CHAPTER 2

'Religion'

Introduction

Any attempt to reconstruct ancient ideologies and worldviews must engage with the imposition of modern conceptual frameworks to schematize the data. If scholars understand those ancient data to fall under the category of "religion," that significantly impacts the frameworks over which we choose to clothe their reconstructions.[1] Every time I refer to religious *texts*, religious *beliefs*, religious *practices*, and any other religious domains of experience, I evoke an entire suite of conceptual structures that may be unwanted. Far beyond simply shaping our discourse about these issues and the conclusions we reach, when these frameworks move beyond being provisional heuristics that are consistently critiqued and compared to others, they become, over the years, cemented into our conceptual architecture and they govern how we are able to *think* about them.

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[1] For some examples of how the data can be obscured by the simple imposition of the framework of "religion," see Brent Nongbri, "Dislodging 'Embedded' Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope," *Numen* 55.4 (2008): 440–60.

At that point, they become "stultifying conventions"[2] that might not only evade detection, but might effectively marshal academic consensus and other power structures against uprooting.[3]

A current example of such a convention within contemporary scholarship related to the Hebrew Bible and the archaeology of early Israel and Judah is the putative dichotomy of "official" and "popular" (or "folk") religion.[4] According to William Dever, a well known proponent of this framework, "there is a rather sharp dichotomy between what most of the writers and editors of the Hebrew Bible prescribe as the 'religion of Israel' and what we can now describe as the reality of religious practices in many other circles."[5] Dever calls the ideologies of the biblical writers and editors of "Book religion," which operates in stark contrast to "folk religion." The product of this dichotomy is an arbitrary and artificial compartmentalization and hierarchization of the data. Much modern and European/American scholarship related to religion tends toward such binary modes of thinking, in no small part because they facilitate the clear and convenient delimitation and delineation of concepts and categories.

This chapter and the next two will construct the case that a variety of frameworks have critically undermined scholarly attempts to penetrate the dense fogs of temporal, cultural, linguistic, and ideological disparity that obscure our view of ancient perspectives on deities and

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[2] This is drawn from comments from Benson Saler on the use of definitions in anthropological analysis: "Explicit definitions are explicit heuristics: they guide or impel us in certain directions. By doing so they tend to divert our attention from information beyond the channels they cleave, and so choke off possibilities. That can sometimes be something of an advantage, since it facilitates focused and orderly attention to one set of possibilities at a time. But it is only an advantage if heuristics are evaluated and compared relative to situational applications. If heuristics are not deemed provisional, subjected to criticism, and compared to alternative, they may well become stultifying conventions" (Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* [New York: Berghahn Books, 2000], 74–75).

[3] This scholarship is overwhelmingly produced by elite, white, straight, Western, males, which privileges a small set of perspectives that tend to be more closely tied to the power structures that have given shape to the contemporary conceptualization of religion.

[4] See Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "'Popular' Religion and 'Official' Religion: Practice, Perception, Portrayal," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, ed. Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 37–58.

[5] William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 90.

their relationships to humans. While those fogs will always obscure our reconstruction of ancient perspectives to one degree or another, scholarship can certainly identify, negotiate, and attempt to mitigate the influences of the modern lenses that most significantly distort the way those reconstructions take shape. In order to attempt just that, these three chapters will engage and interrogate the definition and development of the modern concept of religion and of the ancient concepts of agency, personhood, and of deity, concepts inarguably foundational to the conceptualization of divine agency. That modern concept bears on this chapter's analysis because it essentializes religion as fundamentally about (1) belief and (2) deity, and that essentialism has greatly impacted the ways religion, ritual, and worship have been understood and engaged in contemporary scholarship.[6]

While it is conventional at the beginning of an evaluation like this to define terms, it is precisely that practice of definition that often facilitates the "sharp dichotomies" that give rise to these methodological pitfalls.[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein observed that in the contemporary discourse of

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[6] See pages 114–19 below. As an example, David Morgan argues, "Focus on 'belief' as a set of teachings derives from the creedal tradition of Christianity, which was intensified by Protestantism. From there, belief passed beyond the realm of religion into the philosophy of language, where it came to be strictly defined in terms of the truth-value proposition" (Morgan, "Introduction: *The Matter of Belief*," in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan [New York: Routledge, 2010], 1).

