This is the dialectical process that many found so crucial.

The dialectical process is heavily dependent on subject specific knowledge – namely, an intimate acquaintance with the worldviews involved. One must be able to see things from the point of view of disparate perspectives, be able reason from within each, be cognizant of the criticisms each worldview raises with regard to the others, and the responses the latter mount in their defence. Knowledge of worldviews, then, is seen as a prerequisite to good comparison, which in turn, is necessary for reasonable choice or evaluation of worldviews. But comparison also supplies necessary knowledge in that it helps to expose the effects of worldviews on reasoning, as well as fundamental assumptions – assumptions that are often unseen if they are not contradicted or criticized from other perspectives.

The dialectical evaluation of worldviews is also dependant on critical thinking dispositions, like the willingness to subject one's deeply held beliefs to criticism, to judge alien perspectives fairly, to persevere through the protracted process, and so on. But again, good comparison is seen not only as dependent on certain dispositions, but also as helping to impart these very dispositions. Comparison of worldviews exposes plurality and fallibility, and so promotes intellectual humility and openness. Communal comparative inquiry furthers the internalization of appropriate attitudes.

The same two-way relationship can be found in talk about skills as well. Good comparison of worldviews requires dialogical, dialectical, and comparative skills. But one also finds repeated recommendations to expose students to more comparison, so

that they become better at it. Modelling good comparative behaviour; involving students in communities of inquiry where they are exposed to good comparisons as well as bad, but where bad comparisons are more readily criticized and corrected; infusing such comparative engagement so that exposure runs through several years and subjects; and focusing on disciplinary thinking – that is, on appropriate and inappropriate comparative thinking in the various disciplines – should all contribute to the betterment of students' comparative skills.

In critical thinking, then, comparison is seen as a source of criteria, knowledge, dispositions, and skills needed to think about worldviews critically. The most conspicuous parallel from religious studies is the knowledge component. Scholarly comparison of religions and worldviews is said to be a necessary source of general knowledge about these phenomena, as well as about particular religions or worldviews. Comparisons allow scholars to come up with and test general claims about what religions and worldviews are, what they do, and how they do it. It also highlights departures from common moulds: It exposes differences as well as commonalities. Only slightly less obvious is agreement on the effects of comparison on the inclination (disposition) to engage in critical thought: Both scholarly communities see it as a seed of doubt – a disorienting dilemma – and so a cause for reflection.

What of skills and criteria? Here parallels also exist, but they are not as readily apparent. The four common justificatory lines I found in religious studies literature draw little attention to the potential of comparison with respect to these. Agreement with regard to skills is borne out, however, in recommendations like those of Wildman and Smith, to involve students in scholarly comparative endeavours or their facsimiles. A common understanding about criteria is similarly borne out in my treatment of the debate over biased comparisons, where scholars have long recognized that comparative frameworks are used and misused as comparative and evaluative criteria. This recognition is in part due to comparison of comparisons, hence Hanges' recommendation to expose students to this enterprise.

Although these two accounts of comparison are not identical – as would be expected from two disparate scholarly communities – I find no real incongruity between them. Granted, one devotes more of its attention to skills while the other takes them largely for granted, one is more focused on dispositions while the other puts more emphasis on the relation between comparison and the acquisition of knowledge. But the two groups – one composed largely of educationalists and arriving at worldviews by way of assumptions and deeply held beliefs, the other composed of scholars of religion with an interest in method and theory and arriving at worldviews by way of religion – have no disagreement over basic tenets. Rather, the needs that have been stressed in critical thinking, for which comparison was offered as a solution, cohere in no small measure with what scholars of religion say their field can satisfy. Such a concord provides a firm basis for cooperation.

Beyond this, acquainting students with the reasoning behind the importance of comparison (in the study of religion and in critical thinking) should have benefits of its own. Comparison of worldviews is very rarely used as a tool for understanding others, understanding what worldviews are, challenging our generalizations, loosening the grip our worldviews have on us, or making an educated evaluation or worldview choice. More often than not it is a mechanism that is used in defence of our beliefs. Teaching students about comparative aims should help them notice the aims for which they compare worldviews, and allow them to better discriminate between acceptable and problematic intentions. This knowledge brings intentions to the foreground and so aids in reflection upon them. Its potential for replacing one-sided with fairminded comparisons looks to me to be worthy of investigation.

The same can be said of the other comparative problem areas. As was the case with regard to the definitional debates, the methodological literature contains a wealth of information about common comparative pitfalls and guidelines that have a bearing much further a field. It is not only scholars devoted to the study of religion and religious studies students that need to be mindful of comparative dos and don'ts.

Critical thinking literature contains abundant references to the poor comparative capabilities of students, especially when it comes to fundamental beliefs, the educational failure with regard to these, and corresponding recommendations to increase educational attention to comparative methodology and reasoning. As far as comparison of worldviews is concerned (and wherever worldviews are sufficiently implicated in comparative reasoning) a copious amount of material from comparison in religion seems to fit the bill.

Cooperative, comparative,¹⁵¹ and method and theory studies in the academic study of religion should help focus students' attention on the propriety of comparative methods, on the backing of comparative frameworks, on problematic aims and biased conclusions, on the depth and breadth of inquiry, on the connection between comparison and (self-) persuasion, and much besides. Through consideration of the many difficulties that comparison of worldviews entails, students should gain a more realistic nuanced understanding of comparison, an appreciation of its fallible nature, and the importance of applying critical thought to one's own comparative reasoning. It should also help to highlight the intimate connection between comparison of worldviews, and their evaluation.

¹⁵¹ Involving comparison of comparisons.

Chapter 6 Evaluation of Religions and Worldviews

One of the reasons that motivate people to study religion academically, and one of the main justifications for this work, is that, on the face of it, the academic study of religion should be an important if not crucial part of any reasonable attempt to choose between religions or worldviews. If an aviation enthusiast wanted to design, build and fly his own aeroplane, we would doubtless consider it reckless if he did not study aerodynamics, aviation engineering and construction, and much besides. He would put his own life at risk and perhaps the lives of others if he did not acquaint himself thoroughly with all the information relevant to such a task. Bad choices in the realm of worldviews have been and will continue to be responsible for evils on a scale that dwarfs the risks involved with aviation into insignificance. One would think that this would make the task of gaining knowledge about religions and worldviews very important. For those of us who think that the most fruitful route to knowledge adheres to academic standards, the academic study of religion and worldviews presents itself as an important educative resource.

Surprisingly, however, the usefulness of the academic study of religion to the rational evaluation and choice of religions or worldviews has never been out of contention within this scholarly community. There are those who would deny a role for the academic study of religion in worldview evaluation on the basis of its inferiority to, or incommensurability with, religion. In fact, one can scarcely find a method and theory debate of note that is not in one way or another related to this controversial issue. In this chapter, several conspicuous debates, some of which would be familiar to the reader from previous chapters, will be viewed from the perspective of this evaluative question: Does the academic study of religion and worldviews have a say – does it hold any authority – in the rational evaluation of worldviews?

Because the authority of the academic study of religion in matters of worldview evaluation is premised on the superiority of the scientific worldview, I will open the discussion with an objection familiar from the discussion of critical thinking: the problem of incommensurability. This time the problem of the possibility of choosing between worldviews rationally will be discussed from the perspective of the academic study of religion. Even if rational choice in worldviews is taken as possible, a defence of science as the most reliable conduit to truth, or of the superiority of the scientific worldview over its alternatives, still has to be carried out. More to the point, science needs to be defended as the most reliable conduit to truth when it comes to religion and worldviews. The bulk of the chapter will be devoted to this endeavour. As before, the last section of the chapter will undertake an appropriation of this material into the sphere of critical thinking.

The alternatives to science that will be of most concern are those that rely on supernatural metaphysics. It is the struggle between natural and supernatural metaphysics, or between “the sceptic and the devotee” (Wiebe, 1993, p. 108) that has been the central dispute in the academic study of religion since its inception, and there is no indication of waning interest in it (Pals, 1993, p. 183). It is this sceptic vs. devotee aspect of the various contributory method and theory debates that will be highlighted. This is not to deny other important aspects or less combative interpretations of these debates. My rather limited focus is derived in part from an interest in questions of worldview choice, and therefore in the arguments supplied by competing worldviews in their attempts at rational self-justification, and in part from its own popularity. The sceptic vs. devotee interpretation of several important method and theory debates is seen by many as key. Debates on the reducibility of religion, on its *sui generis* nature, on the scholarly authority of insider and outsider interpretations of religion, on the cognitive importance of religious commitment in its academic study, or on the demarcation of the academic study of religion and theology, are for many largely misconceived if not viewed as manifestations of the perennial struggle between natural and supernatural metaphysics (Flood, 1999, p. 66; McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 134). I take it that the following overview of the struggle between these

metaphysics and the lessons that can be drawn from it will be amenable to generalization to any attempt at a rational evaluation of worldviews.

I rely heavily on writers from the sceptic side of the great “discursive divide” (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 134) that argue in favour of the validity of science and the capability of the academic study of religion to pronounce on such validity, to the detriment of religious and ideological alternatives. This emphasis is borne in part from a belief in the crucial importance of the scientific worldview for critical thinking pedagogy, and in part from a desire to highlight oppositional literature in a field that is in many ways dominated by religious inclinations.¹⁵²

¹⁵² The reference here is mainly to religionist domination in religious studies departments, curricula and textbooks, as opposed to the study of religion within the social sciences. See for example Gill (1994, pp. 966–7), Hjelde (1998, pp. 110, 112, 117), Jensen (2000b, p. 7), Lincoln (2000b, p. 123), and McCutcheon (1997b, p. 25).

On the Possibility of Rational Evaluation of Worldviews

I begin, then, with those who question the possibility of a rational choice between a scientific and a religious worldview in their effort to put a partition between the academic study of religion and worldview evaluation. The argument is similar to that already encountered in the discussion on deep disagreements. It concerns criteriological deficiencies: the lack of a grand narrative – a God’s eye view – free from human epistemological failings, from which the evaluation of worldviews could be carried out unproblematically.

Rational choice between science and alternative worldviews, it is argued, should be based on a true and universally accepted set of criteria with which we could straightforwardly evaluate the competing worldviews to arrive at a judgment that will be accepted by any relevantly informed and mentally unimpaired individual. But there seems to be no uncontroversial way of arriving at or applying such a set of criteria. This is because criteria that have been offered and used to judge worldviews are themselves worldview-dependent. Their perceived validity relies on the prior acceptance of a particular worldview as veridical, and their method of application differs between worldviews.

In the case of a scientific and a religious worldview one crucial source of conflicting criteria is the religious affirmation of a particular revelation – a gift of knowledge from the beyond – which within the confines of a scientific perspective will not be accorded special privilege or immunity from criticism (Wiebe, 1997, pp. 177–8). The existence and nature of the supernatural is taken as truth in one worldview, but only as a claim to truth in another. For those who believe that a scientific worldview depends on a strictly naturalist metaphysics, the prognosis is even worse: The

metaphysics claimed by religion are assumed false (Flood, 1999, p. 171).¹⁵³ Either way, adherents of neither worldview can accept the truth of the other without qualification. From the religious perspective a scientific worldview either denies or does not accept the truth of revelation – the pinnacle of knowledge – and viewed the other way around, religion accepts the unjustified as justified or the false as true.

The criteria just used are truth and coherence with accepted beliefs. A worldview can accept as true only beliefs that do not conflict with its own fundamental tenets. These are the most common of worldview criteria (Goodman, 1978, pp. 17, 19, 122–4), but their ubiquity does not bridge the criteriological gap. Close inspection reveals differences in their application. Their use depends on other criteria that are not shared by both worldviews. What can count as truth is, in both worldviews, substantially different. The criteria that in science govern the procedures for acceptance of claims cannot be accepted *tout court* by religion because that would eliminate the authority of its own unique revelation. Likewise what is already accepted as truth in both worldviews is substantially different, meaning that application of the coherence criterion results in diametrically opposed conclusions. This problem applies to other commonly shared criteria like deductive and inductive logic as well. Shared criteria exist alongside criteria that are not shared – different beliefs, accepted authorities, conceptions of evidence, ontologies, etc. – and these exert a strong influence on reasoning. Unshared criteria make for a worldview-specific kind of logic, and it is this logic, together with shared criteria, that determines what in each worldview will be perceived as rational (Shweder as cited in Geertz, 2000b, pp. 180–1).

The fact that an idiosyncratic logic is implicated in any attempt to derive criteria with which to judge worldviews means that there is no certainty in the matter (Flood, 1999, p. 80). Even scientific criteria are not amenable to logical proof (Ryba, 1993, p. 41). Scientific criteria are valid given a scientific worldview, and a scientific worldview can be justified given scientific criteria. But in attempts to evaluate or choose between worldviews, neither can be taken as given since their truth is the

¹⁵³ See also Wiebe (1999, pp. 261–3).

matter under contention (Ferre, 1987, p. 8). This applies universally: There can be no non-circular proof of any worldview (Stout, 1987, p. 316).

Because there are no criteria with which to judge between worldviews other than insider criteria; because these criteria are not universally accepted; because their acceptance depends on which worldview is taken as veridical; that is, because the question of truth or rationality of worldviews can only be asked from within a worldview and that worldview already contains the answer to the question, the very question is seen by some as nonsensical. The very possibility of establishing one worldview as rationally superior to another, even when science is concerned, is put in question (Flood, 1999, pp. 78, 80).

Is all hope for a rational evaluation of worldviews lost if the ideal set of criteria cannot be had? As was the case with deep disagreements, not everyone in the field shares the strict view of rationality presupposed by the argument above. The answer depends in large measure on the nature of the resources at hand, and here pessimism may yet be unwarranted. Barring an ideal set of criteria, then, what can be substituted for them, and what kind of worldview evaluation could these less than perfect substitutes facilitate? Predictably, here too, one finds reference to the possibility of using worldviews to critique and evaluate each other under controlled circumstances, to universal worldview comprehensibility – that is, our ability to understand radically different worldviews – on which the efficacy of these critiques depends, and the important role that the academic study of religion plays with regard to both of these.

With regard to the appropriate use of worldviews in worldview evaluation, a distinction can be made between the use of one worldview to evaluate another, and the use of elements internal to a worldview in its own evaluation (Jensen, 2004, p. 49). The latter is an evaluation carried out from the inside, not necessarily by adherents themselves, but relying on criteria that adherents would acknowledge as important and in a way that adherents would approve of. Worldviews are never completely coherent or transparent to those who hold them. This means that internal

criticisms¹⁵⁴ have the potential to highlight aspects of a worldview previously unknown to the adherent. For example, one could demonstrate to a student who believes in the immorality of racism that some of his own beliefs are, in fact, racist. Since the critique was internal to the student's worldview one would expect the accusation of incoherence to be accepted and acted upon. In this case the student's worldview should be acknowledged as inadequate until the incoherence is resolved. If the student abandons his racist beliefs the internal criticism was successful.

But the incoherence can be resolved in more ways than one. The student may be strongly attached to his racist beliefs and choose to qualify his belief in the immorality of racism. Racism, he might think, is wrong for all peoples except one particular group that is obviously evil. Whether the student abandons those beliefs that we deem repugnant or good, it is his own cherished beliefs that act as a criterion of truth: claims that contradict them must be modified or abandoned. The problem that the second case highlights is that the operative assumptions or dogmas of a worldview may be such that critiques of certain problematic aspects of that worldview are very unlikely to resonate with believers – not least of which are critiques of those very worldview assumptions.

If a critique contradicts the fundamental tenets of a worldview, and these remain unshakable, perhaps external criticism could help. Alternative worldviews can certainly provide our student with different perspectives – ones in which his own fundamental beliefs are not regulatory and in which other solutions to the problem present themselves. We could, for instance, ask the student to suspend or bracket some of his beliefs for a moment, and study the problem from a scientific perspective. We might acquaint the student with sociological experiments that use participants from both his own ethnicity and that which he believes inferior, which show no difference in response to moral dilemmas. We could present him with ethnographies of people from that group so that he would familiarize himself with their worldview

¹⁵⁴ I use *critique* or *criticism* and *evaluation* interchangeably despite obvious differences. The functional aspect of critique in this context is its ability to point to deficiencies in worldviews, and so evaluate them as deficient in certain respects.

and realize how that worldview is caricatured in his own. We can ask him to study the history of his own tradition or people and the evils that they have committed. We can ask that he studies the psychology of racism, the fallibility of worldviews, and much else besides. These outdoor excursions into the world of science may help loosen unshakable beliefs and allow for criteria that were previously foreign to be taken into consideration. Of course, there is no ‘must’ in the matter. None of these amounts to a deductive proof that the student cannot help but follow. The student could regard the experiments as rigged and the ethnography and history as biased – products not of his own people but of those mischievous others and their cronies.

Just how efficacious external critique will be may turn on the ease with which the person whose worldview is being evaluated is able to view the world through a different lens – namely from the perspective of the worldview generating the critique. People can and often do modify their worldviews and can even abandon them in favour of radically different alternatives. They can also change worldviews temporarily – trying them on for size much as a Hermit crab would a seashell. This could be done both frequently and “in the blink of an eye” (Paden, 2000b, p. 345; Saler, 2000, p. 103), or rarely – requiring something akin to a “resocialization” (Wiebe, 1999, p. 263). Just how easy or frequent this conversion or leap of faith will be is, in turn, dependent on the common ground shared by the two and the knowledge one has about the foreign worldview. I will look at each of these in turn.

The bigger the common ground between two worldviews or the bigger the agreement on fundamental criteria, the shorter the leap of faith will be between the two. Our student is more likely to entertain beliefs close to his own than attempt an emphatic foray into the world of those he hates or into beliefs that he was brought up to fear as dangerous. But the worldview of the other may lie closer to home than first realized, and common ground that was first unrecognized may supply a bridge between the two. It is therefore apposite to investigate just what kind of common ground exists between any two worldviews, or between worldviews generally, and how much support that could give to cross-worldview evaluation.

Worldviews do not vary without constraint. As I tried to emphasize in the chapters on definition and comparison, the academic study of religion reveals universal or quasi-universal similarities between worldviews. These may, with adequate emphasis, provide the sought after stepping stone. Worldviews are creatures of the mind. In order to exist at all – in order to make its home in a mind – a worldview has to be able to supply a certain bare minimum of meaning to its human host: It has to be minimally coherent and consistent; it has to be “existentially suitable” by helping its bearer “cope with the realities of life” (Arjan, 2003, p. 138); it must be encoded in human language (Penner, 2000, p. 69), deeds and emotions; it has to have an explanatory orientation towards the constituents of the real world and a sufficiently large correspondence with them (Jensen, 2004, p. 49; Penner, 2000, p. 67), and so on. There are also important constraints borne of the fact that worldviews must persuade every generation of their truth and value anew, or else risk not surviving the death of their bearers. If a worldview is too hard to understand, or if it is in any way too foreign to the human mind, it will not be a serious contender in the competitive realm of worldviews.

Generally speaking, because worldviews live in a human world, they have to comply with certain constraints dictated by the physical, biological, psychological, and social makeup of that world. One of the results of these constraints is comprehensibility to humans (Wildman, 2006, p. 88). In principle – though often not in practice – a worldview that is successfully inhabited by some, can be understood or inhabited by others (Paden, 1994, pp. 64–5). By studying what a worldview is, and by the use of this concept as a comparative lens to aid in a careful comparison of one’s own worldview to parallel aspects of a foreign worldview, one can gain access to and comprehension in that worldview.

As I already argued, the academic study of religion and worldviews represents a valuable resource to such an inquiry. By facilitating the study of several worldviews it can provide insight into the kinds of constraints worldviews must obey, and so a

greater understanding of the nature of worldviews, and *ipso facto*, one's own (Paden, 2000b, p. 346). It also puts the concept of a worldview as comparative lens into sharp relief, thereby facilitating comparative studies based on a human-wide or non-parochial set of categories. Such studies facilitate understanding by supplying an "analogical bridge" between worldviews through a translation of "what is meaningful for one group into another" (Saler, 2000, p. 18). They supply "a reliable estimate of their respective claims and values" (Jordan as quoted in Sharpe, 1987a, p. 578), and the ways in which these claims and values inter-relate, interact, conflict or cohere (Smart, 1981, pp. 20–1). This relatively reliable source of information about the various worldviews can thereby make possible their use in both external criticism and evaluation. Rather than impotent caricatures, worldviews are now able to truly interrogate each other.¹⁵⁵ The same sort of inquiry can also facilitate internal critique. It contributes to a deeper understanding of one's own worldview, helping one engage in reflexive critique; it can help one grasp and accept others' internal criticisms of one's own worldview; and it can help one carry out critiques of other worldviews based on criteria internal to them.

If the concept of worldview supplies a common denominator between all worldviews sufficient to allow for cross-worldview understanding, the picture should be proportionally rosier for encounters between worldviews that enjoy a significantly larger overlap. One can imagine that a gradual disappearance of differences will make for an ever increasing ease of conversion and conversation between worldviews. But when worldviews lose adherents, it is normally to other worldviews that are culturally proximate. And so it happens that it is often worldviews that "lie both close at hand and overlapping" (Paden, 2000b, p. 345) that resort to the harshest of caricatures and whose adherents suffer the greatest lack of mutual understanding.¹⁵⁶ Similarities of the closest of worldviews can still be kept out of sight or out of mind. Whether near or far, highly similar or as different as any two worldviews can be, assuming the

¹⁵⁵ Smart's "Beyond Ideology: Religion and the Future of Western Civilization" (1981) is a case in point. In this book Smart uses several worldviews to highlight each other's inadequacies. His is a conscious use of worldviews in worldview evaluation and, ultimately, construction.

¹⁵⁶ The phenomenon is most apparent in religious schisms.

relevant knowledge is rarely justified. As a result, the scale and nature of the educational task will have to correspond not only to actual differences but to perceived ones as well: The greater the perceived and actual differences between two worldviews the greater the task and potential contribution of the academic study of worldviews.

Much of usefulness just attributed to the academic study of religion, however, follows only if sufficient confidence is put in the scientific worldview. Arguments for cross-worldview comprehensibility and the efficacy of internal and external critique only support the possibility of rational worldview evaluation. If the authority of the academic study of religion in matters of worldview evaluation is to be properly established, these arguments will have to be augmented with sufficient support for the superiority of the scientific worldview: the worldview on which the academic study of religion depends. Corresponding with the discussion on internal and external critique or evaluation, arguing in favour of the scientific worldview could be carried out from science-external or science-internal positions.

Science-external defences of science do not assume the validity of all scientific criteria, principles, presuppositions, etc. Specifically, they do not assume the veracity of that part of the scientific worldview that is under contention. What exactly is under contention depends on the position from which the defence is carried out. Because different worldviews diverge from science in different ways, and on top of this, because the wherewithal available to defend science also differs between worldviews, the category of science-external defences is very broad. These defences are typically tailored to specific audiences.¹⁵⁷ Still, because of some worldview commonalities, a few justificatory routes should work well within many worldviews. The problem of

¹⁵⁷ See for example Smart's now classical defence of a secular scholarly approach to the study of religion, tailored to a considerable degree to Christian readers, in his "Secular Education and the Logic of Religion" (1968).

religious diversity and the occulting nature of worldviews are two important examples.¹⁵⁸

Science-external attempts at its justification do not constitute a prominent part of the method and theory literature that I chose to focus on. Although I do believe strongly in their pedagogical potential, I will concentrate instead on the science-internal side of things, and in particular, on debates concerning the demarcation of the academic study of religion and its distinction from theological counterparts. Within these debates, scientific assumptions are generally taken as valid – at least where normal objects of scientific inquiry are concerned – but disagreements still abound with regard to their interpretation and usefulness when applied to religion as a specific and perhaps unique object of study. I consider these debates to be relevant to the defence of the scientific worldview because the scientific way of viewing the world would gain plausibility – at the very least, indirectly – if religious methods of studying religion are shown to be inferior to their scientific counterparts.

¹⁵⁸ Religious diversity and the occulting nature of worldviews put the scientific worldview in less doubt than they do its alternatives and so they are important elements in the cumulative case for the superiority of the scientific worldview. I will discuss both of these shortly.