[7] To illustrate just how firm a grasp Aristotelian essentialism has on our intuitions about how categories form and function, note one of Charles Darwin's largely unmet expectations regarding the influence his theory of natural selection would have on the fields of biology and taxonomy: "When the views entertained in this volume on the origin of species, or when analogous views are generally admitted, we can dimly foresee that there will be a considerable revolution in natural history. Systematists will be able to pursue their labours as at present; but they will not be incessantly haunted by the shadowy doubt whether this or that form be in essence a species. This I feel sure, and I speak after experience, will be no slight relief. The endless disputes whether or not some fifty species of British brambles are true species will cease. Systematists will have only to decide (not that this will be easy) whether any form be sufficiently constant and distinct from other forms, to be capable of definition; and if definable, whether the differences be sufficiently important to deserve a specific name" (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* [London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1859], 484, quoted in David L. Hull, "The Effect of Essentialism on Taxonomy—Two Thousand Years of Stasis (I)," *BJPS* 15.60 [1965]: 315). Darwin was commenting on the science of taxonomy, but since even before Aristotle, conceptual categorization has been governed by the frameworks of that field. Hull notes that, despite the fact that a revolution did occur in natural history, "a spectre of essentialism continues to haunt the taxonomist." Note the resonance of that comment with those of Jonathan Jong: "the ghost of Aristotle haunts us still, and we intuit that the only adequate definition of religion is one which specifies the essence of religion, that lists the necessary and sufficient conditions for a phenomenon to count as religious." (Jong, "On (not) defining (non)religion," 16).

definition, "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it."[8] This chapter will provide a convenient case study for prototype theory and related principles from cognitive linguistics. Its goal will be to show that the frames through which many modern scholars of the Hebrew Bible look at the concept of religion—and thus the ideologies of early Israelites and Judahites—have a uniquely Protestant and European shape that serves primarily to distort and has no heuristic value for this thesis' interrogation of the Hebrew Bible.

Creating Religion

The purpose of this section is to outline the process by which the modern concept of religion developed. The current conventional understanding of religion is quite distinct from those of the past. It will be argued that that process was not one of the progressive unveiling of a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon that has always existed and that we have only now come to more fully understand, but that the concept is a cultural reification. I briefly outline that process of reification as it is understood by scholars today, arranging discussion around the history of the etymological origin of the English word "religion": the Latin *religio*.[9] Several words appear to have been used in Greek and Latin antiquity to refer to concepts variously associated with the modern notion of religion (for example, *pietas*, *fides*, *lex*, *secta*, *cultus*, *colore*, θρεσκεία, λατρεία,

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[8] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1.114.

[9] The two most common etymologies for *religio*, deriving from Cicero and from Lucretius, respectively, are *re-legere*, "to gather together again," "to arrange again," or "to re-read," and *re-ligare*, "to tie together again," or "to re-bind." The latter, having been picked up by the Christian author Lactantius, has had far greater circulation in modern treatments of the term, but the scholarship has recently tended toward the priority of the former. See Sarah F. Hoyt, "The Etymology of Religion," *JAOS* 32.2 (1912): 126–29; W. Warde Fowler, *Roman Essays and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), 7–14; Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 23–26; George J. Szemler, "*Religio*, Priesthoods and Magistracies in the Roman Republic," *Numen* 18.2 (1971): 103–31 (esp. 121–29); Lawrence A. Springer, "The Role of *Religio*, *Solvo* and *Ratio* in Lucretius," *CW* 71.1 (1977): 55–61; René Gothóni, "*Religio* and *Superstitio* Reconsidered," *ARP* 21.1 (1994): 37–46; Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 64–68; Anselm Haverkamp, "*Religio*: Zur doppelzüngigen Wurzel institutioneller Bindung," *Rhetorik* 34.1 (2015): 45–51.