Demarcating the Academic Study of Religion

To ask what assumptions or criteria should be operative in the academic study of religion, and what these have to say about alternative methods of study, and in particular, what they have to say about religious approaches to the study of religion, is to enter a long-running dispute surrounding the demarcation of the academic study of religion and the battle over its relationship with theological studies. My own excursion into this contested area will be limited to discussion of a handful of scientific criteria, namely: plurality of orientations, public accessibility, reduction, naturalism and criticism. There are others that have been proposed and used in attempts to separate (or unite) the academic study of religion and theology, or science and religion, that I will only mention in passing or that will be altogether absent here. Those criteria that are discussed will suffice for current purposes.

While some prefer theology to refer to Christian theology, or at the very least a study of *theos*, others allow it to include any confessional study of religion (Wiebe, 2005, p. 99). My usage will allow for a confessional study to be carried out from within secular worldviews, and thus secular worldviews or ideologies will be allowed to have a theological or theology-like orientation to the study of religion or worldviews.

Methodological and Object Plurality

On the face of it, there is broad agreement that the academic study of religion ought to be polymethodic and pluralistic (Smart, 1973, pp. 8–9). Taken together, these epithets mean simply that the field is inclusive of any method (polymethodism) and any datum (pluralism) that are deemed to shed light on religion or religious

phenomena, or as having the potential to do so.¹⁵⁹ What polymethodism means in practice is that the academic study of religion is not so much a discipline as a gathering place based on a common interest, for a multitude of disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies, using a variety of methods and based on a variety of theories (Geertz et al., 2000, sect. 1)

What object-pluralism means is that the academic study of religion is interested in the study of all religions, and all religious or religion-like phenomena. In Sharpe's words, "the student of religion . . . is working not within one religious tradition, but many," and "he is painting on a canvas which is as vast as human history, in length as well as breadth" (1983, p. x).¹⁶⁰ This state of affairs with regard to research interests and approaches is also mirrored in religious studies departments where one can find "a crazy quilt of courses encompassing many disciplines, eras, regions, languages, and methods of inquiry" providing graduates with multidisciplinary training (Benson, 1987, pp. 90–1).

The multifaceted nature of the field is due in large measure to this brute fact: Religion has never failed to stir the interest of thinkers of all kinds. Religion is of no less interest to the psychologist than the philosopher, sociologist or historian. If we are to talk about the study of religion, then, it is inevitable that we talk not of a study but of studies. Though unintentional, this is not an unhappy circumstance. It is, in fact, a scientific necessity – an unavoidable consequence of the multi-dimensional nature of the object of thought, and the all important need for criticism from alternative perspectives.

Religion, recall, is a concept that refers to a highly complex family of phenomena, and these cannot all fit into any unitary form of study. All studies in religion are aspectual: they cannot bring to view "the whole picture and the entire context"

¹⁵⁹ This sense of *pluralism* is methodological. It is distinct from theological pluralism.

¹⁶⁰ I use *object-pluralism* in order to distinguish between Smart's concept of a pluralistic – that is, cross-cultural – study of religion, from methodological pluralism and from religious (theological) pluralism (Smart, 1973, pp. 8–9).

(McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 64). The complex nature of the object of study requires that we attempt to “illuminate a topic from as many perspectives and disciplines as possible” (Geertz, 2000b, sect. 4). Not taking account of the various approaches often translates to an added limitation on understanding, and since methodological and object plurality is to a large extent already there, its fruit ready for the picking, such ignorance makes for a curious omission (Connolly, 1995, *Phenomenology and Reduction* sect., para. 8).

When dealing with the comparative method, I pointed out the view that consideration of cross-cultural data can act as a critical tool somewhat akin to laboratory experimentation. A cross-cultural interest in all religious and religion-like data – that is, object-plurality – helps and is frequently necessary for theory modification or elimination. The assertion that Muslims seek the destruction of the West, or that Muslims are not so inclined, cannot be maintained unqualified without undue restrictions on what counts as data. This object-pluralism – an inclusiveness with regard to what counts as data in the academic study of religion – is the “positive” side of the critical scientific attitude (attempts to falsify a position being the “negative” side). Plurality brings more into view, and so it facilitates criticism (Smart, 1981, p. 292).

The same can be said of methodological plurality. Looking at an object through different lenses does more than simply illuminate it in different lights, it also allows for mutual criticism. Using two methods or theories allows us to use one to criticize the other. A critical use of a multiplicity of approaches helps in highlighting the limitations of each (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 193). Taking a single approach, and not just because of necessities of academic specialization, but from a belief in its methodological superiority – or worse still, sufficiency – can culminate all too easily in an “authoritative rigidity” (Joy, 2000a, para. 6): a retardation of criticism that depends on a lack of recognition or a lack of appreciation of plausible alternatives (Sharpe, 1987b, p. 84).

Now, if the field is methodologically plural, why should it not include theological approaches? If religion's ultimate source is supernatural, surely attempting to study religion without reference to this fact commits us to a serious distortion. That religion's essence is otherworldly is, at the very least, a logical possibility, and for countless many a forgone conclusion. An exclusively naturalistic study of religion cannot be maintained as a general principle, Sharpe (1987b, p. 85) tells us. The data, he writes, "will bear either interpretation" (p. 58), and so a supernaturalistic explanation of religion must be kept as a live hypothesis. Geertz (2000, sect. 1.2) also maintained that a methodological pluralism that includes "spiritual methods" is justified. With respect to these conflicting approaches and their place within the academic study of religion Donovan (1993, sect. 8) says:

No one of these options should be favoured above the others. At most, religious studies should commit itself to a pluralism based strictly on epistemic principles; that is, the recognition of human fallibility and the responsibility to take account of all sides of an issue. By doing this it can continue to foster that precious human capacity for informed, responsible judgment. And at the same time it can help keep the way open for the enlargement of spirit which comes through the interaction of competing ideas.

These words put the question of the demarcation of scientific and religious methods in high relief. What exactly does the need for pluralism imply here? Are theologies to be taken as equal in scientific importance as naturalistic approaches, as we read in Donovan's opening sentence? Just how much scientific legitimacy is conferred on theological approaches by the pluralistic criterion?

Leaving the question of the quantity of legitimation aside for the moment, as a minimum, the pluralistic criterion does not allow a complete disregard of theologies. What is also clear from the characterization above (Sharpe, Geertz and Donovan would be in agreement here) is that whatever scientific legitimation is proffered on

theological approaches by the need for pluralism, it is so proffered only on the assumption that these methods are insufficient in themselves. That is, the same limitations that apply to naturalistic theorizing apply also to their supernaturalistic brethren: These approaches do not possess a God's eye view; they are myopic; they do leave much to be desired; they are to be criticized; and they are to be complemented. The data that a particular theology allows and the methods that it sees fit are seen as such only within the confines of that theology. From the perspective of the academic study of religion these limitations must be dropped. Ultimately, then, the relevant legitimacy is given subject to the subordination of theology to scholarly aims and standards.

But is this not too big a price to pay for too little? How willing are theological approaches to the study of religion to accept the limitations of object and methodological pluralism in exchange for a measure of scholarly legitimacy? Can theologies accept that all religions are to be classed together as data with the implication that, at least initially, no distinction is going to be made between true and false religions? Can they accept that no one religion supplies the ultimate basis from which all others ought to be studied? For Smart (1987b, p. 6), traditional theologies are the very antithesis of these. Theology "has scarcely tried to be pluralistic" (Smart, 1973, pp. 10–11). Ultimately, theologies are committed to particular worldviews (Smart, 1987b, p. 6), and whatever data or methods they deem acceptable, they are so deemed because of their instrumentality for the faith (Smart, 1973, pp. 10–11). Self-critical methods are seldom allowed and if other religions are investigated it is typically in order to show the superiority of one's own faith.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Here Sharpe (1983, pp. 7–8) captures both tendencies: "To 'study religion' is to study only what the community and its representatives, or an individual teacher, are prepared to attest as being worthy of study: a particular Scripture or group of scriptures; the interpretations previously put forward by authoritative teachers, sometimes against the background of 'false teachings' against which an individual or a community have rebelled in the past; and the detailed mode of life which the community has accepted as its own. . . . The assumption is always that the tradition in question enshrines all that the individual needs to know; and sometimes that it contains all that he or she ought to know, since whatever lies outside the authoritative revelation is at best irrelevant, and at worst positively dangerous."

The price of object and methodological pluralism is seldom paid. Scientific legitimacy, where it is sought, can be obtained elsewhere, and for little cost. Although wherever science holds an aura of authority worldviews stand to benefit from any legitimacy conferred on them by science, in the end, it is only the perception of legitimacy that counts. Such a perception can be instilled in believers without the need to subject theological thinking to broader scholarly aims or standards, and without qualification. Is it not a commonly encountered myth nowadays that our religion is scientifically or rationally proven? A precious few know how to distinguish between science and its counterfeits – and so scientific auras are a dime a dozen.

A further disincentive is that the said legitimacy may prove to be far too small. For Donovan it seems that plurality implies equality: Naturalistic approaches should not be favoured above religious ones. However, the same diversity of religions that makes object and methodological plurality inescapable puts such equality in doubt. The fact that religions are so numerous and that their statements, their claims to authority, and their self-understanding, so often contradict one another (as well as scientific knowledge) means that the likelihood of any one of them being true is, *ceteris paribus*, miniscule (Pye, 1997, p. 2; 2000, pp. 224–5; Smart, 2000, p. 101; Ward, 1990, pp. 222–3). Where religious claims to authority are concerned religious diversity points to a substantial fallibility (Merkur, 1993, p. 221) that makes study based on the presumed truth of one faith suspicious at best, and at worst – downright unjustifiable (Edwards, 1993, p. 181; Gill, 1994, p. 965).

Because religious commitment necessitates that theologies take the dubitable as given (Smart, 1973, pp. 10–11) religious diversity and object and methodological plurality can also be seen as a critique of religious approaches to the study of religion. They are a direct affront to what Georg Schmid (1979, pp. 181–2) called *monomania* – the self-privileging of religions and ideologies.

Religions the world over and throughout history have recognized the potentially disorienting or iconoclastic potential of cross-cultural encounters (Smart, 1981, pp. 292–3). Those that survived the encounter – and many did not – managed to discount (misrepresent, explain away) or eliminate (ignore, isolate, kill) the opposition. But there have also been attempts to survive the recognition of diversity through appropriation or modification. In modern pluralistic theology, for example, we have a movement towards object pluralism. Several religions, perhaps all, are accepted as data of equal importance. They can all be accepted as imperfect manifestations of the sacred. But this is still not object pluralism properly so called unless secular worldviews are accepted into the fold – including the attendant ramifications these have for the question of the existence of the supernatural. And then there is also methodological pluralism. Do pluralistic theologies accept methods that are critical of religion? Not often.

I take the discourse on *sui generis* religion – based on the supposition that religion can be understood only on its own terms – as a case in point.¹⁶² Its popularity in the academic study of religion makes it a likely candidate for adherence to scholarly standards. Yet one of its most damning limitations seems to be its monomania. The discourse on *sui generis* religion is based on the presumption that religion is in essence other-worldly, true and good, and this makes naturalistic approaches to the study of religion distortive. It therefore “privileges one group of human data over all others” (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 18–20). We need not accept that this is always so, just as long as we recognize the dangerous tendency to let “alternative methods and approaches go unrecognized and unappreciated” (Sharpe, 1987b, p. 84).

Although method and object pluralism puts the methodological credence of theological studies in question, it is important to emphasize that these criteria do not imply that theologies can be safely ignored. Even if one finds them lacking methodologically, theologies are important religious phenomena. As such they are a

¹⁶² I refer here to the strong *sui generis* thesis. For a definition see Reduction and Naturalism section below.

part of the object of the academic study of religion (Lott, 1988, p. 254; Smart, 1973, pp. 6–7). In the main, they are to be understood rather than be taken as normative (Rudolph, 2000, p. 240); they are to be explained, rather than taken as the explanation (Segal, 2000).

Intersubjective Verifiability

An empirical method dictates that evidence within the academic study of religion should be publicly accessible (Pye, 2000, p. 217; Smart, 1973, p. 65). The academic study of religion requires “a critical inquiry whose theories, methods and results are not esoteric, private and intelligible only within the terms of a special-to-religion epistemology and credibility structure” (Braun, 2000, p. 12). A conception of religion as in essence otherworldly and defence of faith based on religious experience or revelation are prime candidates for exclusion from academic acceptability based on this criterion (Lease, 1997, pp. 138–9; Segal, 1999, pp. 150–1). For the adherent the evidence in these cases is hidden from sceptical (unworthy) eyes. For the non-believer, there is no way to say if the evidence exists at all. Using the intersubjective criterion, the possibility of such revelatory events cannot be denied, but it would be inappropriate to accept them as evidence based on the word of the gifted few. To do so, is to go a long way towards returning the scholarly study of religion to its former position as the handmaiden of theology (Smart, 1973, p. 65). If the issue of religious truth is treated as a scientific question, one cannot accept answers based on “highly idiosyncratic personal grounds” (Wiebe, 2000, p. 269). These are too numerous and conflicting. The question of how to rationally choose between the seemingly endless conflicting revelations remains.

The problem is not limited to scientific inquiry. Where it is said that such private “evidence” should be scientifically acceptable, why should it not be acceptable in settling intra-religious disputes? Accepting this makes for a situation “in which each and every disputant would be wholly successful. It would . . . commit us to a radical

relativism that precludes all possibility of transpersonal truth-claims” (Wiebe, 2000, p. 269). This is not too far from being an accurate description of the state of affairs. It seems that only dead religions are immune to schisms motivated by new revelation or supposedly more authoritative interpretation of an original one.

It must be understood, however, that religious intuition, experience, or revelation should not be excluded from scientific consideration. They all have a publicly available side. It is an empirical fact *par excellence* that people have and always have had religious experiences. This is an important datum for the academic study of religion whether one wants to base supernaturalistic conclusions on it, or understand more fully the workings (and fallibility) of the mind. The point is that in the context of justification, private experiences have no special authority – they cannot be taken as veridical (Hubbeling, 1973, p. 30).

From the religious side of the great discursive divide, it is often mentioned that science, no less than religion, requires “leaps beyond the evidence at hand to a world of imagined entities whose postulated existence is used to make sense of that which meets the senses” (Shweder as cited in Geertz, 2000b, sect. 4). But the behaviour to which this observation points does not contradict the intersubjective requirement so long as inferences from seen to unseen are amenable to public access, and bear public evaluation. In the case of religious experiences, their veracity as pointers to the existence of the beyond is not amenable to public access. On the other hand, an inference from the public fact of a diversity of mutually contradictory religious experiences, to the conclusion that the likelihood of any one of them being true is miniscule, does not suffer from any deficiencies with regard to public accessibility. The same can be said of the inference from the cultural, temporal, geographical, biological and other specificities of these experiences, to the conclusion that they are likely artificially manufactured, or of mundane origin.

Reduction and Naturalism

The academic study of religion attempts not only to describe religious phenomena accurately but also to explain them (Sharpe, 1983, p. xi). We seek to know not only how people behave but why they behave as they do. Why do religions exist? Why do people have the beliefs that they do? The academic study of religion takes a keen interest in answering these questions. Of course, there is no monopoly here. Religions have also sought to explain their own existence, and the existence of faiths with which they come into contact.

The typical explanation – that of the believer – is that her religion exists because of some kind of special access to ultimate truth, a revelation, a religious experience, or a unique insight of the founders. Conflicting faiths are then explained by some version of error theory. Often people will explain their coming to hold their beliefs on the ground that these are the most reasonable beliefs to have. The problem of religious diversity, again, puts such explanations in a bad light.

More popular in the academy are two other common explanatory strategies – the naturalistic and the pluralistic – that seem to do more justice to religious diversity (Paden, 1994, pp. 16–29). Naturalist explanations conflict with traditional religious explanations: If the causes of a certain religion are natural, its believers are wrong when they claim a supernatural source. If all religions are explained naturally, all of their respective supernatural explanations must be false. Pluralist explanations, on the other hand, do postulate and make use of the supernatural as a cause. But strictly speaking, pluralist explanations conflict with traditional explanations as well. A typical pluralist conception of religion, you may recall, would claim that no one religion is true, but rather together they are signs to the beyond – imperfect manifestations of a common source. Both the naturalist and pluralist attempt to explain religions not in terms of the religions being explained, but in terms of an alien perspective or an alien worldview. To the secular social scientist Islam is a human creation; to the pluralist theologian it is an imperfect manifestation of the sacred; both

conflict with the Muslim's belief that it is the work of Allah. To him Allah is both real and much more than a mere culturally dependent manifestation of the sacred.

Both the naturalistic and pluralist explanations, then, do not accept traditional explanations at face value. Both try to explain the manifest level of religions with another that is hidden from the adherent's view (Lawson, 1996, p. 33). Both involve "translation of one culture's constructs into those of another" (Connolly, 1995, *Phenomenology and Reduction* sect., para. 5). Both, then, are reductive (Benavides, 1996, p. 275; Flood, 1999, p. 66; Gill, 1994, pp. 968–9).¹⁶³ But they are reductive only in a sense.

There is another sense of the term – commonly used in pluralist critiques of naturalist explanations (Segal, 1993, p. 4) – that emphasizes "the element of misrepresentation or distortion that occurs in the process of 'translation'" (Connolly, 1995, *Phenomenology and Reduction* sect., para. 5). The first sense conveys no negative connotations – reduction is justified so long as there is a good reason to question the believer's explanation. But the second sense is derogatory – a reductive explanation is always a bad explanation.

The pluralist critique can start with the facts to be explained.¹⁶⁴ Throughout history people the world over have been religious. Humans have always had beliefs in supernatural beings, forces or realms, and they have always had experiences in which they claim to have made a unique connection with that realm – experiences that they feel are veridical – undeniable proof for the existence of their own version of the supernatural. To pluralists, commonalities between various religious beliefs and experiences suggest a common supernatural explanation (Smart, 1981, p. 51). All those people cannot be wrong in their yearning, belief, worship, and experience of the beyond. But there are also differences, and these also need to be explained. The

¹⁶³ Traditional religious explanations are also reductive when it comes to explaining other religions (Merkur, 1993, pp. 220–1, 228).

¹⁶⁴ An alternative interpretation will be presented below, whereby the critique starts not with the data but rather the presumed truth of the supernatural.

pluralism dominant in religious studies literature explains these as cultural husks that were necessary additions to what is a universal but ineffable kernel. Under such a conception religion is seen as a human – and therefore culturally influenced – reaction to an innate yearning for and contact with a mysterious otherworldly sacred reality (Arnal, 2000, p. 26).

If this explanation is correct it follows that to explain religion naturalistically is to miss the mark. It is to make religion into something it is not (Segal, 1993, p. 4). It means focusing on the externals of religion – the culturally variable and fallible husks – rather than its essence, its kernel, its source and its truth (McCutcheon, 1999, p. 69). A naturalistic explanation is here seen as reductive in the derogatory sense. If religion bears the mark of the supernatural, reducing it to the natural alone is unjustified if not harmful. Because religion contains a supernatural element, it is – as far as a naturalistic science is concerned – *sui generis*: It is “one of a kind, self-caused, and cannot be reduced to such things as culture, politics, or society” (McCutcheon, 1999, p. 71).

An appropriate study of religion will accommodate the supernatural by using whichever means make possible the acquisition of knowledge about such a unique object. A strictly empirical investigation will not do the trick because it has no access to the supernatural. The special methods typically offered to complement empirical methods in studying this special object are intuition (facilitated either by religious belief or an empathic understanding of religious belief) and personal religious experience (Hewitt, 2000, p. 33; McCutcheon, 1999, pp. 68–9). Sceptics, using empirical methods alone, “can observe and evaluate the outward machinery of religion, but what they cannot do is to grasp the divine-human relationship which lies at its heart” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 19). Even if the religiously empowered scholar wishes to investigate a faith different to his own, his beliefs and experiences will facilitate his empathetic and sympathetic understanding of that faith (Douglas, 1987, pp. 281–2). They allow him an intuitive grasp of other believers’ perspective: “He knows the force of the religious imperative at first hand, with all its hopes and fears, ecstasies

and disappointments, and above all the way in which it relativises all purely human concerns” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 19).

Just how much credence should be given in the academy to such a conception of religion and its study? Here a distinction can be made between weak and strong versions of the *sui generis* thesis. Those who support the weaker version accept that within a scholarly context the truth of *sui generis* religion cannot be assumed *a priori*. That is, it is acknowledged that the jury is still out on the question of the existence or nonexistence of the supernatural. In this case the legitimacy of a *sui generis* conception of religion and its study has to be defended on scientifically acceptable grounds, such as the scholarly need to be neutral with regard to the truth of religion, avoid circularities, and augment the criticism of naturalistic assumptions and methods. However, what can be defended on such grounds is not the superiority of *sui generis* religion, but merely its possibility – its right to be included. Those who hold this weaker version of the *sui generis* thesis must therefore treat strictly naturalistic explanations as similarly legitimate (Donovan, 1999, pp. 245–6; Wiebe, 1993, pp. 108–14). They must not be seen as necessarily reductive in the negative sense.

Those holding the strong version are altogether more confident about the truth of *sui generis* religion and eager to condemn and exclude attempts to reduce it to the natural realm (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 168; McCutcheon, 1996, p. 1). Religion is at least partly of supernatural origin, and so faith, religious experience or religious intuition are a ‘must have’ for a proper understanding of religion (Hewitt, 2000, p. 33).¹⁶⁵ The strong *sui generis* thesis has been and still is very influential within religious studies

¹⁶⁵ There is another sense of *sui generis* religion that can get confused with these, but that both sides of the natural/supernatural debate tend to take for granted. The establishment of distinct religious studies departments in the second half of the twentieth century owes a debt to the supernatural *sui generis* thesis – a special subject accessed through special methods needed a special department. The naturalistic attack of the *sui generis* thesis seemed for some to put the continued existence of their department in question. But there is a sense of *sui generis* religion that is not metaphysically loaded, and that supplies institutional justification of its own. This is that there are, in fact, religious phenomena, and that these can have effects on other religious and non-religious phenomena (Paden, 1993, p. 208; Segal, 2000; Smart, 1981, pp. 53, 55, 64–7). Saler (2000, p. 3) refers to this as categorical distinctiveness rather than *sui generis* existence.

scholarship (McCutcheon, 1997b, pp. 24–5). As a result, naturalistic scholars of religion have had to justify what their academic brethren are expected to take for granted – the legitimacy of naturalistic inquiry.

The naturalistic defence accepts the premise that an explanation that loses something essential in the data is not a good explanation, but questions whether it is naturalistic or supernaturalistic inquiry that is guilty of such reduction. Criticisms of extant naturalistic theories of religion have long ago led to the realization that such theories should be taken as aspectual, delimited, and tentative. It is understood that one theory cannot be expected to do justice to as complex and diverse a phenomenon as religion (Pals, 1996, pp. 280–1).¹⁶⁶ Naturalistic theories of religion abstract from religious phenomena those aspects that they are interested in or able to deal with, and they should not be mistaken as explaining religion, or even a religion, *in toto* (Paden, 2000a, p. 194; Smart, 1984, p. 258). Sociological, psychological, economic, historical and other accounts of the same faith can coexist so long as there is no contradiction between them. The more disparate explanations are combined, the more aspects of the phenomena are revealed (Molendijk, 1998, p. 5). To monopolize here is to commit “the fallacy of partial description” (Jensen, 2000, p. 63).¹⁶⁷ This is to say, again, that the academic study of religion needs to be methodologically and theoretically plural.

But what of the naturalistic assumption in general? Is it not a monopolization of inquiry to assume that all religious phenomena can or will be explained naturalistically? Doesn't ignoring supernatural explanations exclude a possibly insightful approach? Here a parallel can be drawn between the weak and strong version of the *sui generis* thesis and similar versions of the naturalistic thesis. The criticism does seem to have some teeth against a strong version of naturalism in as much as the nonexistence of the supernatural is not known with certainty (Smart, 1984, p. 258). The strong naturalistic thesis has the peculiar implication that the

¹⁶⁶ See Simplistic Definitions of Religion section.

¹⁶⁷ See also Weckman (1993, p. 213).

scientific study of religion cannot help but treat religions as false, and it would be a serious limitation of any science to have one of its most interesting questions answered prior to inquiry (Smart as cited in Wiebe, 1998a, pp. 61–2).¹⁶⁸ But the same can be said of the strong *sui generis* thesis. Because the metaphysical/philosophical grounds for naturalistic or supernaturalistic explanations of religion are still open to debate it is not academically acceptable to allow for the exclusion of either perspective (Wiebe, 1993, p. 114). The strong *sui generis* claim is just as circular as a strong naturalism – no compelling argument has yet been given that shows naturalistic explanations of religion are doomed to failure, without itself relying on the premise that religion is not of this world.¹⁶⁹ To approach the study of religion thus is to answer the question “What is religion?” before inquiry begins (Gill, 1994, pp. 967–8; Segal, 2006a, p. pxiv–xvii).

Arguments from religious experience – commonly used to justify claims to truth not only of pluralistic theologies but also of religions (Smart, 2000, p. 101) – commit a similar circularity. A religious explanation is not more reasonable given a religious cosmology than a mundane explanation given a naturalistic cosmology. Religious experiences cannot support a supernatural cosmology because explaining them religiously relies on just such a cosmology (Smart, 1981, pp. 55–7; 2000, p. 69). There are no non-religious reasons to take religious experiences as veridical (Moore, 1978, p. 127).

The *sui generis* requirement for special (religious) subject-appropriate methods of study can be seen as an instance of *crede ut intelligas* – the common religious instruction to believe in order to understand (Sharpe, 1983, p. 13). But belief can also preclude understanding because of its conductivity to bias. Strong religious belief often leads to an emotional defensive reaction whenever the believer encounters

¹⁶⁸ A similar argument can be found in Trigg (1997, p. 111) and Wiebe (1999).

¹⁶⁹ For the naturalistic version of this circularity see Stout (1987, p. 316) and Flood (1999, pp. 80–9, 112–14). Based on the problem of circularity in any kind of foundational discourse, Flood argues forcefully in favour of a study of religion that accepts the situatedness of all inquiry within temporal and fallible narratives, and therefore abandons claims to certainty in favour of a reflexivity and inclusivity. Although his critique applies well to naïve forms of naturalism, his claim that all naturalistic reductions of religion depend on foundationalist naturalism seems excessive.

something that might put his beliefs in doubt (pp. 30, 69). Religious commitment can lead all too easily to premature judgment of other worldviews (both religious and secular); a will to believe whatever puts one's faith in good light; lack of reflection on one's own prejudices; an over-zealous preference for supernatural explanations;¹⁷⁰ and, generally speaking, studies that "proceed safely only along the paths which their tradition lays down for them" (pp. 30, 20–1).¹⁷¹

Another problem with the requirement for religious commitment is that it is questionable whether the understanding open to the adherent is one that an academic study requires. Understanding is a matter of degree and of perspective. The scholarly study of religion is not limited to the perspective of the insider. To think differently is to equate it with theology. The understanding that it seeks is therefore not limited to religious understanding. Religious understanding is important in the academy because it is a necessary ingredient in the description of various religious phenomena like religious experiences. But when attempting to explain these phenomena, scholarly understanding occurs on the level of, and using the terms of, the relevant academic disciplines. The data has to be incorporated into extant scientific frameworks or else it remains on the level of theology (Lott, 1988, pp. 12–3, 255). As for the descriptive level – the level in which the adherent's authority is respected – the understanding required need only be adequate for the purpose of reasonable discussion on the causes of religious experiences. This is an understanding that is available to non-believers (Smart, 1978, p. 15).

Another problem with the strong *sui generis* thesis was already mentioned above. Any understanding that is available only through religious commitment fails the intersubjective criterion. The *sui generis* assumption "encourages discourse conducted on the authority of vision, insight, or experience rather than rational discourse, hypothetic inference, and the application of scientific method" (Gill, 1994,

¹⁷⁰ This tendency can also include dislike of naturalistic explanations even when these do not put one's faith in jeopardy. A person might, for example, prefer to explain a discounted sale price on a particular product in the supermarket when she is short of funds as a miracle rather than a coincidence.

¹⁷¹ See also Douglas (1987) and Rudolph (2000, pp. 239–40).

p. 968). The problem is more than the fact that such private claims fail the “generally shared, scientific evidentiary principles of the modern academy” (Braun, 2000, p. 9). Rather, it opens the floodgates for any and all mutually contradictory idiosyncratic claims about religion so long as they are supported by an authentic experience, of which there is no shortage (Edwards, 1993, p. 181; Wiebe, 1998b, pp. 288–9, 389).¹⁷² Rather than sharing known rules of scientific discourse, each and every adherent will rely on his own worldview as a source of knowledge and a criterion of truth (Hubbeling, 1973, pp. 10, 17–9). To treat personal faith as a scientific criterion is surely a case of mistaken identity, no matter how common a mistake this is.

Yet, the eagerness with which supporters of the strong *sui generis* thesis “adopt the stance of devotee as over against the sceptic” (Wiebe, 1993, p. 109) at least as far as the existence of a humanly relevant supernatural realm is concerned, taken together with the problems of monopolization of inquiry, circularity, conductivity to bias, the requirement of a non-empirical faith-dependant understanding, and, to make matters worse, the resemblance to and influence of Christian theology and Christian beliefs on popular conceptions of *sui generis* religion,¹⁷³ raise serious suspicions that *sui generis* religion is nothing more than theological encroachment into scientific territory. The accusation here is twofold: The discourse on *sui generis* religion is both religiously motivated – an attempt to validate various theologies rationally (Smart, 1984, p. 268) – and a religious claim, or even an important religious phenomenon itself (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 16; Saler, 2000, p. 3), and therefore belongs on the level of data and not scholarly theory. I will return to this point when I confront the question of criticism within the academy.

Another reason why naturalistic explanations should be preferred is the more progressive quality of naturalistic explanation. A lot can be said for the relative

¹⁷² I take it that an authentic experience is one that actually took place. An authentic religious experience can still be caused by purely mundane means. When a person claims to have had an experience of the beyond, she is not dishonest if her experience is authentic, but she can still be mistaken about its causes.

¹⁷³ For examples see Dubuisson (2003, pp. 53–4), Gill (1994, pp. 974–5), Hewitt (1999), and Saler (2000, p. 3).

promise naturalistic theorization holds. For some it is the only progressive research program in the study of religion (Martin, 2000a, pp. 53–5; Wiebe, 1998b, pp. 292–3), due in large measure to the genetic and sustaining link between the field’s naturalistic strand and the highly successful natural sciences (Segal, 1989, p. 79; Gellner as cited in Wiebe, 1997, p. 178), and the less flattering historical link between the supernatural strand and religious retreat and apology (Boyer and Edelman as cited in Luther, 2004, p. 38).¹⁷⁴

In comparison with naturalistic counterparts, theological explanations of religion may also suffer from a relative lack of explanatory power. The problem here is of explaining one unknown in terms of another, the latter not being amenable to further explanation. When phenomena in mundane reality are explained by the workings of ultimately unknowable forces like Mana, Tao, Dharma, God, or the Sacred, we have the makings of an explanation *obscurum per obscurius* in which an apparent modicum of understanding is immediately replaced with a new and permanent mystery (Braun, 2000, p. 5; McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 128). If it is accepted that the existence and meaning of the spiritual world can be grasped only through the unique tradition and experience of a Shaman; if God cannot be known in this world, but only in the next, and only by a select few, the relevancy of academic study is put into question. Otherworldly explanations of worldly phenomena puts these phenomena “beyond the grasp of the sceptic and beyond the grasp of the ‘outsider,’ academic student of religion” (Wiebe, 1999, pp. 261–2). In Segal’s (1999, p. 152) words, the theologian is then left “not with an incomprehensible phenomenon but with a phenomenon which he had barred himself from comprehending”. A similar point is made by Peter Berger (1967, pp. 85–90): Religious explanations of religion hide the mundane causes of religious phenomena, and are therefore mystifying rather than explanatory.

¹⁷⁴ The study of the relevant history should therefore be of some educational value to the question of choice between scientific and religious worldviews.

By effectively replacing what from a naturalistic point of view is, at least potentially, perfectly comprehensible, with an unknown and unknowable mystery, religious explanations of religion can, at times, be accused of defensively motivated obscurantism: a subversion for confessional purposes of what could be a legitimate area of study (Braun, 2000, p. 5). This is one of the problems of the assertion of incommensurability in religious studies. Asserting incommensurability between religious and scientific views of religion delegitimizes scientific studies and criticism of religion. If the two are incommensurable, something in religion will not translate into scientific language without distortion. If incommensurability is with regard to the truth of a religion's ultimate source, a naturalistic explanation of religion will be seen by adherents as gross misrepresentation: a distortion of that faith's essence. Since it is their faith, and not naturalistic views, that the adherent takes as veridical, naturalistic theorizing is excluded from contention (Wiebe, 1999, pp. 261–3). This is simply to say that for those whose fundamental beliefs cannot be accepted by science, naturalistic attempts to make those beliefs intelligible are distortive and so, of no "scientific" value.

This is not something that science can readily accept. Barring naturalistic theorizing on a religion due to its veracity and incommensurability is not scientifically acceptable because that veracity is in question. So long as a faith's veracity is not accepted on scientific grounds, naturalistic attempts at its explanation will not and should not accept that they lack explanatory potential. No research program can accept its own dissolution for anything less than commanding scientific grounds.

Perhaps the foremost reason for having a naturalistic study of religion is simply that this is a prerequisite for any science. Science aims at a scheme of knowledge whose various parts complement and enhance each other. Inconsistencies need to be explained away or marginalized (Connolly, 1995, *Phenomenology and Reduction* sect., para. 7). The history of science shows that the naturalistic assumption has been overwhelmingly successful. Supernatural explanations of religion imply a different assumption, perhaps even an incongruous cosmology. Worse still, they may even rely

on religious experience or theological dogma – neither recognized by science as authoritative (Geertz, 2000a, p. 28). For many, then, any science, *qua* science, must be naturalistic. For those favourable to religion who seek scientific approval this strong naturalism is anathema.

From the point of view of the religionist, the problem could be avoided if it could be established that (1) supernatural theorizing is academically legitimate, or that (2) naturalistic theorizing should not pass negative judgment on religion, or that (3) naturalistic theorizing cannot judge religion adversely, or simply that (4) it does not have any negative implications for supernatural assertions. With regard to the first point, I argued that the academic study of religion should be open in principle to supernatural explanations, and that this does not imply equality of justification. Rather, supernatural explanations may be nothing more than an unlikely logical possibility. But what about positions two, three, and four? The need to save a supernatural cosmology from the sceptical razor has led some to argue that the academic study of religion should remain agnostic with regard to questions of religious truth and value; or that it cannot – due to lack of evidence – make any such pronouncement; or that existent naturalistic explanations are, as yet, not good enough to merit the abandonment of their supernatural counterparts. I will look at each of these in turn.

If a supernatural explanation of religion does not possess much warrant on scientific grounds, perhaps such grounds would support a study that remained aloof from the question of religious truth? This idea, popularized by Smart, is called methodological agnosticism. Smart agrees that within any science, an assumption that the supernatural exists is out of place. But it does not follow, he maintains, that its nonexistence must be asserted. The whole question can be ignored (bracketed) without penalty:

By bracketing the Beyond we affirm a kind of methodological agnosticism, a way of approaching the phenomena of religious

experience without any unnecessary slant, and trying to reveal the categories the believer uses rather than imposing our own categories on him. (Smart, 1981, pp. 55–6)

For many, the case for methodological agnosticism is strong, and justifiably so. Failing to keep the question of truth in abeyance has had a long distortive influence on the study of religion (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 55; Freidenreich, 2004, pp. 86–7). This is a problem that is common also outside the academic study of religion. Failure to bracket our own presuppositions about the truth or value of other worldviews results, all too often, in a failure to take others seriously, in an imposition of our own norms of rationality on theirs, and in a premature judgment of their “folly” (Smart, 1973, pp. 108–9; 1996a, p. 1). On top of this there is the point already made, that a scientific approach should not be determined by a position within the field – and a highly disputed position at that (Smart, 1973, pp. 53, 159). That is, a science of religion must assume neither a theological nor an atheistic starting point. Failure to do so would open such a study to the accusation of bias, and would render circular any support it seems to offer to either side (pp. 148, 158).

Accepting, however, that methodological agnosticism is, in Smart’s words, “an essential element in the study of religion,” (Smart, 1987b, pp. 4–5) is, for the moment, beside the point. The question is whether or not, as Robert Baird put it, “when one puts [. . . methodological agnosticism] aside, one is no longer engaged in the academic study of religion” (As quoted in Dunbar, 1998b, sect. 6, para. 3). Should an academic study of religion always eschew such normative questions? This is unlikely.

For both Sharpe and Smart, rational inquiry about religion “begins with the attempt to see clearly what is already there in the world of religion, past as well as present, abroad as well as at home” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 144). This empirical task is a common goal that can be taken for granted at the outset. It is the business of the academic study of religion to work out accurate descriptions of whatever falls within the

domain of religion. “Unless it begins there,” Sharpe tells us, academic inquiry into religion “is unlikely to begin at all” (p. 60). But it need not end there. Mere description of phenomena, in and of itself, does not constitute a science (Wiebe, 2000, p. 267). Over and above the descriptive element, the study of religion also includes an evaluative philosophical element, which is the legitimate abode of questions of truth (Smart, 1973, pp. 41–2), so long as dealing with these does not unduly interfere with the descriptive element (Wiebe, 2000, pp. 270–2).

Neutrality is not the aim of the academic study of religion. It is a means to an end: a way to attain knowledge about religion. This surely includes knowledge about the rationality and truth-values of religious claims. Religious claims about reality constitute one of religion’s most conspicuous and important characteristics (Trigg, 1997, pp. 108–10). It makes a big difference to what religion is if its claims are true or false. It also makes a big difference to what adherents and scholars should believe and do, if religious claims are true or false, plausible or implausible. Religious truth-claims are taken seriously by adherents, that is, they are taken to have cognitive content, and they are believed to be true. They exercise considerable influence on both affection and action, including reasoning (Smart, 2000, pp. 102–3).¹⁷⁵ Questions of ultimate truth have moral implications (Lott, 1988, p. 177; Smart, 2000, p. 32), they are perennial questions (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 129), they are questions that will be asked regardless of academic admissibility, and they are questions to which no one can remain indifferent.¹⁷⁶

Accepting an overly agnostic conception of the study of religion would result in a field that is of little danger to supernatural claims.¹⁷⁷ It means that a scholarly field that is highly sensitive about bias, and that does not demand that its practitioners adopt any faith assumptions (Vardy, 2005, p. 81), will have to leave questions of truth

¹⁷⁵ See also Smart (1968, p. 106) and (1981, pp. 20–1).

¹⁷⁶ Everyone, knowingly or unknowingly gives or lives an answer to the question of ultimate truth, even if for some the “answer” or the resolution is that there is no way to tell or that the question is nonsensical.

¹⁷⁷ This point was not lost on scholars like McCutcheon (1997a, p. 451) and Wiebe (1998c, p. 146) who think that such a move is commonly used in the academy in order to defend religious claims rather than contest them – a problem that will be elaborated on shortly.

to the theologians – an action akin to letting the cat guard the milk. It means giving ideologies free reign (Murphy, 2000, p. 188). As a result many go hungry – expert advice not materializing – or are unaware that what they have ingested is at best of no nutritional value and poisonous at worst. The academic study of religion, then, has “a responsibility to venture judgments about religions” and religious claims (Martin, 2000c, pp. 145–6).¹⁷⁸

A completely agnostic study of religion is probably more than just undesirable. The question of truth may be impossible to ignore. A study of religion should be both descriptive and explanatory, and both have metaphysical presuppositions and implications (Poole, 1986).¹⁷⁹ Both the sciences and religious and secular worldviews depend on metaphysical presuppositions (Dubuisson, 2003, pp. 203–5; Lott, 1988, p. 175). These can and often do come into conflict. The metaphysics implied by science or the academic study of religion make for important objects of study based on the fact that they are rivals to the metaphysical positions of popular worldviews. But they make *necessary* objects of inquiry because they are the theoretical foundation on which scholarly inquiry is based. Putting a wedge between philosophical reflection and the foundation of inquiry amounts to treating it as dogma – an action that puts the results of that inquiry into doubt (Geertz, 2000a, pp. 21–2). Dealing with metaphysics is inescapable. What matters is how this is done (Ward, 1990, p. 228). A serious study of religion must therefore attempt to understand and evaluate these ultimate truth claims.

Coming back to the main theme, and now focusing on the third position I listed above, perhaps supernatural explanations could be given more support if it was shown that whatever implications do follow from naturalistic theorizing, these do not have a force sufficient to eliminate supernatural explanations out of serious

¹⁷⁸ The contrary accusation has also been leveled at methodological agnosticism. Some see it as implicitly sceptical of religion (Flood, 1999, p. 102; Geertz, 2000b). In various hands there is no reason why neutrality could not be used for both defending religious claims and ignoring them. From the current perspective both uses are suspect.

¹⁷⁹ See also Wiebe (1998c, p. 146) and above (chapter 3, The Interdependency of Definition, Theory and Inquiry section).

contention. This would be the case if naturalistic explanations lack sufficient proof, or if their probative force is otherwise lacking – either in absolute terms or relative to supernatural explanations.

The claim that the academic study of religion does not have the evidential wherewithal to support a rational choice between worldviews or the metaphysical claims that lay at their bottom is widespread (Segal, 2005b, p. 50). While it is generally accepted that science trumps religious claims where a conflict exists and empirical evidence is available, for some, the truth of religious metaphysical claims is “not open to scientific inquiry” because they cannot be proved or disproved empirically (Flood, 1999, pp. 171, 174). Even if naturalistic explanations have priority over religious ones, and even if these amount to a plausible and sufficient account of “why people have the beliefs they do [naturalistic explanations] can never totally remove the further question of the validity of these beliefs” (Trigg, 1997, p. 116).¹⁸⁰ That is, accepting that someone’s belief in deity X is well explained by the mundane reason of being socialized in group Y, does not prove the non-existence of deity X. By definition, the supernatural is unavailable empirically, and so we are told that the study of religion is “in principle incapable of providing any evidence about God” (Rudolph, 2000, p. 235). As a consequence, the “science of religion is never able to state what the reality of religion is” (Schmid, 1979, p. 181). Metaphysical claims just “cannot be touched upon by science” (Jaki, 1987, pp. 129–30).¹⁸¹

Although it must be conceded that the science of religion does “not rule out the reality and value of religion” (Wiebe, 1999, p. 268), that is, the supernatural will always remain a logical possibility; and that “those who believe that the evidence adds up to conclusive proof,” of either naturalism or supernaturalism, might as well be “using the evidence to confirm a view they already hold” (Sharpe, 1983, p. xiii); the inference from here to the claim that the question of truth is out of bounds for a

¹⁸⁰ See also pp. 112, 114.

¹⁸¹ Similarly: Science can investigate any aspect of religion except its truth (Stark, 1999, p. 59); Judging the supernatural not to exist is not within the bounds of a naturalism that knows its own human situatedness and limitations (McCutcheon, 1997b, p. 193).

scientific study of religion is unwarranted. This is because naturalistic explanations do have some implications for the truth-value of religious claims, even if these will never amount to “proof,” and because to abstain from judgment until “proof” is available means putting the bar of rational judgment too high.

One reason to think that a plausible naturalistic explanation of religious belief reduces the likelihood of that belief being true is that its truth would be a mere coincidence, and an incredibly fortuitous (even salvific) one at that:

Whoever projects God onto the world does not discover God in the world but rather imposes God on it. Should God turn out to exist after all, the projection would represent no insight on the believer’s part. It would represent mere coincidence. The extraordinariness that such a coincidence would represent is what challenges the truth of religion.¹⁸²
(Segal, 1993, p. 12)

Another reason is that a sufficient natural explanation makes the postulation of a supernatural reality superfluous (Ryba, 1993, pp. 39–40; 2000, p. 188). If religious beliefs and experiences are capable of being artificially produced we do not need the supernatural in order to explain them (Berger, 1967, pp. 181–4). On the face of it religious explanations rely on just one or very few explanatory entities (one or more deities, forces, etc.). But these entities are surplus postulations. They are added to the entities of the natural world – they do not replace them. Worse still, the added postulates are themselves infinitely complex, or incalculably so (Segal, 1989, pp. 78–9). The principle of parsimony demands their abandonment (Hubbeling, 1973, p. 30).

To the extent that a natural explanation is successful, therefore, keeping with a supernatural explanation become less plausible and requires “a much longer leap of faith” (Lott, 1988, p. 170). The converse is also true. The less reasonable or likely a

¹⁸² An extended argument is given in Segal (1989, pp. 75–81).

supernatural explanation seems, the more reason we have to abandon belief in the supernatural causal entity used by that explanation.

To demand more than this, that is, to demand certainty or undeniable proof before admitting that a rational judgment is possible, is to ask too much. Science accepts whatever certitude is made possible by the object of inquiry and qualifies the results accordingly. We can never be without a worldview, and so we are forced to make do with the “more probable and plausible . . . and be willing to entertain alternatives . . . without overmuch fuss” (Wiebe, 2000, p. 267–8).

If my account thus far has been persuasive, the only way in which supernatural explanations could remain in serious contention assuming a scientific perspective – and here I move on to the fourth option listed above – is if naturalistic explanations of religion are as yet not sufficiently plausible, or not more so than supernatural ones. If the student accepts scientific authority, it is here that the heart of the matter would lie.¹⁸³ Which explanation is more plausible – the natural or the supernatural?

Naturalistic theories of religion have always been subject to criticism, and rightfully so. But it is unfair criticism and lack of attention that presents a problem from an educational point of view. Regrettably, both secular and religious pedagogies tend to ignore or caricature naturalistic explanations of religion.^{184,185} If the non-religious, scholarly study of religion is accepted as legitimate; if it is then deemed appropriate that such study should rely on a qualified naturalism (one that accepts only empirically available data, but is inclusive in principle of supernatural explanations of those data); if it is also accepted that such a study should not ignore evaluative questions, and that its results may have a bearing upon them, then it follows that an

¹⁸³ Of course, one should not assume that students will accept a non-confessional study of religion as legitimate. Most students will likely be ambivalent with regard to scientific authority on this subject or even at all, and some can be expected to be downright hostile.

¹⁸⁴ See Barnes (2000, pp. 325–7) for a critique of phenomenological approaches to religious education. Although commonly seen as Smart’s brainchild, they fail his legacy in exactly this crucial point: They rarely allow for the descriptive stage to give way to the explanatory and evaluative.

¹⁸⁵ One common caricature – failing to treat theories as aspectual – is touched on in Pals (1996, p. 281). There are many others, a survey of which would make for valuable research.

education in religion needs to give sufficient attention to scholarly explanations of religion (Jaffee, 1999, pp. 275–7). More broadly, its relative objectivity and relevance to the question of truth makes the scholarly study of religion an important voice in the worldview market – to be ignored at our own peril (Rudolph, 2000, pp. 238–41).

Criticism

If there is to be a first among equals in scientific criteria, few would argue against criticism taking that pride of place. Saying that “the heart of science lies in criticism” does not commit too dubious a hyperbole (Smart, 1981, p. 292; Stout, 1987, p. 316). If the academic study of religion complies with this ideal, it is, *ceteris paribus*, justified (Lincoln, 1999b, p. 395). The same can be said of theology. If theology was shown to be a critical method of studying religion, this would go a long way toward its establishment as an academic pursuit. Conversely, if theology was non-critical, or worse – anti-critical, it would lose methodological credence.

A typical argument in support of the latter begins with the assertion that theology accepts the truth of a particular faith (Smart, 1987b, p. 25). In studying his own religion, a Baha’i will accept the Baha’i faith as fundamentally true, just as a Roman Catholic would his own (Smart, 2000, p. 30). Such acceptance is based not on scientific grounds, but on faith (Hewitt, 2000, p. 40), revelation (Penner, 1975a, pp. 52–3), or a myriad of other cognates. This acceptance or commitment remains unchallenged. Freedom of inquiry in Muslim theology does not extend to questioning Islam’s fundamental premises like the divine origin of the Qur’an. Such premises remain inviolable (Hewitt, 2000, p. 40): Their validity is absolute (Horton as cited in Penner, 1986, p. 657). This does not mean that there is no freedom of inquiry whatsoever, or that critical thought cannot easily be found in religious scholarship. Criticism is often allowed and even encouraged, but always within certain boundaries

(Sharpe, 1983, p. 8).^{186,187} These boundaries, the argument continues, are in direct conflict with the principle of scientific criticism (Hewitt, 1999, sect. 3). With respect to questions of ultimate truth and value, and from any perspective other than that of the believer, they curb critical thought just where it matters most.¹⁸⁸

It would not be difficult to find examples to which this argument applies both in intellectual history and in the personal histories of students. Indeed, this seems to be the dominant mode of religious inculcation, and a fundamental characteristic of religions. This problematic aspect as far as critical thinking is concerned does not go unnoticed in the definitions of cosmography, worldview and world given by Dubuisson, Smart, and Paden. Peter Berger's definition of religion, with which all would have been familiar, emphasizes this characteristic.