εὐσέβια), but my primary object of inquiry in this section will be the Latin *religio*. Although I am more directly concerned with the conceptual referent of "religion" than with the lexeme itself, it is in the Reformation and Enlightenment usage of *religio* and the English "religion" that that modern conceptual package was primarily formulated.[10] While I do not deign to define religion myself in this thesis, for descriptive purposes in this chapter I will provisionally adopt the conventional modern understanding of religion as an organized set of "beliefs" and practices related to deity and its worship. Going forward, this is the general concept to which I will refer with the shorthand term "religion." This outline cannot possibly be comprehensive, rather I will focus on those aspects of the development most salient to the contemporary understanding of the concept of religion and its application to the Hebrew Bible.[11]

Pre-Modern Religio

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[10] For more thorough discussions, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Despland, *La religión en occident*; John Bossy, "Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim," *PP* 95 (1982): 3–18; Ernst Feil, *Religio: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ernst Feil, "From Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*: Elements of a Transformation between 1550–1650," in *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality*, ed. Michel Despland and Gérard Vallée (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 31–43; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27–54; Ernst Feil, *Religio: Zweiter Band. Dei Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs zwischen Reformation und Rationalismus (ca. 1540–1620)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84; Ernst Feil, *Religio: Dritter Band. Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001); Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 57–122; Nongbri, *Before Religion*.

[11] The development of that concept, it should be noted, is neither linear, consistent, nor particularly amenable to schematization (see Feil, "From Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 41). Semantic content is rarely adequately clear or consistent in common language use, even to the writer or speaker, and an author's assertion of this or that definition in their text is often a rhetorical tool more than the product of a critical and insightful examination of semantic intent. The ideas discussed below were scattered around time and space in a variety of manifestations with varying degrees of maturity and salience, and the history I describe is simply one tracing of ideological points of contact. The main concern is not so much the formative players and events, but the presence or absence of certain principles largely believed today to undergird the concept of religion.

Prior to its use in Medieval Christianities, *religio* was predominantly used in a generic and abstract sense to refer to responsibilities and obligations to act in ways consonant with the sensibilities and the social order of Roman intelligentsia. An example of this generic sense is found in *Curculio*, by the second century BCE comic playwright Plautus: *revocat me ilico, vocat me ad cenam; religio fuit, denegare nolui*, "He calls me back directly and invites me to dinner. I had scruples [*religio*], I could not decline."[12] Julius Caesar used the word to refer to the obligation of an oath.[13] For Cicero, *religio* was a virtue that contrasted with *superstitio*, while Lucretius pejoratively described it as a synonym.[14] Ernst Feil, the most prolific contemporary author on the topic, insists the broad but consistent semantic sense of *religio* from the Roman period down to the end of the sixteenth century was "the careful and even fearful fulfilment of all that man owes to God or to the gods."[15] Although reference to deity certainly became more salient in the Common Era, that was not unilateral.[16] Even Augustine in the early fifth century CE hesitated to recommend the word for use

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[12] Plautus, *Curculio* 349–350 (Nixon, LCL), quoted in Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 27. The 2011 Loeb edition reads, "it would have been against my principles, so I didn't want to refuse" (Plautus, *Curculio* 350 [de Melo, LCL]).

[13] Julius Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Civili* (Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, 1886), 1.11: "Erat iniqua condicio postulare, ut Caesar Arimino l excederet atque in provinciam reverteretor, ipsum et provincias et legiones alienas tenere ; exercitum Caesaris velle dimitti, delectus habere ; polliceri, se in provinciam iturum, neque, ante quem diem iturus sit, definire, ut, si peracto consulatu Caesaris non profectus esset, nulia tamen mendacii religione obstrictus videretur; tempus vero colloquio non dare neque accessurum polliceri magnam pacis desperationem adferebat."

[14] See Herbert M. Howe, "The *Religio* of Lucretius," *CJ* 52.7 (1957): 329–33; Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 25–26; Juraj Franek, "Lucretius and the Modern Interdisciplinary Critique of Religion," *GLB* 16.1 (2011): 15–28. Scholars debate whether *religio* was anciently understood as an external pressure or an internal feeling of reverence. For the latter position, see Despland, *La religión en occident*, 26. Similarly, Smith interprets Cicero's usage to reflect "something interior to persons" (Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 26). Over and against this interpretation, Feil asserts, "'Religio' dürfte bei Cicero im Unterschied zur eher persönlichen, aber nicht innerlichen 'pietas' die mehr auf den äußeren Vollzug zielende Einstellung der Römer gegenüber den Göttern bedeuten, die verbal 'deos colore' heißt" (Feil, *Religio*, 49).