For Berger (1967, p. 3) religion is a very special kind of world-building. All human societies, and indeed all humans, need to live within a humanly created world. These worlds must be maintained and legitimated to those that live within them. Religion, Berger writes, "has been the historically most widespread and effective instrumentality of legitimation" (p. 32). If worlds are to be legitimated, their socially constructed and maintained nature has to remain hidden. A religious legitimation does this by explaining a humanly constructed and fragile world as ultimately valid sacred reality, which transcends humanity, but is meaningful to it (pp. 32–4).

Religious legitimation is the ultimate tool whereby the humanly constructed and maintained nature of worlds is disguised, forgotten, or lost to humans (p. 85).

Religion, then, is paradigmatic as a world legitimating and maintaining device. These

¹⁸⁶ After a whole paper describing Rabbinic intellectualism in terms synonymous to critical thinking (Neusner, 1975a), Neusner (1975b, p. 67) commented: "Rabbis cannot be represented as having stood completely outside the system in which they were doing their work. That would be a mode of skeptical thinking which I could not claim to find. This skeptical mode represents an important point of difference between the modern intellectual who stands outside of all structures and the Rabbinic intellectual who is so radical and creative within his given structure."

¹⁸⁷ An interesting and common complication arises in cases where caricatures or weak criticisms of fundamental beliefs are used as substitutes for real criticisms, with the aim or result of defending the faith. This "attenuated vaccine" method can be very persuasive, but it is only pseudo-critical.

¹⁸⁸ Critical thought applied to the fundamental premises of the faith, is, admittedly, less important to a believer who thinks he already possesses the truth, and for whom questioning that truth may lead to doubt or worse.

are two of its important social and psychological functions, and fulfilling these functions depends on removing fundamental religious tenets from the fallible and criticisable sphere of humans to the ethereal and infallible sphere of the sacred.¹⁸⁹

This view of religion is mirrored in two more landmark papers: McCutcheon's "A Default of Critical Intelligence" (1997a) and Lincoln's "Theses on Method" (1999b). Religion, is "a powerful and pervasive means by which human communities authorize their claims," McCutcheon writes (p. 451). More importantly, religion is particularly effective at privileging its claims because of its ability to sanction them with reference to an authority superlatively above that of humans. That is, religions rely on an authority that is ultimate, and that therefore cannot and should not be contested (pp. 452, 455). This aspect of religion is echoed in Lincoln's second and tenth theses on method: Religions isolate their authority from criticism and hide their own nature as worldviews, making critical thought about one's own religion difficult if not impossible.¹⁹⁰

Theologies are similarly implicated, because, as religious studies of religion, they accord and facilitate religious legitimation and maintenance. Many definitions of theology by theologians or those favourable to theology seem to lend support to these arguments. Here, for example, is Joachim Wach's definition of theology:

It is the task of theology to investigate, buttress, and teach the faith of a religious community to which it is committed, as well as to kindle zeal and fervor for the defense and spread of this faith. (As quoted in Martin, 2000b, sect. 1)

The strong *sui generis* thesis can be seen as just such a practice. It mirrors this religious characteristic in both method and effect. It has the effect of shielding

¹⁸⁹ For similar accounts see Byrne (1999, p. 256) and McCutcheon (2000, p. 176).

¹⁹⁰ Secular worldviews take advantage of this persuasive tool by, for instance, elevating a charismatic leader to what amounts to an infallible quasi-divine status, or by claiming scientific legitimacy. To forgo this tool a worldview must admit to its human origin and fallibility in full: No authority can be allowed to be shielded from criticism.

religion from naturalistic criticism, and it does so by claiming legitimation from an authority that cannot be falsified by human investigation. Scholars who accept religion as *sui generis* in the strong supernaturalist sense are not only reproducing religious claims to autonomy and authority, but seem, in this respect, to actually be fulfilling a religious function or participating in a religious practice (McCutcheon, 1997a, p. 451).¹⁹¹

For many, and not only in the naturalistic camp, the academic study of religion should have no such inclination. It has no scholarly duty to insulate religions from critical questions, on the contrary: it justifies itself by criticism. The modern academic study of religion emerged in the latter decades of the nineteenth century in an effort to distinguish itself from theology, as other sciences did before it (Lott, 1988, pp. 7–8). From its very beginning its founders eschewed the partisan and apologetic stance that was perceived to be typical of theology (Pals, 1996, pp. 3–4). Their aim was to create a space for inquiry about religion unencumbered by religious commitment or interference (Braun, 2000, p. 7). The new approach to the study of religion was based on a naturalistic turn. Religion was to be studied “without appealing to a divine being, a god, or any other nonhuman transcendent ‘other’ reality” (Braun, 2000, pp. 12–5). Religion has to be seen as humanly accessible, not ethereal and unique (Lincoln, 1999b, pp. 395, 397–8). What scholars of religion should be doing is exposing religious attempts to insulate themselves from criticism. The academic scholar of religion should “apply critical tools equally in all situations (not just to ‘them’ and ‘their practices and creations’ but to ‘us’ and ‘ours’ as well)” (McCutcheon, 1997a, p. 460). If the academic study of religion is to be able to criticize religion freely, the mechanism that religions use to legitimize and maintain their world has to be disengaged. The all-important assumption that religions are not of this world has to be questioned.

¹⁹¹ Similar notions of *sui generis* religion as a religious tool aimed at isolating religion from criticism can be found in Hewitt (1999) and Shaw (1999, pp. 106–8).

This follows even if religions are only partly humanly influenced, just so long as it is true that one of their functions involves hiding this fact. As long as worldviews have an inbuilt myopia, part of which will normally be various mechanisms that limit self-reflexive critique, and assuming critical thought requires curing this myopia (McCutcheon, 1999, pp. 129–30), those elements of religions or worldviews that limit critical thought provide “the primary instance of data for ideology critique” (Geertz et al., 2000, sect. 4, para. 2).

A non-confessional academic study of religion seems well placed to conduct this kind of ideology critique. The wherewithal afforded the scholar of religion allows, facilitates and perhaps even demands uncloaking of “the mechanisms whereby myths, truths, and norms are constructed and subsequently authorized, demonstrating the contingency of seemingly necessary conditions and the historical character of ahistorical claims” (McCutcheon, 2000, p. 174). Failing to do so may amount to an apologetic reproduction of claims to authority (pp. 174–5) and a default of critical intelligence (McCutcheon, 1997a, p. 445).¹⁹²

The damage from the scholarly failure to follow this principle is not limited to a loss of academic legitimacy brought on by an abrogation of academic standards. There is a difficulty here that has repercussions for critical thinking pedagogy. McCutcheon (1997a) decries the missed opportunity to do what scholars of religion should be uniquely capable of doing. Scholars of religion, he writes, have access to “sophisticated tools for comparing, analyzing, and critiquing the strategies by which communities decontextualize and marginalize, mythify and deify one side in what is more than likely a complex situation” (p. 452.)¹⁹³ They are thus able to “scrutinize the ideological sleight of hand” (p. 454) – the “ideological mechanisms” (p. 456) – “that leads to a seemingly perfect fit between the model constructed and sanctioned by the society or group in question, on the one hand, and reality, on the other” (p. 454). Like

¹⁹² See Hewitt’s (1999) interpretations of some strands of feminist theology along these lines.

¹⁹³ Some of the tools that allow the scholar of religion to achieve this is the comparison of religions and worldviews (McCutcheon, 1997a, p. 456), and naturalistic analysis and explanation of religion – specifically, critical theories about normative discourses that “contextualize them and explain them as human constructs” (pp. 546–8).

Smart, Paden, and Dubuisson above, McCutcheon conceives the academic study of religion broadly. The analysis of religious authorizing practices allows the scholar of religion to shed light on the authorizing practices of worldviews generally (pp. 458–9). This is in agreement with our thesis that the academic study of religion has much to contribute to a critical thinking pedagogy that focuses on worldviews. Obvious objections would arise, however, if it turns out that the academic study of religion does not facilitate critical thinking about worldviews, but rather, is guilty of shielding worldviews from criticism.

Accepting the need for unobstructed criticism in the study of religion in principle, the question of actual scientific practice still remains open. For McCutcheon, academic failure to critique religious claims to authority supports those very claims – an act with apologetic tint. Does this not hold for criticism of science? If scholarly practice is not sufficiently critical of itself, will it not be, in a sense, religious? If this was the case a distinction between the academic study of religion and theology based on the critical criterion will fail. Attempting to show that this is so is one of the two obvious routes to defend theological propriety in this respect. The other route is to show that theology can be just as critical. I will leave discussion of the second route for the moment, and concentrate on the first.

Is science not relying on its own set of dogmas? Does it not accept the truth of a particular worldview, itself unverifiable, and leaves this choice unchallenged? And what of scientists doggedly defending their pet theories against all odds? In principle, freedom of inquiry knows no bounds. The academic study of religion demands the criticism of its own methods and theories (Lincoln, 1999b, p. 397), and this includes the critique of general scientific axioms (Murphy, 2000, p. 183), as well as the consideration of alternative axioms (Saler, 1997, p. 58). Opinion is divided, however, as to whether or not the academic study of religion has been able to deliver.

Dubuisson (2003, pp. 128–9) – not least of the iconoclasts – thinks that such work has been too infrequent. Although it is quite possible that more should have been done, Jeppe (1997, p. 20) argues that the history of the study of religion shows that

the rules of the game have changed, and that this is so, *inter alia*, “because of critical evaluations and reflections carried out by scholars breaking the rules and bending the habits.” For him, the academic study of religion is reflexively critical. Of course, this does not mean that scholars have, or even need to comply with this standard all the time. There can be too much of a good thing. It is not hard to imagine how too much scepticism will end up retarding scientific inquiry. Scholars are also human – they make mistakes, and act under various constraints and roles. But these complications are not sufficient to taint the scientific enterprise itself (Geertz, 2000b, sect. 5, para. 8).

But if the misdemeanours of scientists do not devalue science, why should theology suffer because of the dogmatic behavior of theologians? Are we not comparing scientific ideals with theological practice? As already mentioned, the stated goals of religious studies of religion typically support the distinction. Where this is not the case, goals can be inferred from behavior, which again puts science and the academic study of religion in front of religion and theology as far as reflective criticism is concerned. There is no difference in kind here, but of degree (Saler, 2000, p. 93). The difference lies in the greater degree to which science is aware of alternatives, is self-critical, willing to abandon cherished belief, and the greater degree with which religions and theologies protect themselves from violation (Murphy, 2000, pp. 183–4; Horton as cited in Penner, 1986, p. 657).¹⁹⁴

The converse of this argument was already mentioned above when bias in comparison was at issue. Instead of talking about the amount or kind of criticism allowed, encouraged, facilitated, or forbidden, discouraged or ignored, one can look at residual bias: the bias left over after criticism is deemed to have been exhausted. Here also one should be able to see a difference between theological and scientific inquiry. In scientific circles, criticism will not be thought of as finished (if ever) until

¹⁹⁴ Differences between scientific and theological practice is an empirical question to which the academic study of religion makes an important contribution. Study of critical and anti-critical religious practices with comparable materials from science can provide potentially valuable material for critical thinking pedagogy.

whatever bias is left is considered to be the inescapable bias that comes part and parcel with any human inquiry. With theology, residual bias – bias left to its own devices, bias celebrated – will be “culturally or individually-blatantly idiosyncratic” (Wiebe, 1998b, pp. 164–5). The idiosyncrasy will be the fundamental beliefs of a particular faith.

A New Theology or the Philosophy of Religion?

Another possible route in the defence of theology as academically respectable is to show that theology can be as critical as the scientific study of religion. Robert Cummings takes this line when in his 1992 American Academy of Religion presidential address he asserts that theology is objective because it is “vulnerable to correction” (Cummings, 1992, p. 190). Theological studies properly so called – defined as “the constructive, normative, and critical disciplines for the analysis and assessment of religions’ suppositions, claims, cultural consequences, and obligations” (p. 187) – should be accepted as one of a host of academic disciplines that have a contribution to make for the scholarly understanding of religion.

Attempts like Cummings’ raise several questions. First, it seems prudent to investigate the extent to which academic standards are actually adhered to. Often, an apparent compliance given by one hand is quickly taken back by the other. Cummings’ address is a case in point because of his qualification that “for a theological claim to be publicly vulnerable does *not* mean that it must be reduced to what is easily grasped by an external observer.” Those of an Enlightenment rationalist and empiricist bent should be aware and respect the fact that it may be necessary “to enter into religious life and practice” to gain “a crucial probative experience” before the scholar would “sufficiently . . . be able to judge a case” (pp. 197–9). By allowing for claims that rely on special religious experience to be immune from criticism from those who have not yet gained this insider experience, Cummings could be accused of lowering the bar for objectivity a little too low.

Another question raised by attempts like Cummings' is whether or not all the necessary criteria are addressed. Success should be subject to adherence not only to the criticism criterion but to academic criteria generally. If theological inquiry accepts subordination to and justification based on academic standards alone it would become academically legitimate (Lott, 1988, p. 1).

Suppose, then, that we are faced with a genuine attempt to subjugate theology to academic standards, and that no crucial standard is left out. In such a case it would be apposite to ask why such a study should be called theological at all. In a common, but perhaps misleading nomenclature, any normative inquiry into religion is deemed theological (pp. 6–7). For those who grant that questions of truth and value in religion can be tackled without religious commitment, allowing only for empirical data, allowing for naturalistic explanations, and in a self-critical manner, in short – without transgression of scholarly standards – this nomenclature implies the possibility of an academically legitimate theology.¹⁹⁵

This conception of theology is very different from the definitions of popular or traditional forms of theology given above, which emphasized commitment to dogma, apology, and restrained criticism. In fact, it is hard to see how traditional theologies could or would submit to what will most probably amount to their destruction (de la Saussaye as cited in Hjelde, 1998, pp. 104–5). But if they do, to keep referring to them as theologies would be somewhat of a misnomer. What is left after normative inquiry sheds its epistemologically suspect beliefs and practices is more appropriately called the philosophy of religion.

This alternative usage has enjoyed its own following from the very beginning of the modern academic study of religion (Waardenburg, 1973, p. 15). Smart provides us with a relatively recent and comprehensive example of philosophy's roles within the

¹⁹⁵ Examples of such a scenario can be found in Lott (1988, pp. 171–2) and Wiebe (1998c, p. 155). Wiebe calls this kind of theology “philosophical, theoretical, or scientific.”

study of religion and worldviews (Smart, 1987b, pp. 49–50; 1996a, p. 19; 2000, pp. 31–2, 101–3).¹⁹⁶ Smart talks of three interrelated roles, the first of which is methodological: Methodological and theoretical reflection is part of the philosophical dimension of the field.¹⁹⁷ Second, there is the evaluation of religions and worldviews. It is here that the question of worldview choice comes in, as well as a host of subsidiary questions such as: How can we tell which worldview or belief is more likely to be true? What are legitimate and illegitimate criteria of truth or value with which to assess worldviews and beliefs, and how should these be applied? What can and cannot be inferred based on human experience, reasoning, or putative revelation with regard to the ultimate makeup of the world?¹⁹⁸ Lastly, there is worldview construction. Choice and evaluation of worldviews are not limited to the myriad of options already vying for our attention. There is always the possibility of mixing and matching – of picking out the better parts of various worldviews – and there is always the possibility of modification and invention.

Whatever its role, all philosophical reflection about religion should be a “critical reflection,” so as to be distinguished from traditional theology (Smart as cited in Wiebe, 2005, p. 109). It should be based on unrestricted, wide-ranging, cross-cultural, scientifically sanctioned knowledge rather than religious belief (Hubbeling, 1973, p. 10; Lott, 1988, pp. 177–8; Smart, 1984, p. 268), and it should ask “Which belief is justified?” rather than “Why is it that my beliefs are the most justified” (Ward, 1990, p. 223)? Doing otherwise means risking the loss of academic credentials.¹⁹⁹ Using these criteria, common dogged unclenching attempts to prove on philosophical

¹⁹⁶ Smart (1996a, p. 19) argues that because the study of religion should be reconceptualized more broadly as the study of worldviews, the philosophy of religion should be similarly reconceptualized as the philosophy of worldviews.

¹⁹⁷ See also Lohr (1999).

¹⁹⁸ See also Segal (1989, p. 75) and Vardy (2005, p. 80).

¹⁹⁹ It should be noted that apology does not imply false beliefs. But in the study of religion the history of both popular and intellectual thought and the universal defensive inclination that it reveals merit the distinction between ad hoc rationalization and a genuine quest for truth, a distinction that does have implications with regard to academic value. On the pedagogic level a similar inclination can be expected. Pointing out the psychological and epistemological ramifications might be beneficial if not necessary.

grounds the superiority of a faith already accepted are categorized as theological, not philosophical (Lohr, 1999, para. 2; Lott, 1988, pp. 176–8).

The usage favoured here makes the distinction between good and suspect normative reflection clear: one is philosophical, the other theological. The parallel in the alternative usage – traditional theology versus new, critical or scientific theology – can lead too easily to misinterpretation considering the highly contested epistemological credentials of theology in both scholarly and popular speech (ranging from “the only path to truth” to “a path to nowhere”). One can also imagine the ease with which theologians would equivocate their own work with the “new” or “scientific” sort. A nomenclature that treats all normative reflection on religion as theological can also lead to the mistaken belief that all normative reflection is bunk – the work of devotees, not scholars – or, on the other hand, that all theological reflection should be allowed in the university.²⁰⁰ We can take Cummings’ address as an example of the latter. On the basis of the validity of normative inquiry in religion, it seems that he is trying to sneak in an old kind of theology along with the new.²⁰¹

It may be pedagogically beneficial to consider attempts to defend theology in the academy using arguments that can justify only the inclusion of philosophical inquiry as instances of the apologetic function of theologies: as yet another technique with which the authority of a particular faith can be maintained. Alternative ways of viewing the world represent a threat to authority that must be defused. Worldviews need to persuade adherents that the existence of other perspectives does not cast doubts on their beliefs (Smart, 1981, p. 33). The perspectives that need to be explained away most urgently are those that are proximate, successful and conspicuous. For most people living today science is likely to be all of these. Consequently, science is a phenomenon that worldviews do not normally ignore.

²⁰⁰ Admittedly, the issue is largely a matter of convention. So long as normative inquiry into religion is accepted in the academy, and a distinction is made between genuine inquiry and *ad hoc* apology, no great consequences follow. But the discussion does raise important issues, not least of which is the use of the legitimation of theology as a persuasive device. See also Kornblith (1999, p. 185) on the relevance of rationalization to argument assessment.

²⁰¹ See Cummings’ (1992, p. 191) inclusive definition of theological studies. A similarly problematic definition of theology can be found in Ford (2005, p. 62).

Accepting science wholeheartedly would necessitate the abandonment of the fundamental beliefs of most worldviews. Ignoring science altogether is possible, either through isolation of the faithful or through relegation of faith to that ever decreasing realm that science has yet to inhabit. But these options have negative consequences of their own. However, if adherents could be persuaded that their faith is supported by science – that it is scientific – without having to abandon the creed, a worldview could not only survive the encounter with science but actually appropriate scientific prestige to its advantage (Smart, 1973, pp. 82–3, 101–5). One need only switch science for pseudo-science – a task too easy to affect considering the ability to distinguish between the two is not widespread. Claiming scientific status for one’s beliefs is one of the most powerful persuasive strategies (Dixon, 2005, p. 469). It is a common myth that both shores up claims to authority and defends beliefs from criticism by an apparently legitimate sanctioning of some ideas and a discouraging of others (Smart, 1981, p. 265).

So many efforts to validate theology as a scholarly pursuit seem to be attempting just such a feat: the use of the prestige of science for persuasive effect (Schmid, 1979, p. 161). From its inception, it was the hope of many that the crowning achievement of the academic study of religion will be a demonstration of Christianity’s superiority (Hjelde, 1998, p. 117). Today, the discourse on *sui generis* religion and related attempts to insulate religion from criticism found in debates on methodological agnosticism, insider/outsider, incommensurability, etc. are seen by many as a continuation of that dubious tradition (Geertz et al., 2000, sects. 1, 4).²⁰²

But the academic study of religion should not be “an instrument for the preservation of religion” (Wiebe, 2000, p. 263). To use science thus is to substitute a scientific goal (acquiring knowledge) with a religious one (defending given beliefs). This is a religious act. The fact that it is also popular and that it often exerts a great influence on beliefs classifies this as an important religious phenomenon. As such, it should be

²⁰² For a modern pluralist example see C. J. Bleeker’s aspiration for a science of religion that will show how “pure religion, in whatever form, always has been and surely will remain a source of spiritual strength” (Geertz et al., 2000, sect. 1.4).

of interest to the scholarly study of religion: It should be studied and criticized like all other important religious phenomena (Geertz et al., 2000, sect. 4, para. 2; Schmid, 1979, p. 162). These reasons also make such a study of potential benefit for critical thinking pedagogy. They justify the analysis of how worldviews, one's own included, attempt to use science for persuasive effect, inasmuch as this could help combat the popular myth and open the door for self-criticism.

The apologetic repercussions of much that goes on in the field also deserve mention on account of the difficulties or confusion such attempts may present to neophytes in the field. If the academic study of religion is to be recommended as important for critical thinking pedagogy, those venturing into it must be warned that what they are entering is at times less a promised land of wisdom than a quagmire where worldviews manipulate the tools available in the field in a struggle for legitimacy and adherents. The pervasive manipulation of academic study for the purpose of justifying one's own beliefs, the large religious and theologically trained intake of religious studies departments and resultant publications, and the likelihood that many students of critical thinking have themselves been influenced by something akin to pseudo-scientific theologizing, are parts of this quagmire, and they require signposting. Once they are brought to the fore, and as long as they are handled with due care, difficulties such as these could prove to be less a curse than a blessing in disguise for critical thinking education.

Worldview Evaluation and Critical Thinking

Evaluation of worldviews is at once the most universal and inevitable, and yet the most problematic and unjustified of worldview phenomena. We are good and right, but Muslims are evil, Christians are heretics, Scientologists are stupid, Mormons are morons, religious people are ignorant, atheists are immoral, the intelligensia are counter-revolutionary, Jews are minions of the antichrist, and so on. The list of comparable prejudices and their abominable consequences can be multiplied *ad nauseum*, and indeed, noxious is what they are. They all rely on an almost inevitable inclination to take our worldview as an unproblematic criterion of truth and value. This inclination need not rely on, and is by and large in opposition to, proper inquiry. In a similar fashion, traditional, and as yet very popular ways of inculcating new generations into authorized belief, take those same beliefs and their superlative educational propriety for granted (Smart, 1987b, p. 25), and protect them from criticism. Inculcation along these lines is, in the sense sketched above, theological or theology-like. The persuasive success of this theological mode of inculcation depends to a large degree on its ability to leave its subjects oblivious of reasonable alternatives and the complexities and uncertainties that are involved in any choice or evaluation of worldviews. In the academic study of religion such alternatives are *the* object of study, and both scientific and traditional approaches to evaluation have been problematized. It thus has the potential to act as an antidote to ubiquitous prejudices by being a vehicle for and an impetus to critical thought, in an area of thought that is normally hidden from view.

Comparison and problematization, you may recall, lie at the very heart of the general approach critical thinking writers have taken towards the evaluation of worldviews and other alternative perspectives. In particular, they emphasize the need to teach students how to take worldviews – as evaluative frames – out of the background, and then to analyze, criticize, and evaluate them through comparison with alternative

points of view. Towards this end, they recommend prolonged engagement with relevant intellectual conflicts, criteriological and epistemological studies, and empathetic inquiry into different worldviews – including, crucially, the scientific. They also recommend a heightened sensitivity to apology and pseudo-science, and point to the need to encourage or trigger – often through the study of alien perspectives – students’ willingness to question their own worldviews.