[15] Feil, "From Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 32. This is supported by Thomas Aquinas' comment that "The word religion is usually used to signify the activity by which man gives the proper reverence to God through actions which specifically pertain to divine worship, such as sacrifice, oblations, and the like" (Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 2.2.81.8).

[16] The second century CE Roman grammarian Sextus Pompeius Festus explained that, *Religiosus est non modico deorum sanctitatem magni estimans, sed etiam officiosus adversus homines*, "To be *religiosus* is not merely to hold the sanctity of the gods in great respect, but also to be dutifully obliging towards men" (Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significatu quae supersunt com Pauli epitome*, ed. Æmilius Thewrewk de Ponor [Budapest: Sumptibus Academiæ Litterarum Hungaricæ, 1889], 386, quoted in Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002], 4).

in reference to Christian worship of God owing to the fact that *religio* "is to be observed in dealing with human relationships, affinities and ties of every sort."[17]

That Roman usage was retained into Medieval Christianity even as a new sense developed in reference to monastic orders.[18] The "religious" were those who "dedicated their whole lives to the scrupulous and withdrawn service of God."[19] Alternatively, members of the priesthood not devoted to an order ("regulars") were designated "secular." During this period, *religio* continued to be used to refer to piety and the duties owed to God, although the usage in reference to monastic orders predominated.[20] The existence of those different religious orders may have facilitated the later

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[17] "Moreover, the very term *religio*, too, although it would seem to indicate more precisely not any worship, but the worship of God—and this is the reason why our translators have used it to render the Greek word *threskeia*—yet in Latin usage, and that not of the ignorant but of the most cultured also, we say that religion is to be observed in dealing with human relationships, affinities and ties of every sort. Hence this term does not secure us against ambiguity when used in discussing the worship paid to God. We cannot say confidently that *religio* means only the worship of God, since we should thus clearly be violating usage by abolishing one meaning of the word, namely, the observance of duties in human relationships" (Augustine, *City of God* 10.1 [Wiesen, LCL]). For more on Augustine's use of the word, see Feil, *Religio*, 68–75.

[18] This is the earliest definition of "religion" given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which suggests this was the word's most salient sense as it came into English from Anglo-French around 1200 CE. Cavanaugh cites John Bossy to the effect that "the ancient meaning of *religio* as duty or reverence 'disappeared' in the medieval period" (Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 64, citing Bossy, "Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim," 4), but this is challenged by Peter Biller, "Words and the Medieval Notion of 'Religion,'" *JEH* 36 (1985): 351–69, and Cavanaugh himself notes, "Bossy cannot be taken literally" (p. 64). Biller's own discussion, which seems to overcompensate for Bossy's emphasis on the monastic sense, is challenged by John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *AHR* 91 (1986): 546, n. 93. See also Jon Derek Halvorson, "*Religio* and Reformation: Johannes Justus Lansperger, O.Cart (1489/90–1539), and the Sixteenth Century Religious Question. Volume One" (PhD diss., Loyola University, 2008), 25–27.

[19] Feil, "From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 32. Canon 13 from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 CE prohibits the founding of new religions (*religionem*) on the grounds that the great variety already leads to confusion. It declares, *sed quicumque voluerit ad religionem converti, unam de approbatis assumat*, "Whoever wants to become a religious should enter one of the already approved orders" (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:242).

[20] This narrow sense for *religio* is found alongside other senses in two of Thomas Aquinas' apologetic works from the 1250s that defended entry into those orders: *Contra impugnantes dei cultum et religionem* (*Against Impugners of the Cult of God and Religion*) and *Contra retrahentes a religionis ingressu* (*Against Preventers of Entry into Religion*), which were published together in 1902 as Aquinas, *An Apology for the Religious Orders: Being a Translation from the Latin of Two of the Minor Works of the Saint*, ed. Rev. Father John Proctor (London: Sands & Co., 1902). For an attempt to soften the boundaries of *religio*, perhaps under the influence of the Roman sense, see French theologian Jacques de Vitry's contention: *Non solum hos qui seculo renunciant et transeunt ad religionem regulares iudicamus, set et omnes Christi fideles, sub euangelica regula domino famulantes et ordinate sub uno summo et supremo abbate uiuentes, possumus dicere regulare*, "We consider to be religious not only those who renounce the world and go over to a religious life, but we can also call regulars all the faithful of Christ who serve the Lord under the evangelical rule and live in an orderly way under the one highest and supreme Abbot" (Jacques de Vitry, *Historia occidentalis, XXXIV*, ed. John F. Hinnebusch [Fribourg: The University Press, 1972], 165–66, quoted in Giles Constable, "The Diversity of

development of *religio* as a genus comprising many different species, although the semantic focus

is still on external performances, and the notion of *religio* as a system of beliefs is entirely absent.

Religio was more frequently interiorized and universalized in the fifteenth century as humanist

Christians applied Neoplatonist frameworks to Christianity to formulate a view of *religio* as an

innate impulse to God that was common to all humanity.[21] This served the humanistic concern for

unity and peace in an era of increasing ethnic and ideological discord. Germany's Nicholas of Cusa

(1401–1464) and Italy's Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) were particularly prominent among these

Neoplatonist Christians, and they described the multiplicity of different rites and practices among

the peoples of the world as a product of the filtering influence of each person's own experiences

and relationship with God.[22] Writing in 1453 in response to the news of the fall of Constantinople

to the Turks, Cusa's narrative pleads to God to manifest himself to the world so that violence

would cease when all came to know that "there is only one *religio* in a variety of rites."[23] Some

twenty years later, Ficino described *religio* as a universal constant, as natural to humanity as

barking is to dogs and neighing to horses. Despite the illusion of pluriformity, he writes in

Theologica Platonica, "All human opinions, all responses, all customs, change—except

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Religious Life and Acceptance of Social Pluralism in the Twelfth Century," in *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick*, ed. Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985], 45, and in Halvorson, "*Religio* and Reformation," 26).

[21] See Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 34–35; Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 11–14; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 70–71; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 87–89; Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation. Volume 3: Renaissance, Reformation, Humanism*, trans. James O. Duke (Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 23–29.

[22] Harrison identifies two reasons for religious diversity in Cusa's writings: "First, the relationship between each individual and God is unique, and it is to be expected that expressions of the divine encounter will differ. Second, on account of the chasm between finite and infinite, all 'objective' descriptions of divine reality will only be relatively true" (Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 11).

[23] "Non est nisi religio una in rituum varietate," *De pace fidei* 1.6 (Jasper Hopkins, trans., *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa. Volume 1* [Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001], 635). In context, the statement reads, "If you will deign to do the foregoing, the sword will cease, as will also the malice of hatred and all evils; and all will know that there is only one religion in a variety of rites."

religione."[24] Despite subtle differences, the two authors' conceptualizations of *religio* shared fundamental similarities, including the conceptualization of *religio* as internal and its loosing from its cultural moorings and related rites and practices.[25] Conceptually, this was not an enormous leap, but it served to unify humanity—for them[26]—under a single underlying transcultural and transhistorical virtue, and it set the stage for *religio*'s further detachment from rites and practices during the Protestant Reformation.[27]

At the outset of the Reformation, Western Europeans broadly divided the traditions of the world into four groups: "the heathens, the Jews, the Christians, and the Mohammedans."[28] They were referred to not with *religio*, but *leges*, "laws," or *sectae*, "sects." The former referred to their requirements and ordinances, while the latter, coming from the Latin *sequi* ("to follow"), referred broadly to groups of followers.[29] *Religio* was generally used in reference to Christianity, and the

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[24] *Theologica Platonica* 14.9. Adapted from Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 13.

[25] As Smith points out, Aquinas appears to use *religio* to refer to this "inner motivation towards worshipping God," among other meanings (*The Meaning and End of Religion*, 33).

[26] It should be emphasized that these texts and the perspectives within them are not understood as reflective of an objective reality, but of the contextualized and rhetorical perspectives of largely white male elites, which has an inherently distorting effect.