Several of the writers mentioned above draw very similar pedagogical conclusions from the debates revolving around the problem of worldview evaluation. The emphasis is, in the main, on reflexive critical thought, aided by theoretical reflection. One of the problems of current approaches to religious education (of which theological inculcation represents an extreme case) is that “instructors often present their data as self-evident; they fail to identify for their students the complex and contested theoretical, definitional, and methodological issues that have shaped the field.” In an educational setting properly so called one should “examine the often hidden background issues, assumptions, and problematics so necessary to any scholarly field” (McCutcheon, 1999, p. vii). A study of these background issues is also a study of our own cognitive apparatus. “The one indispensable imperative that distinguishes thinking in university classrooms,” Jaffee (1999, p. 275) tells us, “is precisely the obligation to become aware of the interpretive commitments which shape the way we understand” our object of study. In the evaluation of worldviews, it is we and our worldviews who are as much an object of study as anything else.

The academic study of religion can help focus attention on the student’s (and teacher’s) worldview in many ways, not least of which is the inexorable realization that worldviews are both numerous and relative (Paden, 1994, p. 169), and that “the study of religion is completely dependent on the basic theory that one has on religion” (Geertz, 2000a, p. 22). It can also guide such critique by helping the student foreground and clarify his/her own presuppositions, and come face to face with some of their limitations and alternatives (Joy, 2000b, p. 82; Paden, 2000a, p. 206).

Two areas in particular present themselves as important if not necessary ingredients of any theoretically conscious critical and reflexive study of worldview evaluation. One is the evaluative criteria themselves, their characteristics, limitations, and the problems involved in their use – in a word: criteriology. The other is general theories or explanations of religion and worldviews (Jaffee, 1999, p. 277).

The perspectival nature of worldview evaluation – or the implication of worldviews in their evaluation – makes it important to ask not only “How is a field of study that is bound by academic standards of reason to handle questions of ultimate truth and value in religion and other worldviews?” but also “How valid is this kind of study compared to one ubiquitous alternative – religion?” That is, it is important to look at the issues involved from within science and from without. This division was premised on the impossibility of finding a satisfactory answer, within the confines of one perspective, to a question for which choice of perspective could make all the difference. In this respect, the question of the possibility of rational evaluation of worldviews based on the evaluative criteria of the academic study of religion resembles in general form all worldview evaluations, constructions and choices. In all of these two criteriological problems arise: There is the question of appropriate use and implications of given criteria – the worldview-internal aspect – and the worldview-external aspect, which concerns the validity of those criteria. When worldview evaluation is encountered in a scholarly setting – and, I maintain, in an educational one – these criteriological questions should not be avoided.

A criteriological study in our context is therefore comparative, and it is scientific criteria, coupled with criteria of various religions and worldviews, including those of the student that seem to make for the most suitable comparands. Forsaking a chimerical God’s eye view, it is these very perspectives that must also function as alternating comparative lenses. In the resultant matrix sets of criteria are analyzed both from within each of the various perspectives (and, *ipso facto*, from outside all the rest), and from without – that is, from a position in which no controversial

criterion can be taken for granted, and the problems that this brings to light are discussed.

Major Elements for Criteriological Comparison

		Comparands		
		Science	Student's Worldview	Other Worldviews
Comparative Lenses	Science			
	Student's Worldview			
	Other Worldviews ²⁰³			
	None			

This matrix, when used consciously, allows for some transparency with and management of the learning process. Different issues come up when looking at evaluation from a naturalistic perspective, as opposed to a position where naturalistic assumptions and their alternatives are themselves debated, and in which none has complete authority. Still other issues are brought to the fore when one carries out a comparative analysis of worldviews using one's own criteria, or those of any other worldview. The pedagogical importance of neither of these analyses can be dismissed out of hand, and will depend in part on the knowledge and beliefs of the student. Where a student holds a caricature of scientific inquiry and puts little or no trust in it, delving into the world of science and comparing it to others will have some priority. Where science is taken as authoritative and is thought to prove a particular religion or worldview, an investigation of scientific criteria and just what can be based upon them is in order. Where someone believes his own worldview to be immune to error, critiques of his own worldview originating in others could be valuable. Where a student's evaluation of other worldviews is taken to be unproblematic, her criteria and

²⁰³ These may be the worldviews of other students, worldviews with which students normally come into contact, or worldviews that are particularly suited to demonstrate an important worldview phenomenon.

their use will need to be foregrounded and compared to similar cases in other worldviews where limitations are more likely to be admitted.

Despite the contradiction, it is not unlikely that one student (let alone a group) will suffer from all these problems and more, in which case all the elements of the matrix will need to be included. Some problems may in themselves be sufficient justification for considering the matrix as a whole, as where students hold worldviews to be incommensurable and truth and value relative (normatively speaking). Here the analyses suggested by this matrix will heighten awareness of common criteria and the limitations of incommensurability and normative relativism. Another example is where two worldviews are implicated in argumentation. Here, resolution of the conflict will be greatly facilitated by clarity with regard to those criteria/assumptions/claims that can be taken for granted – commonly shared beliefs that neither side will take issue with – and unshared criteria, that will have to be argued for in turn, preferably using shared premises.

My treatment of the possibility of rational choice between worldviews and the debates surrounding the demarcation of the academic study of religion represent elements within this matrix. They are an admittedly limited attempt to “present an intelligible geography” of highly problematic terrain (Jeppe, 1997, p. 21). Important issues were raised that together indicate the questionable nature of some religious or worldview commitments in the quest to understand worldviews, and by implication, the questionable nature of non-scientific worldviews. All of the issues raised with respect to the debates raging around the demarcation of the academic study of religion from theology, and their differential epistemological merit, should be of potential benefit not only to an understanding of both, but also to a comparison of a student’s own “theology” to scientific thought. The distinction between science, its alternatives, and its counterfeits; the cross-cultural success of science; the use of pseudo-science for persuasive effect, often for the purpose of theological apology broadly conceived, put the academic respectability of religious understanding of

religion in doubt – nudging them in the direction of datum and away from theory – taking the student’s worldview along for the ride.

My interest in the study of general theories or explanations of religion and worldviews can be divided into two important areas. First is acquaintance with scholarly conceptions of these phenomena as alternatives to the student’s own. Those who hold conceptions of worldviews that see them as infallible gifts from an incorruptible source, or the product of a rational choice between truth and absurdity, stand to benefit from a study of less naïve and academically respectable conceptions that abandon certainty and infallibility for probability and practicality (Joy, 2000b, p. 82; Weckman, 1993, p. 216). Also, one or two general explanations of religion will not do. In the classroom, “many different [explanatory] systems should be examined, noting the advantages of each” (Weckman, 1993, p. 213). That is, the student’s approach should be methodologically plural – based less on one global explanation than on an “evenhanded perspectivalism” (Paden, 2000a, p. 207).

The second important area is the makings of a good theory of religion. The question here is which criteria come into play in distinguishing between good scholarly explanations/reductions and bad ones, and what these have to say about the student’s ideas on the matter. The student’s own conception should pay sufficient attention to the complexity of religious and worldview phenomena (Yonan, 1993, p. 48), and the diversity of worldviews. These are unlikely to eventuate without an empathic understanding of multiple worldviews, or an object plurality, which is itself a powerful reminder of the contingency of worldviews (Jaffee, 1999, p. 280), and a “provoker of critical analysis” (Weckman, 1993, p. 219). Still on the subject of complexity, the student should be able to account for the “means by which cultures transmit their fundamental pictures of reality” (Jaffee, 1999, p. 279). There must be enough emphasis on the mundane determinants of worldviews. There should also be an acquaintance with the various ways in which worldviews can occult thinking. The student must also be able to distinguish between the descriptive and evaluative tasks (Smart, 1981, p. 47), be familiar with the problems afflicting each, and “have a nose

for degrees of interpretation” (Smart, 1978, p. 20). That is, she should be able to separate data that is normatively problematic and data that is only minimally so, and base her thoughts on the latter.

In the classroom, these contributions should help produce a measure of “epistemological modesty” – a realization that “it is not in the nature of religious or ideological truth to be absolutely perspicuous: it is in essence debatable, the tests are soft, the fruits difficult to evaluate” (Smart, 1981, p. 301). They should also make for less epistemologically and ethically suspect evaluations.

Chapter 7 Interreligious Dialogue

The main aim of this thesis is to mine for contributions to critical thinking pedagogy, relating to problems associated with worldviews, from the disciplines comprising the academic study of religion. Interreligious dialogue could be said to inhabit the grey area between the study of religion and its practice.²⁰⁴ Without taking a position on the issue, interreligious dialogue is of interest to me primarily because of its *prima facie* relevance to dialogic approaches in critical thinking. Interreligious dialogue, by its very definition, occurs between different worldviews. Thus literature on interreligious dialogue is a likely place to find discussion of parallel problems, parallel solutions, and perhaps novel ones.

I open this chapter with a short look at how interreligious dialogue is justified within the relevant literature, and in particular, on the arguments of two writers whose work I find particularly well-matched to critical thinking. I then list and briefly outline a number of commonly encountered problems or obstacles to interreligious dialogue as well as remedies to their solution. The items I have chosen to look at were included because of their relevance to critical thinking. In the last section I will connect the relevant material to critical thinking.

A brief remark about definition is in order. Minimally, interreligious dialogue “involves at least two persons from different religions conversing together about issues of religious significance” (Dunbar, 1998a, *The Problem* sect., para. 1). The literature on interreligious dialogue, however, shows a wide acceptance of a further requirement: It should include, on all sides, a willingness to learn, or a degree of

²⁰⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith (as cited in Lott, 1988, pp. 192–201), for example, takes his dialogical approach to be an important ingredient in religious studies, while Michael Pye (1997; 2001) and Matthew Foster (2000) see a clear separation between the two.

open-mindedness (Bryant and Flinn, 1989, p. xvii; Dunbar, 1998a, sect. 2, para. 1; Mojzes, 1989, p. 199; Shapiro, 1989, pp. 31–2). The minutiae of various definitions (Bryant and Flinn, 1989, p. xvi) or kinds (Mortensen, 2002, pp. 80–1; Sharpe, 1987c) of interreligious dialogue will not be tackled here. I use several variants of *interreligious dialogue*, for example: *interfaith dialogue*, or simply *dialogue*, throughout. They are treated as synonymous here. Where *cross-worldview* or *interideological dialogue* is mentioned, the term is used in a broader sense that includes secular worldviews as well as religious ones.

Justifying Interreligious Dialogue

Literature on interreligious dialogue in recent decades “has largely concentrated on discovering permission for dialogue in scripture and tradition”²⁰⁵ (Race, 2001, pp. 11, 94). As these are tradition specific approaches, important as they may be, in many cases they are unlikely to be persuasive to outsiders (Dickens, 2006, p. 408). The same could be said about their relevance to critical thinking. Because they are tailored for a specific group, they could be crucial in persuading that group to enter dialogue, and yet remain wholly unconvincing to others. I will not be concerned with such approaches here, but their existence as a valuable resource in the literature should be noted. Justificatory strategies that make no reference to any religious authority or tradition are also abundant in the literature. Since my concern lies in critical thinking, I will mention the work of only two writers – Leonard Swidler and Paul Knitter – whose arguments in favour of interreligious and interideological dialogue seem to be well suited to critical thinking.

Swidler (1987) begins with an account of the “deabsolutization” of truth in modern scholarship: the perception of truth as being partially determined by historical or cultural circumstance, the intention of the perceiver, the limitations of language and interpretation, and so on. “It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the role played by the conceptual paradigm or model one has of reality,” he writes “in the understanding of reality and how to live accordingly” (pp. 10–11). This is especially true for worldviews as “all-encompassing” perspectives that “describe and prescribe for the whole of life” (p. 13). According to Swidler, dialogue participants must be cognizant of this paradigm shift in the understanding of truth. Such recognition requires that we continually “analyze our own presuppositions” (p. 12).

²⁰⁵ Kimball (2005), Kozlovic (2001), Küng (1987a), Sahadat (1997), and Springsted (1992) could be taken as examples of a tradition specific justification of interfaith dialogue.

But this is not enough since “it will never be possible to perceive reality except through paradigms or models. Hence *metamodel* thinking is not possible, except in the more limited sense of meta-*monomodel* thinking – that is, perceiving reality through multiple, differing models” (p. 11). Appropriate thinking in this area is therefore “multimodel thinking.” Ignoring other conceptual models amounts to ignorance of any complementarity that may exist between them. That is, one is here forgoing the opportunity to see the data in different light. Once the deabsolutization of truth is appreciated, one cannot, with integrity, refrain from searching through dialogue for such complementarity in “differing cultural, philosophical, social, religious viewpoints” (p. 12).

One of the upshots of this complementarity or added value of cross-worldview dialogue is a more critically reflective perception of one’s self:

We come to know ourselves largely by contrast, by encountering the other. . . . Through interreligious, interideological dialogue we will come to know better our own religious ideological selves with all their consistencies and contradictions, their admirable and abhorrent aspects. Our dialogue partners will serve as mirrors for us.²⁰⁶ (p. 26)

Swidler’s conclusion is that “interreligious and interideological dialogue is the most appropriate matrix within which all thinkers ought to carry out their systematic reflections on their explanations of the meaning of life and how to live accordingly” (p. 5).

Knitter (1995) takes a very similar route, also relying on post-modern scholarship (Gadamer, Wittgenstein, Habermas, Foucault and others), and also beginning with the limitations of interpretation and language. “To know is to interpret, and to interpret is to use language” (para. 4). Language, however, is limiting. It is “inextricably tied to

²⁰⁶ Nadira Charaniya and Jane Walsh (2001, pp. 365–6) describe results along this line. See also Shapiro (1989, p. 31–2) and Braybrooke (1992, pp. 310–1).

particularity – to one culture and one historical context – it both reveals and conceals at the same time” (The Multilingual Imperative sect., para. 1). Nothing in religion, not even religious experience, escapes this. However, often in the field of religion language is absolutized: It is treated as if this limitation does not apply to it. We need to deconstruct such language to find what is outside its field of view. Listening to other religious languages is also valuable in this respect. They “make up . . . for what we are ‘missing’ in our language” (The Multilingual Imperative sect., para. 5). Or again: “to speak with different words and grammar both reveals new worlds to us and makes clear the limitations of our own language” (The Multilingual Imperative sect., para. 6). There exists, then, a “multilingual imperative” in religion: “In order to be authentically religious . . . we cannot be religiously monolingual. Rather, in our religious life and practice, we must seek to be multilingual” (The Multilingual Imperative sect., para. 6). For both Swidler and Knitter, then, cross-worldview dialogue is a method of reasoning, of learning, and of self-criticism.

Problems

Problems Associated with Accounts of the Other

As all-encompassing, religions and worldviews include descriptions and explanations of outsiders and other faiths. These are usually rigid and dismissive (Sadri, 2006, p. 8; Streng, 1987, p. 71). Several obstacles to dialogue, or problems encountered in it, have their origin in such accounts.²⁰⁷

Legitimization of discrimination and violence.

The threat, existence, memory, or perception of discrimination or violence, are obvious deterrents to dialogue. John Azumah writes:

It is an open secret that some aspects of our inherited traditions have engendered ideas in the minds of believers that they are superior to others who are at best sub-human and at worst non-human. Some of the traditions even go to the extent of teaching that by virtue of their religious affiliation some believers have a God-given right to discriminate, exclude and dominate others, sometimes even to take their lives with impunity. Some of these scriptural texts and accumulated traditions have most often been invoked to legitimize discrimination, exclusion and violence against people of other religions. (Azumah, 2002, p. 274)

A religion's version of history is often implicated in such legitimization: "Memories of certain historical events continue to evoke suspicion, distrust, fear, anger, paranoia

²⁰⁷ I use *accounts* as referring to both descriptions and explanations.

and outright hatred towards others in many communities.” Thus, “Attempts to make history a propaganda tool and refusals to accept responsibility for the misdeeds and missteps of past generations not only undermine dialogue but also compromise relations between communities” (Azumah, 2002, pp. 276–7).

Dialogue, however, could prove most useful in just such cases. One of the challenges of interreligious dialogue is to deal with those aspects of worldviews that have been or could be used to legitimize discrimination or violence towards outsiders (Azumah, 2002, pp. 274–6), and to neutralize the reinforcing effects of current conflict (Magonet, 2003, p. 110).

Ignorance or misconceptions of other faiths.

There seems to be a consensus in the literature that lack of knowledge of other faiths is a central problem for cross-faith dialogue (Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 281, 293; 1998, p. 8; Carey, 1997, p. 16). The acquisition of knowledge about others is seen both as a prerequisite to dialogue (Kozlovic, 2001; Mojzes, 1989, pp. 204–5) and its outcome (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001, pp. 364, 353). Lack of accurate information can also be accompanied by actual misconceptions of others. Charles Kimball (2004) writes of a “detailed ignorance” between most Christians and Muslims, but the point can be generalized: “The obstacles are larger than a simple lack of knowledge. Much of what many people think they know is incorrect or rooted in a long history of misunderstanding and bias” (Kimball, 2004, para. 8). Kimball also brings up the role of the media (through its focus on exotic or dramatic details rather than the bigger picture) in helping to create or perpetuate this detailed ignorance. Romantic or idealized conceptions of the other should also be kept in mind as a problem of inaccurate description (Azumah, 2002, p. 276), but this is probably not as disruptive of dialogue as are negative accounts.

Inferiority of other faiths.

Another commonly mentioned hindrance is description of others as inferior, or more generally, a stance of superiority toward non-believers. Alan Race (2001, p. 94) writes that “the theologies of particular traditions have traditionally assumed that their own tradition is superior to others, however gently expressed.” Antony Fernando (1987, pp. 116–7) makes a universal claim: “Every religionist is a firm adherent of a we-are-superior ideology. . . . It is only to say that there is an unadult and unthought-out fanaticism of some degree or other in the very best of us when it comes to the appraisal of our own religion.” A stance of superiority can constrain or shut off one’s openness to learn from others, as well as cause suspicion in the eyes of one’s dialogue partner.²⁰⁸

Truth in other faiths.

Three broad categories of positions on the possible possession of truth by other faiths are commonly discussed in the literature. These are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. While these were mostly the product of discussions in soteriology on the possibility of salvation outside of Christianity²⁰⁹ (DiNoia, 1993, pp. 62–3), they are now commonly referred to with regard to the broader issue of truth. These broader meanings will allow a look at implications for secular worldviews as well as religious ones. Though formulations vary substantially, the broad definitions used in earlier chapters will suffice for current purposes. Thus, exclusivism is taken as a position that “claim[s] to be in exclusive possession of truth” (Chubb, 1972, p. 290). The religious exclusivist thinks that all religions other than hers are plainly false. The inclusivist claims to be in possession of the final or most comprehensive truth (Hick, 1987, p. 331). Lastly, the pluralist claims that “each [religion] has a contribution to

²⁰⁸ See Equality and Proselytism sections below.

²⁰⁹ “Chiefly on the basis of the stands they take on this crucial soteriological issue, proposals in this field are classified as exclusivist (salvation comes only through explicit faith in Christ), inclusivist (salvation can come through implicit faith in Christ), and pluralist (salvation is attainable through all religions)” (DiNoia, 1993, pp. 62–3).

make to the fuller awareness of truth” (Braybrooke, 1992, p. 313). Pluralism also commonly postulates an underlying unity among some or all religions (Hick, 1987, p. 331).

It would not be possible to survey all the arguments for and against these three approaches here. It would be apposite, however, to mention those criticisms that are relevant to the current interest in openness to other perspectives. Since openness to learning from other perspectives is commonly seen as a prerequisite to dialogue, a criticism often put toward exclusivists is that such positions close themselves off from dialogue by not taking part (Carey, 1997, p. 7), by not being “prepared to question, or to admit uncertainty” (Hames, 2004, p. 73), or by degrading the encounter into a partisan debate (Chubb, 1972, p. 290).²¹⁰ Perhaps because of such “isolationist” (Carey, 1997, p. 7) tendencies, much of the efforts of the interfaith movement in the twentieth century were expended in “persuading members of different faiths to meet, to talk together and to become friends.” And, Marcus Braybrooke (1998, p. 8) adds, “in several religions this new relationship has led to a rethinking of traditional exclusive claims.”

Inclusivists, in their eagerness to include outsiders as “implicit believers” (DiNoia, 1993, pp. 62–3), have been accused of imputing their beliefs to others, and failing to recognize differences in other faiths, where such a recognition is said to be necessary for learning to take place (Losel, 1989, pp. 192, 194). Pluralism, commonly based on the belief that “great world religions constitute variant conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the one ultimate, mysterious divine reality” (Hick, 1987, p. 331), has also been accused of presupposing underlying similarities between traditions while tending to ignore differences. The recognition of differences is important if dialogue is to fulfil its objective of learning and change (Tracy, as cited in DiNoia, 1993, pp. 64–6). Tom Dickens (2006, p. 407) writes on a dialogue premised on John Hick’s or similar pluralisms:

²¹⁰ Another more damning critique often made is the connection of exclusivism and violence (Race, 2001, pp. 1–2).

One engaged in such dialogue is assured at the outset that fundamental disagreements are impossible. Such disparities as are discovered remain safely at the level of differing phenomenal responses to various manifestations of the Real. There is . . . no genuine openness toward another's perspective that might significantly alter one's own. . . . I would contend, by contrast, that one reason we need to engage in dialogue with others who fundamentally disagree with us about life's ultimate aim is that they may be right and we wrong. If we seek truth, we ought to feel compelled to explore alternatives to our own definition and embodiment of it.

Partisan Debate

The claim that one is in exclusive possession of truth can initiate a debate where each party takes a partisan stance: marshalling reasons and authorities in an attempt to show that beliefs inconsistent with its own are false (Chubb, 1972, p. 290). Even where initially only one party takes an apologetic stance others can easily be drawn in as a result (Traer, 2001, p. 19). Such debates are seen by many as an impediment to dialogue (Leggewie, 2004, p. 105), either because they obstruct listening and learning from others (Groff, 2002, sect. 2.4), or because of their futility, considering problems associated with cross-worldview judgments. Debate, however, seems like an ever-present potentiality in interreligious dialogue: "All interreligious relationships and dialogue . . . are ultimately based on conflict because of their mutual and seemingly exclusive truth claims" (Hames, 2004, p. 70). When mutually incompatible differences are perceived, "we incur an ethical and epistemic duty to engage in argument: that is, we owe it to others to correct their views about what matters ultimately, and we owe it to ourselves to consider and respond to significant challenges to our own beliefs" (Griffiths, as cited in DiNoia, 1993, pp. 66–7). Not everyone sees this as a problem though. Claus Leggewie (2004, p. 105), for example, maintains that

such disputes are conducive to learning and change just as long as they are maintained within peaceful boundaries.

Proselytism

Proselytism in the course of dialogue – or the subordination of dialogue to it (Nkulu-N'Sengha, 1996, sect. 4, para. 5) – is likewise seen to conflict with the need to be open to learning from others or to respect them in their difference (Groff, 2002, sect. 2.4). Many also see the lack of a clear distinction between dialogue and proselytism, and the exclusion of the latter from the former, as a reason for widespread suspicion both of one's dialogue partner and of interreligious dialoguing in general. If one party to an encounter suspects its partner of using the occasion only as an attempt to convert, it is not likely to listen, or it might shy away from dialogue altogether (Azumah, 2002; Braybrooke, 1992, p. 261; Kozlovic, 2003; Sahadat, 1997, sect. 6, para. 1). Thus there are those who see no place for proselytizing or propagandizing for one's faith in interreligious dialogue (Groff, 2002, sect. 2.4; Sahadat, 1997, p. sect. 6, para. 1; Traer, 2001, pp. 13–4). However, the barring of proselytism, or not subordinating dialogue to it, is said to have created a perception of dialogue as “a betrayal of mission” or a betrayal of one's faith which has a similar effect of excluding some groups from the process (Azumah, 2002, p. 270; Braybrooke, 1992, p. 261).

Fear of Losing One's Faith

Fear of loss or compromise of one's faith is popularly associated with interreligious dialogue (Brown, 1984). Dialogue is suspected to be a sacrifice of one's faith both by those who see it as a ploy of conversion, and by those who see it as an abandonment of conversion. Requests like those of Swidler and Knitter for the deabsolutization of

truth claims, and disapproval of partisan debate, are also claimed to contribute to such fears (Azumah, 2002, pp. 270). Other commonly recommended prerequisites to dialogue can be similarly troubling. Rami Shapiro (1989, pp. 31–2), for example, sees interreligious dialogue as an inherently risky activity due to the need for suspension of one’s own beliefs, entry into the beliefs of another, and critique of one’s beliefs from this new perspective. Even without any prerequisites, the simple possibility of finding commonalities with “the Other” can be troubling (Cannon, 1998, para. 8).

Because of the nature of worldviews as totalities of meaning, change can seem like a danger of loosing one’s existence and identity into a world of chaos, absurdity (Kreiger, 1993, pp. 342–3), illusion, and sin (Streng, 1987, p. 64). This is understandably associated with strong feelings of fear, pain, and threat (Shapiro, 1989, p. 34; Azumah, 2002, p. 279). The confidence that might be gained by pluralists from what Dickens (2006, p. 407) claims to be a lack of risk or vulnerability in postulating an underling unity between religions – and thus the impossibility of fundamental difference – could be lost by recognition that “the distinctive vision of reality, the focal point shaping each tradition, seems to be less significant than those traditions themselves want to assert” (Lott, 1988, p. 199). There is also the possibility that changes to one’s perspective will bring as a corollary alienation or marginalization from one’s social milieu (Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 310–1; Mojzes, 1989, p. 201; Shapiro, 1989, p. 34). Fears such as these can act as grounds for limited engagement or defection, or they may deter from entry into dialogue altogether.²¹¹

²¹¹ Perhaps partly for the purpose of allaying such fears one finds the use of language opposing conversion or radical change in conjunction with talk of prerequisites to dialogue (see Commitment to Learning and Change section). As persuasive attempts to popularize interreligious dialogue such language might be more successful than talk of dialogue as a “Trojan horse” that “will change us from within, willy-nilly” (Race, 1998, pp. 16–7).

Use of Differing Criteria

Worldviews differ from each other in the meanings they assign, in what they consider true, valuable, moral, etc., and these different conceptions of meaning, truth, and value are used as criteria in judging other worldviews. In a sense, then, they come with their own criteria of meaning, truth, and value. Such differences are often the cause of misunderstanding, poor reasoning, and bad judgment.

Because of different interpretive schemes, or criteria of meaning, even where participants are using the same language, the subject of discussion will often be understood differently, causing confusion, misinterpretation, and even the breakdown of dialogue (Jones, 2001, p. 156; Magonet, 2003, p. 109; Mojzes, 1989, p. 201).

Use of our own criteria as definitive and final in judging other worldviews, it was argued, is all too common. Literature on interreligious dialogue also witnesses to this point. Unfortunately, Peter Jones (2001, p. 156) writes, “we often consider our own framework to be normative and as such capable of impartially evaluating the truth claims of another.”²¹² The problematic nature of such judgments is rarely noticed. Negative judgment of the other using our own criteria is seen as natural, appropriate, and even inevitable. For example, George Carey (1997, p. 16) takes it to be an understandable inclination given the alienation and strangeness people feel when encountering another religion. Dickens (2006, p. 414) believes it is expected that dialogues committed to the seeking of truth will include a “critical evaluation of our partner’s beliefs and practices on the basis of norms internal to our own tradition.” And according to Raimundo Panikkar (1987, p. 129) any judgment we make regarding another religion will necessarily be done according to our standards.

²¹² For another acknowledgement of this phenomenon in literature on interreligious dialogue see Braybrook (1992, pp. 310–1).

Joseph DiNoia (1993, p. 67) defends a thesis very similar to Fogelin's deep disagreements. According to DiNoia, cross-faith argumentation "presupposes that the religious doctrines in question can be made intelligible to persons who do not hold them, [and] that there are some non-community-specific principles of judgment by which to appraise these doctrines." Where these are not shared, cross-faith argumentation is doomed to fail. For the same reason, appeals to reason, or argumentation regarding criteria, will also fail. They will "often amount to nothing more than covert attempts to convert the opponent to our criteria" (Kreiger, 1993, p. 340). Where one party supports its reasoning by an authority that is not recognized as such by the other, dialogue ends and talking at cross purposes begins (if there is to be further talking at all) (Chubb, 1972, p. 289).²¹³

²¹³ See also Küng (1987b, p. 239) and Magonet (2003, p. 109).

Solutions

Commitment to Learning and Change

The goal of interreligious interideological dialogue according to Swidler (1987, pp. 6, 13, 37) is to learn from the other and change accordingly. Authentic dialogue will not occur if this is not the participants' primary goal. Not being open to learning from others compromises our ability to "listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as possible, in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely and . . . as much from within, as possible" (p. 6). Change is implied in learning: "If at any point we might find the partner's position persuasive, we – our integrity being at stake – would have to change" (p. 6). For Swidler, interreligious and interideological dialogue is fundamentally an irreplaceable method of learning and reasoning about the meaning of life. Swidler's ten ground rules for dialogue are seen by Race as an embodiment of his own *spirit of dialogue*. Both the rules and Race's spirit of dialogue "harbour an expectation that dialogue will make some difference in our overall religious perceptions and practical activities in the struggle to learn more and to change" (Race, 2001, p. 87).

Several writers wish, however, to circumscribe change. Paul Mojzes (1989, p. 201), for example, although partial to "some rethinking" of one's conceptual framework, as this "may be necessary if one takes the search for truth seriously," advises that too much rethinking may confuse the other party or alienate the participant from his or her group. Linda Groff (2002, sect. 2.4) writes that learning is possible without leaving one's own tradition. Similarly, Nadira Charaniya and Jane Walsh (2001, p. 353) write that "it is important that adults learn how to cross borders of difference without becoming assimilated into what lies on the other side." Syncretism or radically innovative changes are also denounced. For example, Groff writes: "Do not

try to create one world religion, but respect the diversity of traditions” (Groff, 2002, sect. 2.4).²¹⁴ Some writers on interreligious dialogue advocate for learning and change only in particular areas.²¹⁵

Swidler would probably not allow for such qualifications. For him, dialogue requires open-mindedness to the point of agreeing in principle that conversion to the other side is possible:

All those searching for religious meaning and truth, no matter how convinced by and committed to a particular tradition or position, if they would act with integrity, must have a “radical” openness, an openness “in principle.” That is, for example, they must be willing to say with total seriousness that for the sake of integrity it is possible in the future that they might have to cease being a Christian, at least as they now understand it – or cease being a theist, at least as they now understand it. It may not seem at all likely, but they must be open to the possibility. (Swidler, 1987, p. 36)²¹⁶

Considering, however, that what lies outside a worldview is often experienced or thought of as chaos, absurdity or the “damned,” David Kreiger (1993) regards such calls for openness as “pious and unrealistic” (pp. 342–3). Such openness puts “the very existence and identity of the speaker at stake” (p. 340).

Self-Criticism and Critical Thinking

Talk of critical thinking or self-criticism would not be foreign to readers in interreligious dialogue. Mojzes (1989, p. 201) takes it to be necessary that all sides adhere to the rules of “logical thinking”. Several of his guidelines for dialogue could

²¹⁴ See also Braybrooke (1992, p. 113) for a similar if more negative and restrictive stance to syncretism and change.

²¹⁵ See, for example, Azumah (2002, pp. 275–6).

²¹⁶ See also Race (2001, p. 86).

have been taken from a critical thinking textbook.²¹⁷ In one relatively short version of Swidler's "dialogue Decalogue" (2000), critical thinking or self-critical thinking (or one of their variants) are mentioned no less than ten times.²¹⁸ As illustrated above, both Knitter and Swidler view the availability and acceptance of criticism of one's self or one's tradition from other perspectives as a condition, that uniquely, allows dialogue to function as a method of learning and reasoning – a method that can free us from the confines of our perspective. But participants, Swidler argues, should not only be passively self-critical in their openness to criticism, but also actively self-critical (both toward one's self and one's tradition) (Swidler, 1987, p. 15). Among other things, self-criticism involves acknowledgement and repentance of misdeeds (Azumah, 2002, p. 277; Mohagheghi, 2004, p. 91; Nkulu-N'Sengha, 1996, sect. 4, para. 7; Traer, 2001, p. 20). Self-criticism or critical thinking, just like humility (Dickens, 2006, pp. 416–7), are not taken to conflict with religious commitment (Mojzes, 1989, p. 206; Swidler, 1987, p. 15).

Equality

Equality is seen as a prerequisite to dialogue in several ways. Equality of value is implied where equality is said to conflict with perception of one's tradition as superior (Race, 2001, p. 94). Inequality in this sense constricts openness to learn from others (Swidler, 1987, p. 15). Equality of power is also required. Inequality in this sense gives the powerful party room to steer and use the encounter for its own – perhaps objectionable – purposes (Knitter, 1995; Leggewie, 2004, pp. 104–5; Race, 2001, pp. 101–2). Intellectual equality exists where parties have "similar levels of scholarship and study" (Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 310–1; Kozlovic, 2001). Inequality in this sense is said to allow for teaching or "a garnering of data in the manner of an

²¹⁷ Guideline nine reads: "Look at the weaknesses and strengths of both views." Guideline thirteen: "Be open to constructive criticism, and avoid destructive criticism." Fourteen: "Each member of the dialogue should be self-critical and honest." And seventeen: "Both the ideals and the realities of each group should be taken into account" (Mojzes, 1989, pp. 204–5).

²¹⁸ Reproduced in Race (2001, pp. 171–2).

interrogation” (Swidler, as quoted in Kozlovic, 2001, Technical Competence sect.) rather than dialogue. Such inequality may be necessary, however, so as not to make interfaith encounters “exclusionary and elitist” (Dunbar, 1998a, sect. 7, para. 4). One could also speak of procedural equality, where practical arrangements for dialogue are agreeable to all involved: “It should not be dialogue on my terms or yours but on our terms by mutual agreement” (Sahadat, 1997, sect. 1, para. 1). Inequalities, however, may be hard to overcome (Sharpe, 1987c) or even identify (Knitter, 1995). Knitter (1995) suggests practicing a “hermeneutical suspicion” in dialogue, and giving a “hermeneutical privilege” to voices that are traditionally oppressed or excluded.

Mutually Agreeable or Explicit Criteria

To facilitate cross-faith dialogue (understanding, judgment, argumentation, etc.) criteria have been offered that, through a process of consensus building, would be accepted by all or most parties to a dialogue at least potentially. They are not taken to be objective, but “they are sufficiently pan-traditional to allow for some meaningful evaluations and comparisons” (Dickens, 2006, pp. 415–6). Several examples could be given. In the ethical domain, conduciveness to a full human life or the realization of “humanness” (Küng, 1987b, pp. 239–43; Swidler, 1987, pp. 27–32), human rights, autonomy (Swidler, 1987, pp. 27–32), and the golden rule (Küng, 2000; Swidler & Mojzes, 2000, pp. 182–4). In the cognitive domain there are explanatory power (Dickens, 2006, pp. 415–6) and coherence (Dickens, 2006, pp. 415–6; Küng, 1987b, p. 243–5). Coherence is given as a religion-internal criterion that can nevertheless be applied by the outsider, in mounting internal critiques of the other, for example.

Another way to deal with criteria is to make them and their effects explicit. For example, both Mojzes (1989, p. 201) and Jones (2001, p. 156) recommend that participants examine whether or not the language they are using is understood

differently by each side. Jones suggests a method whereby the frameworks used by the participants are made explicit.

Appropriate or Preliminary Subjects for Discussion

Several writers prescribe preliminary or specific subjects for discussion. Swidler (1987), stressing the need for a willingness to learn from the other, suggests prolegomena to dialogue. If a potential partner holds an absolute view of truth, then discussion should have as its goal the acceptance of a deabsolutized view of truth. If a potential partner perceives her tradition as having a superior grasp of the truth, then discussion should have as its goal the abandonment of a superior stance toward the other (p. 37). When these goals have been achieved the dialogue can begin, but at least initially, it should shy away from dealing with disagreements. Instead, it should concentrate on commonalities as a trust building measure (p. 15).

In opposition to views that maintain that sensitive disagreements should be left alone, Dickens (2006) stresses the need to tackle far-reaching and sensitive disagreements head-on to help resolve conflicts. But this needs to be done appropriately: Participants should view each other as fellow searchers for truth, potential friends, and as “siblings,” empathizing with each other, and being honest and humble – his three models and three virtues for dialogue.

Anticipating disagreements regarding criteria, J. N. Chubb (1972, pp. 290–1, 305) recommends a preliminary discussion on a “meta-theological” level. It should aim at reaching an agreement regarding the subject of discussion, the method or criteria of truth used to adjudicate between conflicting assertions (e.g. reason, experience, or revelation), and what is meant when a belief is claimed to be true. It should also aim at vitiating the potential polemical nature of interfaith encounters. The answers to these questions should then be kept in mind throughout the ensuing dialogue.

Jones (2001) offers a method and subjects for preliminary discussion that are meant to help bring to the surface one's terms of reference. Wishing to avoid problems inherent in direct comparisons between traditions,²¹⁹ his "dialectic dialogue" compares indirectly. Before an issue is to be tackled, participants must first examine how their and the other participants' traditions view central human dichotomies (e.g. individual and community, text and reader, faith and reason, us and them, human and nonhuman) that structure the various tradition-specific understandings of the issue at hand. By comparison of framework specific understandings of concepts that influence perception on the issue under discussion these frameworks and their criteria and language are made explicit. This process helps to prevent misunderstanding, and participants gain a deeper insight into their partners and themselves.

Taking depictions of the Other as a central problem for interreligious dialogue, Azumah (2002, pp. 275–6) writes that "acknowledging and rethinking the way people of other religions are depicted in the inherited traditions is the key challenge that should preoccupy partners in dialogue."

For Knitter (1995, *The Hermeneutical Privilege of the Oppressed* sect.) poverty and suffering are key. The voice of the oppressed should be "first among equals" (para. 8):

The oppressed (including those who can speak for the oppressed earth and the animals) must be given a privileged hearing in the dialogue both because they have previously been excluded and because their voices can speak more adequately of the "human condition" in our present-day world. (para. 4)

Other recommendations include keeping the discussion focused on "common human concerns" (Mohagheghi, 2004, p. 91) and away from polemics; practical cooperation

²¹⁹ Jones mentions the compromise of in-group solidarity when comparing similarities with the out-group; the compromise of inter-group solidarity when comparing differences; a common perception that one is not being heard by the dialogue partner; and misunderstandings caused by use of our own criteria when interpreting or judging others.

to deal with issues or problems that are important locally (Kimball, 2004, para. 9; Mojzes, 1989, p. 202; Traer, 2001, p. 19); and specific (rather than general) issues that are agreed to in advance (Mojzes, 1989, pp. 204–5).

Commonality and Difference

Partly in order to “provide a common basis for interreligious dialogue” some writers postulate an “ontological, epistemological, soteriological, or ethical” commonality between traditions (DiNoia, 1993, pp. 62–3).²²⁰ Stressing commonalities may foster inter-group harmony (DiNoia, 1993, p. 64) and “neutralize extreme elements of our respective faiths” (Hames, 2004, p. 73).²²¹

As mentioned above, Swidler (1987, p. 15) recommends that commonalities be discussed first, as a way of building necessary trust. This will take some time considering “our mutual ignorance.” He asks participants not to assume points of disagreement beforehand and to try to agree as much as possible. If these petitions are taken seriously, he maintains, we will find out that most differences originally perceived to exist are not real, those that are real are likely to be complementary, and that contradictory differences are rare (p. 27). His “universal systematic reflection of religion-ideology” is made possible by a common language – an “ecumenical Esperanto” – that uses “language, terms, categories, and images” “understood and embraced by persons of all religions or ideologies” (pp. 19–20). This, in turn, also depends on an underlying commonality: our humanness (p. 20). Swidler’s ecumenical Esperanto, to a certain extent, could also be considered as a commonality of criteria – an important commonality in its own right.

²²⁰ Pluralisms like John Hick’s that see an underlying unity in the transcendent focus of several traditions, would fall under the ontological rubric. A universal search for deeper meaning (Groff, 2002, sect. 2.4) or a “common human basis for perceptions/descriptions of reality” (Swidler, 1987, p. 12) would fall under epistemological commonalities. Soteriological accounts would include “salvificocentric” approaches to dialogue like those of John Sahadat (1997, sect. 1) and Race (2001, pp. 3–4). Lastly, Hans Küng’s (2000) “global ethic” is an example of ethical commonality.

²²¹ See also Jones (2001, p. 158).

Dale Cannon (1998, para. 11) maintains that “dialogue is best served by bringing together people pursuing the same way of being religious within the different traditions” because this would increase the “likelihood that commonalities will be found and appreciated, providing a more amicable basis for determining, weighing, and appreciating each other’s differences, not to speak of mutual learning, collaboration, and growth.” For him commonality aids attempts to enter empathically into the perspective of another.

Stressing commonalities, however, need not entail the elimination or disregard of differences. These have a role to play in dialogue too (Marquardt, 2004, p. 76). Without differences dialogue cannot fulfil its function as an agent of learning and change (Leggewie, 2004, p. 105). “Only where there is difference, where there is tension, and where there is the possibility of confrontation and complementarity can there be born insight. Commonality is not the beginning of dialogue but its end” (Losel, 1989, p. 194, see also Tracy, as cited in DiNoia, 1993, p. 66). Commonalities, then, should not be presupposed prior to discussion. It is dialogue that should reveal where both commonalties and differences lie (DiNoia, 1993, pp. 64–5), and it should “allow both hidden agreements and deep incompatibilities to emerge with clarity” (DiNoia, 1993, p. 68).

Empathy

There is a consensus that empathy has a role to play in interreligious dialogue. It is understood as an “imaginative identification with another’s existential situation” (Dickens, 2006, p. 414), or experiencing a “partner’s religion or ideology ‘from within’” (Swidler, 1987, p. 16). The all encompassing nature of worldviews means that “a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and ‘whole being’” (Swidler, 1987, p. 16). Attempts to understand the Other

will be deficient if they neglect this subjective or internal aspect of religion.²²²

Empathy is also seen as an antidote for the ready application of our own criteria on others (Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 310–1; Dickens, 2006, pp. 14–5; Panikkar, 1987, pp. 415, 128–9), and as a method of appreciating the internal coherence (Dickens, 2006, p. 414), criteria (Kreiger, 1993), inner logic (Panikkar, 1987, pp. 128–9), or beauty (Dickens, 2006, p. 414) of a person or their tradition.

Braybrooke (1992, p. 282) asks: “Can someone who is not a member of a faith speak adequately of it, or must an outsider inevitably miss the ‘feel’ of a religion?”

Braybrooke maintains that attaining an empathetic understanding of another’s faith has been shown to be pedagogically possible, at least to a considerable degree.

Swidler also maintains that “experiencing another’s religion or ideology ‘from within’ at least to some extent is possible for all” (Swidler, 1987, p. 17).

Empathy is “both an affective and an intellectual skill” (Dickens, 2006, p. 414). Both imagination and in-depth intellectual investigation play a major role in facilitating it (Swidler, 1987). Empathy requires that participants learn and accept their partner’s self-conception (Groff, 2002, sect. 2.4; Swidler, 1987, pp. 14–5). Our understanding (or lack of it) can then be verified by putting our description of the insider’s perspective to their judgment (Kimball, 2004, para. 10; Smith, as cited in Lott, 1988, p. 196; Swidler, 1987, pp. 14–5).

Knowledge and Education

The acquisition of knowledge is central to solving many of the problems associated with interreligious dialogue.²²³ The knowledge needed is about the topic under

²²² See Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s dialogic approach to the study of religion outlined in Lott (1988) and Panikkar (1987, pp. 128–9).

²²³ For example, the tendency to prematurely or inappropriately use our own criteria for judging others (Carey, 1997, p. 16), accounts of others that legitimize discrimination and violence (Azumah, 2002, pp. 275–8), and more.

discussion (Mojzes, 1989, pp. 204–5), and about us and our tradition as well as others' (Kozlovic, 2001). And knowledge of the fruits of the academic study of religion is also required. In the interfaith encounter itself, knowledge about others, especially the kind needed for empathetic understanding, can be obtained directly from them (Charaniya et al., 2001, pp. 364, 353; Kimball, 2004, para. 14). "It is easier," Braybrooke (1992, p. 282) writes, "for a member of a religion to convey what it feels like to belong to it." Prior knowledge, however, is also seen as necessary, and this is where religious education comes in. Such education would have to concern itself to a large degree with the problematics of traditional descriptions of the Other (Boys, 1991; Fernando, 1987, pp. 116–7; Kimball, 2004, para. 13; Lee, 1991).

The Academic Study of Religion

Partly because it provides the necessary information about religion, its academic study is seen by many as beneficial or even "indispensable to interfaith encounter" (Dunbar, 1998a, sect. 3, para. 1; Race, 2001, p. 5). Since its inception it has seen a "mushrooming of perspectives and knowledge" making it impossible to ignore diversity or treat it as before (Race, 2001, p. 2). If the observable aspects of religions are studied appropriately only to the extent they are studied scientifically (Smith, as cited in Lott, 1988, p. 198), the academic study of religion can become a major ingredient in a common language for cross-worldview dialogue or reasoning (Smith, 1987; Swidler, 1987, pp. 20–6). But scholarship and scholars as participators in dialogue also act as facilitators of empathetic understanding. Thus in both the internal and external aspects of worldviews, scholarship can act as an interpreter (Cannon, 1998, para. 17–8; Smith, as cited in Lott, 1988, p. 198). The academic as participant can also foster a more critical perspective in the proceedings (Cannon, 1998, para. 17–8; Race, 2001, p. 5). But this may only occur if the findings and methods of the academic study of religion are acknowledged (Mortensen, 2002, p. 81; Pye, 1997; 2001). In these ways and more, many academics are willing participants (Berling,

1991, p. 8), and good results have been reported (Braybrooke, 1992, p. 293; Kreiger, 1993, p. 332; Sharpe, 1987c, pp. 45–6).

Humility

Humility and modesty are also commonly seen as a prerequisite for dialogue. For Knitter it grounds the need for equality with and openness to the Other (as cited in Race, 2001, p. 109). Others associate it with the recognition of our fallibility, our lack of complete knowledge, and the impossibility of certainty. It requires that beliefs are held tentatively (Bain-Selbo, 2000, para. 27; Dickens, 2006, pp. 416–7; Mojzes, 1989, pp. 201–2). Robert Traer (2001, p. 14) recommends modelling humility in dialogue by beginning “interfaith sharing with a description of how we have fallen short of our ideals,” instead of the more normal “propagandizing” for our group.

Charity and Trust

Mojzes (1989, pp. 204–5) asks dialogue participants: “Interpret your partner’s view in the best light.” For Eric Bain-Selbo (2000, para. 27) charity in dialogue means “presupposing the truth of the other’s claim so that we can understand it and see whether it corresponds to, complements, or contradicts our own beliefs.” Also, a common requirement for empathic understanding is that the outsider’s interpretation of the insider’s perspective be recognized as such, and assented to by the latter (Kimball, 2004, para. 10) – a practical requirement that goes a long way to assure charitable interpretation. Trust, another prerequisite (Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 310–1; Swidler, 1987, p. 15), should also help in this respect. One would tend to interpret more favourably if “the authenticity and sincerity of the partner is presupposed” (Mojzes, 1989, p. 201).

A Willingness to Dialogue

Freedom from coercion is understandably seen as a prerequisite for dialogue (Mojzes, 1989, p. 200). People cannot be forced into it: “One must insist upon the complete willingness of a dialogue partner” (Leggewie, 2004, p. 104). All sides need to recognize a need for dialogue, as well as a mutual interdependence with one’s interlocutors (Mojzes, 1989, pp. 200–1).

Practice

In discussions among a small group of participants with experience in interreligious dialogue Charaniya and Walsh (Charaniya et al., 2001) found four major motivators for dialogue: a personal history of having one’s intellectual curiosity satisfied, and the surprise and joy of learning that comes with it; anticipation of broadening one’s knowledge of the other; a “profound intimacy” experienced towards the other participants; and a positive and hopeful atmosphere in dialogues. These motivators were related to previous experience participants had with dialogues. Swidler (1987, pp. 36–7) similarly connects experience with allaying of anxieties felt when one’s own deeply held beliefs are challenged. Experiencing changes in beliefs in one’s life will gradually make these less threatening. Good experience in dialogue, then, can provide incentives for further dialogue. But good experience in interfaith-dialogue provides more than motivation. It also helps to facilitate future dialogue by providing more in-depth knowledge of the Other, as well as more empathy and intimacy (Charaniya et al., 2001). However, should the dialogue go sour, opposite effects can be anticipated (Marquardt, 2004, p. 78).