[27] Cavanaugh notes, "What is novel about Cusa's use of *religio* is that ritual practices are not essential to it" (Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 70). The French humanist Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) advocated for a similar conceptualization of religion, listing sixty-seven propositions he believed to be common to all the world's faiths. If they could but abandon the outward performances and practices, all of humanity could be peacefully united (cf. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 72).

[28] This according to, among others, Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576), a highly influential Italian scientist who wrote in 1552, "Leges autem quatuor, Idolorum, Iudaeorum, Christianorum & Mahumetanorum" (Hieronymus Cardanus, *De Subtilitate XI* 3.551a, quoted in Feil, "From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 34). For a thorough discussion of Cardano and his understanding of *religio*, see Feil, *Religio: Zweiter Band*, 49–74.

[29] Feil, "From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 33–34. Cf. Marsilius of Padua's 1324 publication, *Defensor pacis*, which makes use of *religio*, *leges*, and *sectae*. The translator, Alan Gewirth, provides the following description of Padua's usage of the terminology he renders "religion" in his introduction: "'Religion' (*secta*). Marsilius uses this term regularly to refer to any system of religious law; in this sense he also uses the term 'law' (*lex*) itself. Thus at one point he writes: 'such are divine laws for the most part, which are called by the common name "religions" (*sectae*).' This is the third meaning of 'law' which Marsilius distinguishes, where the term means 'the standard containing admonitions for voluntary human acts according as these are ordered toward glory or punishment in the future world. . . . In this sense of the term law all religions (*sectae*), such as that of Mohammed or of the Persians, are called laws in whole or in part.' . . . Thomas Aquinas uses *secta* to mean heresy, although sometimes he uses it for any school, like that of the Peripatetics. According to Isidore of Seville, who also couples the term with heretical error, *secta* etymologically is derived from that which one follows and upholds" (Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, trans. Alan Gewirth [New York: Columbia University Press, 1956], xc–xci).

central concern relative to that usage was distinguishing true from false religion, not in the sense of a set of beliefs and practices based on false propositions, but rather in reference to the means and the object of that worship. Huldrych Zwingli's 1525 publication, *Vera et Falsa Religione Commentarius*,[30] dealt with "true and false *religio* as displayed by Christians,"[31] and was concerned primarily with characterizing devotion to any person or institution apart from God, whether Christian or otherwise, as false *religio*. John Calvin's 1536 *Christianae Religionis Institutio*[32] describes *religio* as "confidence in God coupled with serious fear—fear, which both includes in it willing reverence, and brings along with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed by the law."[33]

These publications manifest an understanding of *religio* as the proper expression of piety, much in line with similar usage in earlier periods, apart from their emphasis on the appropriateness of the worship, which was by no means incidental. After all, the primary concern of the early reformers was the mediatory role the Catholic Church asserted in the salvation of humanity as well as the ecclesiastical abuses that resulted from its unilateral authority. That brand of worship was now *religio non grata*. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others appealed over and against the Church to the Bible as the supreme authority on all matters of belief, and from that authority they formulated the principles of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*, with which they then

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[30] Smith suggests that "Commentary on Genuine and Spurious Piety" is a better translation than "Commentary on True and False Religion" (Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 37). This is based on the evolution in meaning of more than just the word *religio*. The concept of truth also underwent a significant change as a result of the Enlightenment. Smith later states, "In 1500 if one asked about a person, *ejusne philosophia vera est?* this would have meant, 'Is his love of wisdom genuine?' Came the Enlightenment, and it meant (and means), 'Is his philosophy true?'" (Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 40).

[31] Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 55. See also Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 36; Willem J. van Asselt, "The Prohibition of Images and Protestant Identity," in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclash: Struggle for Religious Identity*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 304–05.

[32] Smith argues that "Grounding in Christian Piety" is the best translation of this title (Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 37).

[33] Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 54.

inveighed against the authority of the Church and its reliance on priesthood and practice. *Sola scriptura* rejected the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church, while *sola gratia* and *sola fide* denounced the soteriological efficacy of human works.