Courage and Confidence

Common fears of compromising one's faith; fears of negative social repercussions that may result from change of belief; fears of crossing over with empathy into alien worlds or having one's deepest beliefs opened to criticism (both of which are widely regarded as necessary for dialogue) imply, for several writers, that a certain degree of courage and confidence are necessary as prerequisites for dialogue (Bain-Selbo, 2000, para. 28; Braybrooke, 1992, pp. 310–1; Carey, 1997, p. 16; Kreiger, 1993, p. 347; Marquardt, 2004, p. 82; Shapiro, 1989, pp. 31–2, 4).

Interreligious Dialogue and Critical Thinking

To the extent that critical thinking instruction uses dialogical methods, or is intent on teaching dialogical skills, the similarities between both problems and solutions in the two fields are more or less straight-forward. The two fields overlap substantially, especially when considering approaches in critical thinking that combine dialogic methods with worldview evaluation, choice, and construction. Dialogic and allied ways of dealing with worldview related obstacles to critical thought, taken by writers on critical thinking, are similarly seen as important, or even central, by writers on interreligious dialogue. Here I have in mind primarily emphasis on the criticism of one's own worldview; comparative approaches to worldviews, including evaluation and choice; learning about and imaginatively entering into particular worldviews; and the study of areas of conflict or controversy between different worldviews. In all these areas scholarship on religious dialogue is of interest. In what follows I briefly recount some of the issues outlined above, but this time with reference mainly to critical thinking.

The strong emphasis displayed by the interfaith movement on persuading members of different faith groups to dialogue with each other brings up the subject of motivation. The average student is unlikely to open his cherished beliefs to criticism unless motivation is substantial. It would be interesting to investigate to what degree various approaches to critical thinking attempt to motivate their students toward this end, as well as – like much of the interfaith literature – to what extent this is done using reasoning internal to the student's worldview. The latter would be particularly significant where the student's prior views are not favourable for critical thought. Use of cross-worldview encounters as sources for disorienting dilemmas to initiate or trigger self-reflection is another area worth looking into.

The justification both Knitter and Swidler provide for interreligious dialogue as a method of learning and reasoning about worldviews lends support to those writers that see critical thinking with regard to worldviews as something that needs to be carried out through the confrontation and analysis of several worldviews. Considering this and other claimed benefits, a case could also be made for an interreligious interideological dialogue model for critical thinking pedagogy, provided care is taken to make it sufficiently critical.²²⁴

With regard to problems associated with accounts of the Other, critical thinking students are similarly likely to have rigid and dismissive descriptions and explanations of different or opposing perspectives on issues that are important to them, as well as, more globally, of other worldviews, especially ones they see as opposing (Paul, 1992b). Where a student's worldview legitimizes (directly or indirectly) the mistreatment of those who hold different perspectives, an attempt to appreciate their views fairly is hardly possible. One of the goals of critical thinking is to act as an antidote to such discriminatory accounts of others (and the behaviour that they sometimes provoke) (Siegel, 1997, chap. 6). But where students already possess these beliefs it is hard to see how this goal can be achieved without first dealing with weak sense critical thinking or other illicit influences of worldviews on reasoning.

Ignorance or misconception of other perspectives is similarly problematic for critical thought and its instruction: the acquisition of relevant knowledge being crucial to critical thinking (Bailin and Siegel, 2003, p. 184). Again, however, it is hard to see how to motivate for and make the acquisition and evaluation of information about other perspectives a fair process without dealing directly with biases inherent in our thinking in this domain.

A stance of superiority toward different beliefs (and those who hold them), whether overt or concealed, large or small, represents a considerable obstacle to openness to other perspectives outside interfaith dialogues too. The difficulty encountered in

²²⁴ I will come back to this point shortly.

interfaith dialogue is a particular manifestation of a general phenomenon that holds outside of dialogic situations. Still, where deliberation is not solitary, there is the additional prospect of being taken as suspect by one's partners in reasoning. Carol Trosset (1998), for example, found that discussion of sensitive issues is likely to be identified with advocacy and avoided. The debate on proselytism in interfaith dialogue has some contribution to make here.

The primary relevance, in my eyes, of discussions concerning exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, has to do less with these categories than with the underlying concern of the interfaith movement with the possibility of truth in other perspectives. I have two doubts with regard to the view of openness that pluralism implies.²²⁵ In a scale of openness to truth in other perspectives, or alternatively, of exclusivity with regard to truth, popular interpretations of pluralism would place it on the end opposite to exclusivism. Such a view of openness or exclusivity may not be appropriate in critical thinking. This is because pluralism would not always be a logical possibility, and because there are positions more generous than pluralism with regard to truth.

Let me expand, beginning with the first point. In many instances the equality or unity associated with pluralism is not possible in the critical thinking context. It is possible, for example, to hold that psychological and sociological accounts are equally insightful and complementary for an issue in which both approaches seem relevant (say, Freud and Durkheim on religion). But it is not possible to grant epistemological equality where truth claims are perceived to conflict. In many cases that are important to critical thinking pedagogy either the subject is not sufficiently "multi-logical" (Paul, 1993b, pp. 141–2) (that is, amenable to analysis from multiple perspectives), or conflicting truth claims cannot be dismissed as culturally (or otherwise) conditioned expressions of an underlying unity or agreement. The need to be open to truth in others' beliefs in critical thinking encompasses both mono- and multi-logical issues,

²²⁵ Both difficulties are largely semantic and would not apply equally to all versions of pluralism. They do, however, apply to the meanings commonly used in literature on interreligious dialogue.

as well as both disagreements about particular truth claims on the micro level and disagreements about worldviews on the macro level.

Second, in most interpretations, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism refer to distinctly religious responses to the diversity of religions (Hick, 1987, p. 333). Together they are taken to be exhaustive of reasonable positions. A naturalistic alternative is rarely mentioned.²²⁶ The lack of attention given to this alternative is understandable given that we are dealing with literature on interreligious dialogue – the interideological strand being a more recent and less popular addition.²²⁷ In critical thinking, however, interest should be with any and all worldviews, whether religious or not.

A fifth alternative is also overlooked. Exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and their naturalistic counterpart, all contain a normative pronouncement regarding the truth (or lack of it) in other faiths or worldviews, and as such may not be suitable for a purely academic approach (Foster, 2000). However, one would most likely want the critical thinking student to emulate the academic approach at an initial stage prior to evaluation and judgment. While the academic study of religion is supported by some as helpful or even necessary for interreligious dialogue, it is not mentioned as a viable interfaith alternative to the above approaches to truth. Following Smart (1973, pp. 53, 57–8), the fifth position will be methodologically agnostic. This position is open to the possibility of truth in (or contribution from) any worldview, religious or secular: It is open to the possibility that there is a sacred focus to which all or some religions point (pluralism), one religion best exemplifies (inclusivism) or embodies (exclusivism), or even none; as well as the possibility that this sacred focus does not

²²⁶ Küng (1987b), as an exception to the rule, mentions it as a fourth alternative, but only to quickly dismiss it as unreasonable.

²²⁷ With the inclusion of secular worldviews in dialogue, as in Swidler's interreligious and interideological dialogue, more attention will have to be given to naturalistic positions. This would be an uphill battle as there seems to be an anti-secular bias in the interfaith movement, there already in the movement's modern beginnings, where combating irreligion was embraced as a common goal (Race, 2001, pp. 102, 11).

exist (naturalism). It is openness of this kind that should be considered as the most appropriate for the non-exclusive end of the spectrum.²²⁸

The distinction between exclusivism and inclusivism also seems to blur outside soteriological connotations.²²⁹ Thus, a view of openness with regard to truth in other perspectives that is more congruent with the variegated content and aims of critical thinking is one where the opposite ends of the exclusivity scale are labeled *exclusivist* (absolute or overwhelming exclusivity) and *non-exclusivist* (no or negligible exclusivity).²³⁰ By *negligible* I mean that the student is sufficiently open to the possibility that she may be wrong and the other right – sufficiency being determined by context.

This does not thereby diminish the importance of discussions of inclusivism and pluralism to critical thinking. Several avenues could be pursued here, one of which would be the inclusion of these debates as content under the heading “alternative theoretical perspectives . . . with regard to X” – X being worldviews – if Siegel’s curricular model is applied. As an aside, I may add that interreligious dialogue could be included in this model also under demarcation of X (the “grey area” debates regarding the distinction between interreligious dialogue and the academic study of religion mentioned in the beginning of this chapter), “alternative theoretical perspectives . . . within . . . X” (learning about different worldviews) and “problems of the evaluation of those alternatives” (as in criteriology, below).

With regard to criticisms of inclusivism and pluralism – is it common for students of critical thinking to disregard differences in other perspectives as some inclusivists and

²²⁸ As discussed in relation to worldview evaluation, methodological agnosticism is preliminary in nature – instrumental as it is for reflection and judgment. In the academic study of religion these later stages are controversial because of their normative nature. But critical thinking is ultimately oriented toward personal decision making and choice – concern for scientific methodology and assumptions notwithstanding.

²²⁹ See, for example, Basinger (2006).

²³⁰ The closer a student’s beliefs are toward the non-exclusivist end of the scale, the more we would expect her to be prepared to question her deeply held beliefs. And conversely, the further along her beliefs are toward the exclusivist end, the greater the possibility of weak sense critical thinking.

pluralists are accused? I venture to speculate that the opposite tendency, mentioned by Swidler, of imagining differences where there are none, is much greater. This, of course, is an empirical question worthy of pursuit under the rubric “students’ thinking about alien perspectives.”

The important function that encounter with difference plays in learning was one of the main themes found in the work of critical thinking writers who focus on worldviews or similar phenomena. This kind of learning is probably best expected where differences are real: imagined differences being more likely to be the result of bias or other illicit influences on our thinking about others, and thus more likely to be unenlightening caricatures or simply too negative to be considered as respectable alternatives. In both cases, then, whether a difference or the lack of it is imagined, learning from alternative views may be limited. Assuming the empirical investigation to have yielded the expected results, the accurate recognition of differences should be added to the goals of approaches to critical thinking that depend on alternative perspectives.

Moving on, I find in partisan debate a fine exemplar of weak sense critical thinking. It is equally problematic for dialogic approaches to critical thinking, but is also of concern more generally. For example, all critical thinking students are expected to encounter group decision-making situations, both in and out of the university or other educational settings. Pre-emptive suggestions from the interreligious dialogue literature, or suggestions for keeping debates within peaceful boundaries where they do occur, could be trialled with little or no modification in many educational contexts.

The anxieties or crisis associated with having one’s cherished beliefs questioned is also an obstacle shared with critical thinking. Alleviating them, or equipping the student with the tools for dealing with those negative feelings that cannot be avoided, should be of particular import for those in critical thinking that require a prolonged and wholehearted engagement with alien perspectives. But even the normal

introductory critical thinking course can have similar effects. A student, for example, may experience social alienation after questioning the thinking or behavior of those around her. Proclaiming a need for courage, not unique to interreligious dialogue,²³¹ does not address the problem adequately. The possibility that successful dialogues, through time, may create self-confidence, can solve the problem only retrospectively. Where crisis does occur, counselling the student is outside the educator's scope of practice. But demanding intellectual courage as a prerequisite is not educationally feasible.

The danger of misunderstanding and misjudgement due to an unnoticed use of our own criteria is there in both the micro and macro levels of critical thinking: both in evaluation of an argument that relies on a worldview alien to ours, and in a direct encounter with that alien worldview itself. In both cases this may lead to a dismissive and superficial engagement with difference. A focus on criteria appropriate within the epistemological and methodological assumptions of critical thinking²³² (like Paul's (Paul, 1993b, p. 63) intellectual standards), the explication of criteria used (Jewell, 1991), and the problematics of criteriology (as might be expected of Siegel's curricular model) is thereby justified. The use of criteria by mutual agreement through consensus building is an interesting addition to these. Particular suggestions under these headings, like Jones' (Jones, 2001, p. 156) method for making frameworks explicit, could be added to the repertoire already available for critical thinking educators.

As the problems outlined make clear, encounters with otherness do not, in and of themselves, produce learning – they may actually prevent it. Interfaith literature indicates that there is a necessity, therefore, to deal with the students' beliefs (and ways of thinking) about views different from theirs.

²³¹ See Paul's (Paul, 1993b, pp. 325, 256) intellectual courage as a critical thinking disposition.

²³² See Siegel (Siegel, 1997, chap. 1) for his views on the epistemology underling critical thinking.

I now move on to solutions and prerequisites, starting with openness. Recall that in the exclusivity scale above, I referred to the non-exclusive end of the scale as one where the student is sufficiently open to the possibility that she may be wrong and the other right. But what is sufficiently open? In the situations that are of most interest here – situations where one is expected to reason about sensitive matters of personal concern, perhaps even one’s self-concept – arguments by Dickens and Swidler for a radical openness seems tailored for the critical thinking class, at least when compared to those in religious dialogue who seek to limit the necessary commitment to learning and change. Such limitations may gain adherents in critical thinking instruction in the primary and secondary levels where political considerations like parental rights are sometimes of overriding concern. But limitations on openness may conflict in practice with some aspects of the goal of teaching strong sense critical thinking.

Although it is hard to imagine any teacher of critical thinking failing to affirm the importance of intellectual openness, some approaches to critical thinking might seem deficient by Swidlerian standards. It is not hard to imagine a student, having just completed an introductory course in critical thinking, claiming that the objective of the course was to teach students how to avoid being duped. As important a goal as this is, Swidler’s (1987, p. 6) insistence on commitment to learning and change as a primary purpose could be adopted with no loss, and with much to gain.

Many suggestions for preliminary discussions mentioned in the literature look promising. Swidler’s (1987, p. 37) prolegomena to dialogue (aimed at the deabsolutization of truth and equality of value), the search for commonalities (p. 15), agreement about criteria (Chubb, 1972, pp. 290–1, 305), fair description of the other (Azumah, 2002, pp. 275–6), or of one’s self, as in Traer’s (2001, p. 14) modelling of humility, the identification and perhaps rectification of several kinds of inequality, can all be incorporated into critical thinking pedagogy. The same could be said for the strong emphasis on dialogic and critical dispositions, virtues, and values.²³³

²³³ Trust, empathy, charity, humility, openness, courage, knowledge, perseverance, criticism, incredulity, equality, etc.

The in-depth intellectual investigation of another's perspective, and following attempts to use imagination (appropriately structured by the products of that investigation) to view an issue from this new perspective, all this being necessary for empathetic understanding, goes a long way toward the goals of applying the principle of charity, the recognition of reason in others, and possibly the fallibility of our own perspective. The importance of empathetic understanding is not lost on critical thinking writers. One of the advantages of interreligious or interideological dialogue is that it includes direct access to proponents of alternative views, allowing for verification procedures to provide additional insight. On the other hand, one must keep in mind that very often the quality of information one can gather about alien perspectives from those who hold them will be questionable, hence the instrumentality of the academic study of religion. It seems to me that the cogency of arguments for the importance of knowledge about religion and religions, as well as an appropriate scientific perspective, for interreligious dialogue, remains even when transplanted to the critical thinking domain, at least where worldviews are implicated. Where this is the case, ignorance of content and methods of the academic study of religion impoverishes critical thinking instruction, as it does interreligious dialogue.

The list of problems outlined in this chapter shows that biased or insufficient information about other worldviews, gathered from other dialogue participants, is only the tip of the iceberg. Interreligious dialogue is in many ways a mixed blessing as far as critical thinking is concerned. Just as with religious studies, there is a strong religious bias within literature on interreligious dialogue. Although this is expected, it does pose problems for critical thinking instruction. Common difficulties also make it likely that cross-worldview dialogue will initially, and for some time, fall short of required standards, sometimes allowing the darker side of classroom conversation to rear its ugly head. Just how debilitating these difficulties are for the integration of interreligious dialogue into critical thinking pedagogy is an important question that I leave for the concluding chapter.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Despite its popularity, the standard approach to critical thinking instruction is as yet incapable of consistently producing self-reflexive critical thinkers: thinkers who are willing and able to think critically about their own deeply held or fundamental beliefs. The constituents of the standard approach do not readily transfer to this sensitive realm of thought. Increased dexterity in argument analysis and fallacy identification are more likely to be recruited for the defence of prior belief than used in soul-searching questioning. Since critical thinking is of necessity also critical thinking about our own sensitive beliefs, the standard approach does not represent a sufficient educational approach to critical thinking.

A considerable and multifaceted body of literature in critical thinking suggests that the solution to this problem lies in in-depth, prolonged, and explicit instruction on the application of critical thought to worldviews. It also suggests that critical thinking pedagogy requires input from relevant expert communities. The close relationship between worldviews and religions means that the academic study of religion is in many respects the primary institutional embodiment of critical thinking about worldviews, and so – despite its relative obscurity within critical thinking literature – should also be a primary source for such input.

Furthermore, extant approaches to critical thinking instruction that already deal with worldviews display certain prominent features that point to particular elements within the academic study of religion as promising sources for cross-field contribution. There is broad agreement within critical thinking that because worldviews are implicated in reasoning, because they exercise strong and deleterious influence on reasoning, because of their rigid insularity, because of worldview related obstacles to good reasoning like weak sense critical thinking and a host of attendant biases and

defence mechanisms, the standard approach requires augmentation with instruction of certain dialogical, dialectical, and comparative reasoning skills, worldview criteriology, critical thinking dispositions, and knowledge of important reasoning-related worldview phenomena, the scientific worldview, and other specific worldviews, including the student's own.

Considering these themes, inquiry into method and theory literature concerning the definition of religion, comparison of religions, and their evaluation, and literature on interreligious dialogue, seems particularly apposite. Because worldviews are implicated in reasoning, critical thinking about deeply held beliefs – and very often critical thinking *simpliciter* – is dependent upon appropriate worldview choice. An appropriate choice of worldview depends on a reasonable evaluation of worldviews, which is reliant on reasonable comparison, itself possible only if one has a sound understanding of what worldviews are. The implication of worldviews in reasoning also means that the conceptualization, comparison, and evaluation of worldviews is never going to be easy or straightforward. The detrimental effects of worldviews on reasoning and worldview-centric biases and defence mechanisms only serve to heap difficulties upon difficulties. Inquiry into the ways in which scholars have been grappling with the conceptualization, comparison, and evaluation of religions could be used to provide necessary insight into these involving tasks. Whether one is concerned with religions or worldviews, such inquiry ought to be considered as an invaluable source for the requisite subject specific skills, criteria, dispositions, and knowledge. Literature on interreligious dialogue further supports the connection between scholarly discourses on the conceptualization, comparison, and evaluation of religion and the requisite worldview related skills, criteria, dispositions, and knowledge, and it also contributes to these directly.

My discussion of the definition of religion and worldview highlighted the importance, for critical thinking, of three widespread definitional failures. Conceptions of religion and worldview that are parochial, simplistic, or unduly normative make the fair comparison and evaluation of worldviews all but impossible. I found definitional

attempts to deal with these failures, and in particular, conceptions of worldview like the one offered by Ninian Smart, to be of equal importance. These represent a morally and epistemologically acceptable understanding of this family of phenomena that can be used to structure a sufficiently critical comparative and evaluative inquiry.

My treatment of comparison concentrated on comparative aims, methods, frameworks, and conclusions. What makes for appropriate and inappropriate comparative practices with respect to these in the confines of the academic study of religion is never far removed from similar considerations in the context of critical thinking. Studying the relevant debates within the academic study of religion should therefore help students recognize and appreciate the differences between the use of comparison for defensive rationalization and its use for rational evaluation. It should teach them how to best compare worldviews – how to choose and use the right comparative aims, methods, and frameworks to arrive at well-supported comparative conclusions – and it should motivate them to do so.

In the chapter that I devoted solely to evaluation, the central debate between natural and supernatural approaches to the study of religion was used to extract general pedagogic recommendations. Religions and worldviews are extraordinary objects of evaluative inquiry because they are inevitably implicated in their own evaluation. Abjuring rational evaluation of worldviews altogether is not called for – it stands on highly problematic grounds, and it certainly does not possess the superlative moral and epistemological support popular thinking often attributes to it. Legitimate evaluative practice in this sphere must rely on worldviews to critique and evaluate each other, but only under controlled circumstances. The academic study of religion is paradigmatic of such controlled circumstances, and inquiry into its methods and theories (and discourses thereof) should be considered as an invaluable source for the relevant knowledge, capabilities, and the impetus to use them.

Furthermore, my discussion of religious diversity, the success of naturalistic science, and its unmatched fulfilment of commonly accepted and seemingly important

evaluative criteria, suggests that of the worldviews that ought to be considered as pedagogically important evaluative frames, the academic approach to religion – relying on a scientific worldview and a modest naturalism – is of primary importance. At worst (and I hope to have argued convincingly against this position) this perspective is first among equals. Worldviews that are culturally prominent or dialectically beneficial and the student's own worldview are also required for this process. The most reliable source for information about these lies, again, within the academic study of religion.

Lastly, consideration of interreligious dialogue reveals more than a list of dialogical failures or important dialogical skills, criteria, dispositions, and knowledge. It supports the importance of the academic study of religion to all of these, and it shows that there is much more to the scholarly study of religion – as far as critical thinking is concerned – than well known topics from the philosophy of religion.

Teaching students to think critically about worldviews must include imparting the willingness and ability to take worldviews – as evaluative frames – out of the background, and to analyze, criticize, and evaluate them through comparison with alternative worldviews. This requires a prolonged engagement with relevant intellectual conflicts, criteriological and epistemological studies, and empathetic inquiry into different worldviews – including, crucially, the scientific. It also requires a heightened sensitivity to apology and pseudo-science, and a context and subject-matter that would trigger and sustain students' willingness to question their own worldviews. The academic study of religion is uniquely positioned to satisfy these needs.

Why, then, does the academic study of religion receive so little attention within critical thinking circles? My own suspicion is that this has something to do with the fact that a reconceptualization of the academic study of religion into the academic study of worldviews has yet to gain overwhelming scholarly support, let alone much visibility within greater academia. But I doubt that this is the whole story. In all

probability there are many factors involved, too many to attempt a full account of this issue here. I do want to touch, however, on three problems that may well have had a retarding influence, and that constitute a considerable barrier to the implementation of the kinds of recommendations I have stressed.

The first of these has already been given plenty of attention. The academic study of religion – and most importantly, its conspicuous institutional flagship: religious studies departments and scholarship – seems to be suffering from an acute case of multiple personality disorder. All but eradicated from the scientific world, in religious studies departments and scholarship, supernaturalistic assumptions are often accepted as much more than a logical, if farfetched, possibility. Rather, a forceful, perhaps even dominant approach within religious studies has taken supernaturalistic scholarship to be the only game in town. In religious studies departments, associations, conferences, and journals, supernaturalistic assumptions, often in the form of pluralistic theologizing, have gained a considerable degree of normalcy.

Seen from the point of view of critical thinking, I suspect that many would consider this to be a contamination of religious studies by anti-critical theology. Some of the scholarship that I chose to use in this work does draw that conclusion, and I hope I managed to show that some arguments to this effect should not be dismissed out of hand. Such a view of religious studies, however, may well lead critical thinking educators to believe that religious studies departments, perhaps even the academic study of religion as a whole, are not suitable loci for a critical education about worldviews.

When religion or religious phenomena are studied within other departments, whether in the natural or the social sciences, supernatural assumptions are far less likely to hold any sway. For this reason, I do not think that the argument above has any force when directed at other areas within the academic study of religion. If studies of religion in other departments suffer a depreciated image because they are associated with religious studies simply due to a shared object of study, then the problem is

mostly one of mistaken identity. Still, religious studies departments are the most recognizable location for religion specialists within academia, and they ought to be at the centre of scholarship and education about religion. If religious studies does suffer from an anti-critical malaise, or at the very least, if this is a distinct possibility, the argument above against its suitability for critical thinking education does seem to point to a genuine problem. Since my own recommendations do pertain to the academic study of religion as a whole, and since I explicitly considered religious studies scholarship to be an important element in an education about worldviews, it behoves me to supply some sort of defence or solution to this problem.

I think that any credible response to this problem must recognize at the outset that not every aspect of the academic study of religion is conducive to critical thought about worldviews, and that much of what goes on under the auspices of religious studies will not readily translate into or be suitable for critical thinking pedagogy. I do support the inclusion of religion in education as a major curricular subject and believe that it should be modelled largely on the academic study of religion. But it should be shaped and taught in a manner that facilitates critical thought about religion and worldviews. If schooling included a sizable component devoted to the critical study of religion and related phenomena, it would seem reasonable to expect a corresponding increase in the quality of thinking about worldviews, and of thinking generally. The thrust of my argument is not that religion ought to be a fourth R. Rather, the fourth R should be a combination of reasoning and religion, a critical education about religion (really a critical education about worldviews).

Religious studies scholarship, then, should not be taken as a model for education about religion without qualification. What I am calling for is a synthesis with critical thinking. There is much in religious studies, and the academic study of religion, that is important for critical thinking. At the same time, critical thinking scholarship has its own contribution to make to the scholarly study of religion, especially when the question at hand is the makings of a critical education about worldviews. How exactly can critical thinking pedagogy and scholarship help with religion education

and scholarship is an important question, but not one I could appropriately tackle within the narrow confines of this work. My argument, in the main, took the opposite route. Because some aspects of the academic study of religion do seem to hold promise to a critical education about worldviews, and so to critical thinking generally, the academic study of religion ought to feature more prominently within critical thinking scholarship and pedagogy. Generally speaking, critical thinking writers, even writers that take a lively interest in worldviews, have yet to give the academic study of religion its due. A handful of writers acknowledge the importance of one or two of its components in passing. The few pages that John Chaffee devoted to the subject, and even Nel Noddings' chapter on religion, represent no more than cursory encounters with this field. My own discussions on interreligious dialogue, and the definition, comparison, and evaluation of religion within religious studies method and theory literature, do not represent a great advance either. Considering the themes I identified in Chapter Three, these are areas that look particularly promising for critical thinking pedagogy. Although I do recommend their inclusion in critical thinking pedagogy, I take them primarily as a sample of a wider field of inquiry. This sample is meant to support a broader recommendation, namely – just as education should be infused with critical thinking, so too should critical thinking be infused with the philosophy of the academic study of religion, and the fruits of its inquiry. This recommendation does not come without reservation. Ultimately, it is up to the critical thinking community to separate the wheat from the chaff. So far, interest in the academic study of religion within critical thinking has been no more than tangential. Until such time as it becomes the subject of wide and concerted attention, it will be hard to say with any confidence whether the critical thinking community has ignored the academic study of religion because it found it wanting as far as educating critical thinking about worldviews is concerned, or whether the academic study of religion simply escaped its view (slipped beneath its radar, as it were).

My first reaction to the problem of theological encroachment, then, is to qualify my support for the pedagogical importance of the academic study of religion. It is more helpful to critical thinking in some respects than in others, and it is up to the critical

thinking community to decide which is which. The fact that the academic study of religion has (or may have) some anti-critical aspects does not thereby excuse the critical thinking community from taking the academic study of religion seriously.

But there is still more to be said on this issue. Theological encroachment may also be a blessing in disguise. In my discussion of extant approaches to critical thinking that already attempt to deal with worldviews or related phenomena I argued that one of the themes that an overview of such approaches reveals is a strong emphasis on the importance of controversy. Intellectual controversies are very useful if not necessary for the teaching of those skills, criteria, disposition, and knowledge that are needed for the reasonable evaluation of alternative perspectives. This applies even to those controversies that display substandard argumentation. Richard Paul and Gerald Graff highlight this particular point. The more hotly contested (emotional, fundamental) an issue is, the more likely it is to display degraded forms of reasoning, and the more opportunities there will be for teachers to deal with such reasoning. Sanitizing debates, or dealing only with exemplary debates, is not always the best thing to do. So long as engagement with controversy is structured and controlled appropriately – so long as it is not superficial, so long as all perspectives are treated with both empathy and suspicion, so long as inquiry is dialogic and cooperative, in short, so long as engagement with controversy complies with the dictates of critical thinking – controversy represents less of a barrier to critical thought than a prerequisite for it.

Because of the multiple personalities of religious studies, and no doubt because of behaviour Richard Paul would call critical thinking in its weak sense, Eric Sharpe (1983, p. xiii) wrote that “the study of religion will almost inevitably confirm or support whatever attitude the student already holds concerning the ultimate object of study.” On the other hand, according to Russell McCutcheon (1997a), the tools of the academic study of religion allow the scholar of religion to think critically about religion and worldviews, including her own. The authority of both these writers to pronounce on the character of the field is beyond reproach, and, despite the apparent contradiction, I believe these are accurate descriptions of the current state of affairs.

At the moment, educational commitment to religion and worldviews in primary and secondary schooling is far from reaching the requirements of an appropriately conceived fourth R. The few who choose to study religion at tertiary level rarely possess the educational background that in other departments would be considered necessary.²³⁴ The intake of religious studies departments is comparatively low, and consists mostly of those who are very favourable to religion, and, to a lesser extent, those who are highly critical of it. This is a situation that is conducive to the kind of results that Sharpe describes. Nevertheless, even if the academic study of religion suffers – to a degree – from a default of critical intelligence, it still contains within it a considerable amount of the means necessary for such intelligence. A sufficiently attentive and suitably discerning critical thinking community will no doubt be able to pick out the good, ignore the bad, or else adapt it to its own purposes.

The second problem I want to raise is the politically explosive nature of education about religion. Religious education is a subject that straddles political, legal, ethical, educational, and religious spheres. A critical education about religions and worldviews is not unlawful in Western Anglophone democracies. It is protected in the legal systems of many countries as well as in international human rights law.²³⁵ The educational and ethical support for it is considerable. Politically, however, this remains an issue on which one must tread lightly. A miscalculated step risks strong

²³⁴ Consider for example the mathematical background expected of a person who wishes to major in mathematics – a subject no more complex, and far less controversial than religion.

²³⁵ For example, in the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Art. 5, 14, 7, 15, 27, 45) education of a proper standard is one that: gives a critical understanding of problems, and an ability of rational analysis; eliminates misconceptions; teaches the true interests of peoples, people's real interests, problems and aspirations; and revises its textbooks to insure that they are accurate and up to date. The 1952 UN General Assembly Convention on the International Right of Correction (preamble) stipulates the right of all peoples to be fully and reliably informed. The 1975 UN General Assembly Declaration on the use of Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interests of Peace and for the Benefit of Mankind (Art. 6) states that "all states shall take measures to extend the benefits of science and technology to all strata of the population." The 1969 UN General Assembly Declaration on Social Progress and Development (Art. 1, 5) stipulates that education should enable everyone to enjoy the fruits of social progress and contribute to it; enlighten public opinion; and bring awareness of the changes occurring in society as a whole. Confessional or theological inculcation seems to conflict with these statements. Unfortunately, documents such as these come with little or no power of enforcement, they are often vague, and resolution of conflicts with other rights is not addressed. As a result, most signatories ignore this right with impunity.

reaction from religious groups (or cultural or indigenous minorities) that, for reasons both real and imagined, see this type of education as a threat to their worldview. Even if protracted legal battles often end in results favouring educational common sense, few would wish it upon themselves to be embroiled in them (Nord, 1995). A critical education about worldviews does involve some risk to teachers and principals, and to educational policy makers from school boards to heads of governments. The same applies to educational publishing houses. Fear of waking up a giant, or an astute reading of the related conventional fundamentals of the textbook market, may well have played a part in the slow pace and piecemeal manner with which educational systems have been picking up the gauntlet laid down by philosophers of education decades ago (Smart, 1987b, p. 57). It may also have had something to do with the relative lack of interest in religion within critical thinking (directly or indirectly).

Religious groups and ethnic or cultural minorities have been vociferous advocates for the rights of parents (or of specific ethnic or cultural communities) to determine or have an influence on the character of their children's education. But just how far do parental rights go? Many groups have argued for – and left to their own devices, have been able to establish – a kind of confessional and indoctrinatory inculcation for their children that leaves the reasonable evaluation of worldviews by the wayside. Should parents be allowed to limit their children's exposure to worldviews to one that is intent on instilling belief regardless of evidence? What if the method or content used all but guarantee such belief? Is the case for parental rights strong enough to require a critical education in religion and worldviews to be further qualified? These questions, and closely related questions concerning, neutrality, commitment, liberty, toleration, autonomy, multiculturalism, and more, have been a major preoccupation of modern philosophy of education for years. I cannot begin to do justice to all the relevant debates here. One of the assumptions of the current work is that the case against such parental rights is strong.

Philosophers have tended to grant that parents have *prima facie* rights to make educational decisions concerning their children, but add that these must be balanced

against the rights of children and the rights of the state. When an education about religion and worldviews is concerned, the autonomy of the child and the peace and prosperity of the community at large can override parents' wishes. Parents are educational stakeholders, and so they ought to be able to help shape it. But they are not the only, or even the primary stakeholders, and so their contribution is welcome only so long as it remains within certain boundaries. These boundaries are breached when a critical education about worldviews is put in jeopardy (Gutmann, 1987, pp. 30–1, 234; Hobson & Edwards, 1999, pp. 105–34; Smart, 1987b, pp. 20, 25–6).

If I overstate the case some qualification may be called for. But I will have to overstate the case by a great deal before a thorough engagement of critical thinking with the academic study of religion will stop making educational sense. Dealing with what is proximately feasible has its place, but so does thinking about more distant goals. Educators carry a hefty burden here. We share a responsibility to take actions now that will prepare the ground for a better education to come. A critical education about worldviews will not become more feasible, expedient, or attractive on its own. Kinks need to be ironed out. Proposals based on sound theory and experience need to be put forward and discussed. Parents, teachers, policy makers, and publishers need to be informed. There must be a torch to light the way.

The third and last complication that I will raise here concerns lack of sufficient resources, and in particular, insufficient numbers of suitably qualified teachers and an overcrowded curriculum. Generating a large enough number of good religion teachers already seems like a very tall order. At a minimum, most religion teachers will have to be familiar with several religions, several methods and theories with which religions can be studied, and how religions function within the lives of individuals and communities (Hobson et al., 1999, p. 169). If the object of study is worldviews the relevant expertise is made larger, and it is increased yet again if what one is after is a widespread ability to think critically about worldviews. Cognitively speaking, thinking critically about worldviews is a highly demanding task, and this will inevitably reflect in its teaching.

On top of the demanding nature of the cognitive undertaking, I have also stressed the potential for negative, sometimes severe, psychological and social consequences. This is a problem that teachers need to be able to deal with. I have argued that this is a problem that exists to some degree in current university critical thinking instruction. Teaching critical thinking about worldviews will increase educators' needs in this respect.

Can teachers today carry this heavy load? Religion teaching is poorly regulated in New Zealand. Schools are not obliged to teach about religion, and when they do, they are not obliged to take an academic non-confessional stance. By-and-large, when religion makes an appearance in schools it is in parochial Christian inculcation.²³⁶ Furthermore, universities do not offer teaching qualifications specific to this field, while institutions whose overt aim is to produce teachers that will teach for belief in Christianity can be approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority to qualify teachers in all levels of schooling.²³⁷ In countries like New Zealand the kind of fourth R that I have in mind demands dramatic increases in both teacher numbers and the quality of their training, if not a complete overhaul: a paradigm shift in the way this subject is understood and treated.

The situation is not appreciably different for critical thinking teachers. As a subject, critical thinking is typically offered only at university, and only as an introductory philosophy paper. Those who teach it are normally philosophers with background in a related field, but that background will rarely include expertise in religion or

²³⁶ Most state primary schools include about twenty yearly hours of Christian instruction taught by volunteers that require little more than police vetting (Churches Education Commission, 2010; Hannan, Rishworth, & Walsh, 2006; Morris, 2009; Petersen, 1993; Pidgeon, 2010, p. 59). Integrated and private schools receive considerable government funding and are overwhelmingly Christian-confessional, some fundamentalist (Lee, 1993; Pidgeon, 2010, pp. 60–1; Walker, 1993). Middleton Grange School (Christchurch), integrated in 1996, is a case in point (Dunlop, 1993; Middleton Grange School, 2010). O'Donnell (2001) is representative of the kind of religious inculcation offered in Catholic schools. These make up the majority of integrated schools. The Anglican Schools Office (2008) is a more curriculum focused Anglican analogue. The little research that is available on home-schooling in New Zealand paints a similar picture (Baldwin, 1993).

²³⁷ See, for example, Bethlehem Tertiary Institute (2010).

worldviews. There are no advanced papers in critical thinking, no papers are offered on how to think critically about one's own deeply held beliefs, and no papers on how to think critically about worldviews. The situation in lower levels of education is not better.²³⁸

The complexity of the subject is such that teacher education will need to adapt. As a start, advanced courses in critical thinking about deeply held beliefs and worldviews need to be created and offered to fledgling teachers. Critical thinking and religion specialists could collaborate in this endeavour. Participation in such courses should be compulsory for both religion and critical thinking teachers. A strong case may even exist for broader compulsory participation. Advanced training given to all teachers would pave the way for infusion of the material throughout schooling as befits a fourth R. There is much more to be said on this issue, but unfortunately, this is not something that can be adequately dealt with here. Still, whatever the difficulties, I see no reason to think that getting enough of the right teachers is beyond the realm of the possible.

The same position applies to the problem of the crowded curriculum. The question here is not "Is there time for it?" The problem of the crowded curriculum is, in the main, a problem of judging the relative importance of various educational interventions, and critical thinking about worldviews is simply too important a subject not to be included and emphasized in the curriculum.²³⁹ Current educational

²³⁸ Paul's paper "Critical Thinking and the State of Education Today" (1996) seems to be indicative of the situation in New Zealand in this respect. Aspiring teachers are not required to study critical thinking, and critical thinking is not taught at school directly, yet it is still regarded as an educational ideal that schooling should seek to develop. It is also questionable whether there is sufficient clarity about the meaning of critical thinking within New Zealand's educational system. How New Zealand schooling fares with regard to critical thinking and its application to worldviews is an important question that I hope to tackle in the future.

²³⁹ The importance of critical thinking as an educational ideal is something that I take for granted here. For interested readers the work of Harvey Siegel would make a good first port of call in this respect. Because others have already done the necessary work, and because educators generally accept critical thinking as important (admittedly, in theory more than in practice), my own efforts were concerned with the importance of the study of worldviews to critical thinking, and the study of religion to the study of worldviews.

attention – largely limited to lip service and a single university course that few know exists – is too little too late.

This brief consideration of some of the more obvious difficulties will have to suffice for the time being. Before I get to my closing remarks, a brief word on future work is due. In a sense, talk of recommendations for future study is by this stage somewhat redundant. This whole work is itself a recommendation for more study. Its main thrust is to highlight the need for more cooperative engagement between critical thinking and religion scholars and scholarship. To date, such engagement is at best only embryonic, and so my argument had to be painted in broad strokes. Filling in the details is a task that must be the charge of a healthy scholarly community, not a handful of voices, much less a single doctoral thesis. This is not to say, of course, that I have not been concerned with more specific avenues for interdisciplinary enrichment. Method and theory literature on the definition, comparison, and evaluation of religion, and literature on the practice of interreligious dialogue, are cases in point. First and foremost I regard these subjects as a sample of a wider field of inquiry, a sample that is meant to support my broader recommendation: Just as education should be infused with critical thinking, so too should critical thinking be infused with the philosophy of the academic study of religion, and the fruits of its inquiry. But in order for these subjects to function in this capacity some details had to be filled in. Although my discussion of these subjects had to be more suggestive than exhaustive, I hope I managed to indicate several more specific pedagogical opportunities.

Having said that, I would like to add a few brief words on the prospects of doing some relevant empirical research in New Zealand, and on some areas in religion scholarship that I consider as promising as those that I discussed, but which, for lack of time and space, I could not consider here.

In my overview of the problem of transfer and the debate over generalizability I noted the oft-cited need to complement the sizable theoretical discourse with pertinent

empirical research. The effectiveness of standard critical thinking courses in promoting good thinking outside of the critical thinking class is still an open question. Most writings on this subject are either attempts to settle the question on theoretical grounds, or on the basis of empirical research carried out in other fields, or on somewhat unreliable data like student perceptions. The little direct evidence that is available consists mostly of precourse-postcourse tests that resemble the material studied. While moderate gains in test results can be expected, the effects of the course on students' academic studies generally, their reasoning at the workplace, as consumers, and on their own deeply held beliefs, are recognized in the literature as urgent research questions. It is also unclear which of the various common elements of content and delivery are more likely to achieve the desired effect – a deficiency that hampers course evolution. Data on prolonged effects is also missing: Do gains diminish or increase over time? As far as worldviews are concerned, a good amount of empirical evidence, specific to the standard approach, showing that the tentative steps taken thus far in instruction for critical thinking are as yet far from sufficient to bring about the desired outcome – people who are willing and able to think critically about their own deeply held beliefs – may go a long way towards motivating more substantial and more fruitful efforts. Courses in critical thinking (informal logic/practical logic/critical reasoning) have been offered in New Zealand universities for well over a decade. Now that the community of critical thinking course graduates in New Zealand is many thousands wide and several years deep, it may well be feasible to carry out some of the necessary research here.

As for excluded subjects, from fairly early on in my doctoral research it became clear that the number of topics that seem to hold promise to critical thinking surpasses the space I had available several times over. The ground looks very fertile indeed. Although many avenues presented themselves, apart from the subjects that I eventually included in this thesis, I found literature on modern non-confessional religious education, and psychological and sociological work on religious conversion and on religious socialization, indoctrination, and persuasion, especially promising.

Teaching for critical thinking about worldviews could profit from conversion research since one goal of such education would be to facilitate shifting between worldviews in a timely and structured manner. Additional insight could come from familiarity with socialization, indoctrination and persuasion techniques normally used by religions and other worldviews, and even by “anti-cult” or “deprogramming” groups. All of these subjects could be used both to teach students about the process of acquiring and authorizing worldviews – a lesson that ought to promote a more critical stance towards one’s own worldview – and to help create educational interventions that are in tune with the rational and non-rational fundamentals of the destabilization, modification or abandonment of given worldviews, the acquisition of new worldviews, and the needs of those who go through these processes as well as those who facilitate them.

Debates concerning confessional and non-confessional forms of religious education mirror several of the topics I touched upon, particularly in my discussion of the demarcation of the academic study of religion and its distinction from theological studies, but there is much more to religious education that is of potential value to critical thinking than that. In some respects, scholarship on religious education represents a half-way house between the research oriented academic study of religion and the pedagogy oriented critical thinking, at least as far as primary and secondary schooling is concerned. Lessons learned in this field could transfer to critical thinking, helping to incorporate a worldview element into critical thinking instruction at school.

Epilogue

In my discussion of critical thinking in Chapters Two and Three I thought it appropriate to quote Robin Barrow and then Trudy Govier about abortion (pp. 45, 62). Using abortion as an example, Barrow highlights the inadequacy of standard critical thinking instruction when it comes to difficult emotionally charged and important moral questions. Govier's words help explain this inadequacy. Alternative positions on issues like abortion spring from and rely on different sets of background beliefs, ultimately: different worldviews. So far, the standard approach to critical thinking instruction has not been giving enough attention to the application of critical thought to worldviews or to the students' own deeply held or fundamental beliefs.

The popular debate over abortion in America has been given so much media attention that it has become a cultural icon of sorts. This highly visible debate includes such an abundance of morally significant faulty reasoning that it is no surprise to find it used again and again in writing on critical thinking and in critical thinking textbooks. Admittedly, most references to it remain superficial: It is used to teach about various fallacies, and it does this job well. Few within the confines of the standard approach take the extra step to stress, like Barrow does, that critical thinking about abortion, and issues like it, takes much more than basic argument analysis and fallacy identification skills. Nevertheless, underlying this common usage is, I believe, a recognition – mostly implicit, at times unconscious – that critical thinking must be able to deal with complex and morally pressing issues like abortion. If it cannot, its value as an educational ideal – as the educational cognate of rationality (Siegel, 1988, p. 30) – is substantially diminished.

Several troubling parallels can be drawn between the debate over abortion and the account of Major Trapp and his men with which I opened this work. Ignoring the

disparity of scale, both involve violence and murder perpetrated by uncritical belief in an equally uncritical worldview. The murder of abortion clinic staff by Christians can also be used to tell the story of the implication of worldviews in perpetrators' reasoning, the strong unnoticed and uncriticized influence they exert thereto, their insularity, and the abominable consequences of this kind of belief. Abortion is not unique in this respect. As I claimed at the outset, there is hardly a conflict or controversy of note in which similar worldview characteristics cannot be identified. Luckily, not all of them end in murder. But many do. Others lead to lesser unnecessary evils.

Barrow's admonition concerning the need to teach critical thinking where and when it counts must apply to many such cases. Should schooling devote time to teach about the Holocaust? Undoubtedly. Should it devote time to abortion? Arguably so. But the list of dangerous yet attractive beliefs or conceptions of reality is too long to be covered by any stretch of the imagination. It is also a list that is forever changing, renewing, adapting. Limiting focus to proximate threats will leave education forever attempting to catch up, always years behind the threat of the hour. The problem here is a general one, and it will admit only of a general solution. Teaching about proximate threats is at best a stopgap measure. What we are really after is a pedagogy for critical thought not for any particular set of beliefs, and not for disembodied arguments, but for any and all worldviews: a general critical thinking pedagogy that gives worldviews the attention they demand.

In a paper on the evaluation of the credibility of sources in critical thinking, Earl Carlson (1995, p. 40) wrote that he "found no really good models of how to deal with the full range of issues involved in selecting among alternative epistemologies, or ways of knowing." Questions revolving around the rational evaluation of worldviews have been central to the academic study of religion since its inception and relevant material is abundant. To date, no simple solution has presented itself. Instead, and perhaps by default, the academic study of religion has opted for substitutes that happened to be at hand. These are less elegant replacements agreeable to all, than

make-due compromises. Together they make for a continually expanding chart of treacherous waters, in the form of method and theory discourses, and in-depth studies of religions and worldviews. The academic study of religion is no Holy Grail. Still, it is well placed to warn neophytes about the dangers of various courses of action in the hope that future navigators will survive their voyages less scathed. The critical thinking community ignores this valuable resource to its own disadvantage.

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Appendix: Critical Thinking Courses in New Zealand

The following are course descriptions of critical thinking courses found in official university websites on January 5, 2007. All courses are offered in philosophy departments. All philosophy departments offer one course, and all courses are in the introductory (100) level.

The University of Auckland – “Critical Thinking”

An introduction to the construction and analysis of arguments. The aim is to help students develop the ability to evaluate other people's reasoning, as well as the ability to construct good arguments of their own. We will use examples from many sources, including editorials and letters to the editor, advertisements and political debates. A variety of kinds of argument will be considered, along with the various ways in which they can go wrong. The course deals with logic informally. (The University of Auckland, 2007)

The University of Waikato – “Critical Reasoning”

This paper helps students engage critically with arguments encountered both inside and outside the University, especially in politics and in the media. It will assist them with interpretation of arguments, identifying and clarifying premises, conclusions and inferences, and recognising unstated assumptions. In addition, it will develop their ability to construct persuasive arguments of their own. (The University of Waikato, 2007)

Massey University – “Critical Thinking”

This paper examines the structure of arguments, using non-formal methods to determine whether an argument is good, or whether it may be flawed.

(Massey University, 2007)

Victoria University – “Critical Thinking”

This course provides an introduction to the theory of critical thinking.

Students will learn how to evaluate arguments and weigh up the evidence in support of a conclusion. Students will also learn how to make rational decisions based on the hypotheses they come to believe after consideration of such arguments. (Victoria University, 2007)

University of Canterbury – “Truth and Reason”

An introduction to critical thinking. (University of Canterbury, 2007a)

Thinking rationally involves many skills. In the first half of the course you will be studying what is called formal logic, acquiring the ability to recognise and produce good deductive arguments. The second half of the course develops practical skills in reasoning and examines ideas about truth. Have you ever heard someone arguing about something and been convinced the person was wrong, but not been able to explain why? This part of the course will give you general tools for evaluating and criticising any arguments-political, ethical, academic, or those of your family and friends. We will also consider such questions about truth as “Can we ever know the truth?” “Can

something be true for me but false for you?” and “Is it always good to know the truth?” (University of Canterbury, 2007b)

Lincoln University – “Logic and Critical Reasoning”

An introduction to fundamental skills and techniques of logic and critical thinking including the identification, analysis and evaluation of arguments, the study of fallacies in argument, and basic features of deductive and inductive reasoning. (Lincoln University, 2007)

University of Otago – “Critical Thinking”

This paper aims to educate students in clear thinking and rational argument. Topics covered include: how to sort out good arguments from bad ones; techniques for testing the validity of an argument; common fallacies of argument; and the distinction between science and pseudoscience. (University of Otago, 2007)