Reformers argued that salvation was "by grace, through faith," but the precise mechanism remained unclear. Sensitive to the need to avoid the Pelagian notion that human works played a role in effecting salvation, many asserted the doctrine of election, or the notion that God arbitrarily picked some for salvation.[34] Over and against this view was the doctrine of Jacobius Arminius (1560–1609), which held that salvation was contingent upon mere intellectual assent to the right theological formula—"I believe"—an act that was asserted to fall short of a "work," but still preserve the role of human agency.[35] This gave rise to the Arminian controversy, which helped shift Europe's theological focus from God to doctrine, and splintered "Christian religion" as a reference to piety directed at Christ into the sundry "Christian religions," now in reference to the various groups and their particular systems of belief. The result of the roiling ideological boil of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the reification of a conceptualization of genuine Christian faith—one that begins to approximate the modern notion—as a community of believers bound not by shared rituals and ecclesiastical authorities, but by shared sets of 'beliefs' about God. Cavanaugh notes, "The earliest form of pluralization in the modern sense is found in the 1590s, with Richard Hooker from the Anglican side and Robert Parsons from the Catholic side writing about religions as objective and opposing sets of doctrines."[36] Note religion is used still in almost

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[34] Although the most salient aspect of most contemporary conceptualizations of Calvinism, this doctrine did not originate with Calvin. As Harrison notes, "Augustine and many prominent schoolmen advocated election in this form, and Calvin's fellow reformers Luther and Zwingli were, if more circumspect, certainly no less committed to it than Calvin himself" (Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 183, n. 8).

[35] Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 24; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 73.

[36] Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 74, citing Bossy, "Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim," 5–6, who states, "In important works, both started off with the traditional sense of religion as worship or worshipfulness:

exclusive reference to Christianity. Its eventual—though still limited—democratization would give rise to the discipline of comparative religion, or the study of "world religions."

The conceptual battlefield of the Reformation also catalyzed the development of the modern concept of the state.[37] At the dawn of the Reformation, sovereignty was broadly divided into "temporal" and "spiritual" domains, but both were subsumed within the Church,[38] with civil authorities functioning as the "police department of the Church."[39] One of Luther's goals was to "extricate the Church from its entanglement in coercive power,"[40] but that hierarchy had been challenged many times in the centuries leading up to the Reformation.[41] Indeed, preexisting tensions between civil authorities and the Church contributed much to the local successes of the Reformation movement,[42] in no small part because temporal autonomy was immensely attractive

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'Christian religion' or 'Catholic religion.' Both ended up by talking about 'religion*s*': a plurality of objective entities erected around a set of doctrines or principles and therefore true or not true, but above all different."

[37] That is, the state as "a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme political authority within a certain defined territory" (Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume 2: The Age of Reformation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 353, quoted in Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *MT* 11.4 [1995]: 398).

[38] John Neville Figgis notes that the Church, "took over from the Roman Empire its theory of the absolute and universal jurisdiction of the supreme authority, and developed it into the doctrine of the *plenitudo potestatis* of the Pope, who was the supreme dispenser of law" (John Neville Figgis, *Studies of Political Thought From Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907], 4).

[39] Figgis, *Studies of Political Thought*, 5, quoted in Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,'" 398. Luther still understood civil authority to derive from God: "I say then, since the temporal power is ordained of God to punish evil-doers and to protect them that do well, it should therefore be left free to perform its office without hindrance through the whole body of Christendom without respect of persons, whether it affect pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns or anybody else" (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman, 55 vols. [St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86], 44.130).

[40] Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,'" 399. See also Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 14: "Luther's objections to the status and powers of the Church also led him to repudiate every claim by the ecclesiastical authorities to exercise any jurisdiction over temporal affairs. It is sometimes said that this involved him in defending the separate jurisdiction of the State as distinct from the Church' (Waring, 1910, p. 80). His central belief about the Church, however, was rather that, since it is nothing more than a *congregatio fidelium*, it cannot properly be said to possess any separate jurisdiction at all" (quoting Luther H. Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther* [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910], 80).

[41] For example, the Italian scholar Marsilius of Padua, drawing from Aristotle and other Classical thinkers, argued in 1324 that the Church should be limited in its jurisdiction to moral questions, with civil authorities maintaining the right to force (Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, trans. Alan Gewirth [New York: Columbia University Press, 1956], 113–26).

[42] Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,'" 401.

to those civil authorities frustrated with Catholic (and papal) hegemony.[43] This struggle for autonomy catalyzed the so-called "Wars of Religion" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and as the faiths fought, fractured, and split, princes and other civil authorities were able to wrest a great deal of power from the Church, laying the groundwork for the further privatization of religion[44] and the accession of the secular state.[45]

Modern Religion

The Enlightenment's prioritization of the light of reason in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cemented these developments into the foundation of the modern concept of religion.[46]

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[43] This relationship was symbiotic, as the support of civil authorities gave the Protestants access to power and resources that made the success of their movement possible. Nongbri notes, "What makes the reformers of the early sixteenth century different is that they were able to garner enough material support so that when doctrinal conflicts (or economic conflicts or legal conflicts) arose, they could resist repression by Catholic authorities. The effects of the reformers' protests thus went beyond the realm of what we might call 'religious ideas.' When Luther began calling for local rulers to resist papal authority, they listened to him; Frederick the Wise of Saxony provided Luther sanctuary from ecclesiastical authorities when he was excommunicated, and within fifteen years the list of princes and cities supporting Luther and his reforms was substantia" (Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 97).

[44] I am, of course, painting here with a rather broad brush. Individuals within different socio-religious groups were working in various ways before, during, and after this time period to privatize and democratize religious practice.

[45] This process of inverting the sovereignty of ecclesiastical authority over civil authority would continue on through the Enlightenment, and it would ultimately be responsible for the construction of the secular state as "a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme political authority within a certain defined territory" (Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 353, quoted in Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,'" 398). As Cavanaugh notes, the contemporary tendency puts the cart before the horse in asserting that, "Our early modern ancestors were right to secularize public discourse in the interest of minimizing the ill effects of religious disagreement" (Jeffrey Stout, *Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981], 241). In reality, the "Wars of Religion" "were fought largely for the aggrandizement of the emerging State over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order" (Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,'" 398). Note the resonance of this developing concept of true religion as confined to a moral purview under civil authority with Julius Wellhausen's reconstruction of pre-priestly Israelite authority: "Hebrew antiquity shows absolutely no tendencies towards a hierocracy; power is wielded solely by the heads of families and of tribes, and by the kings, who exercise control over religious worship also, and appoint and depose its priests. The influence possessed by the latter is purely moral; the Torah of God is not a document in their hands which guarantees their own position, but merely an instruction for others in their mouths; like the word of the prophets, it has divine authority but not political sanction, and has validity only in so far as it is voluntarily accepted" (Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies [Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885], 5).

[46] As with all intellectual movements, it was far from monolithic or easily delineable. "Early Enlightenment was ambiguous, tentative and multi-vocal. It tended to have multiple and sometimes contradictory allegiances. It was a new stage of emergent practical learning attempting to recognize and interpret itself" (Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists* [London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009], 15). On the Enlightenment and its engagement with religion, see C. J.

Protestant theology had championed revealed religion over and against human reason, a corrupt product of the Fall[47] that was insufficient to bring humanity to a salvific knowledge of God (cf. Rom 1:18–23[48]). The ascent of the natural sciences and the growing interest in newly "discovered" cultures in Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas,[49] however, gave rise to an intellectual movement that challenged the privileging of the mysteries of Christianity, and asserted all truth must be amenable to rational examination. Where Reformers had challenged the arbitrariness of Catholic authority, Deists, Platonists, Freethinkers, and others—mainly in England—began to challenge the arbitrariness of Protestant revealed religion.[50]

Betts, *Early Deism in France: From the so-called 'déistes' of Lyon (1564) to Voltaire's* Letters philosophiques *(1734)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984); Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 61–98; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ernst Feil, "From Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 31–43; S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Wayne Hudson, *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).

[47] A "natural" knowledge of God, according to Calvin, was inscribed on the hearts of all humans (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge [London: James Clark and Co., 1962], 56, quoted in Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 177, n. 9), but it served only to leave them "without excuse" (Rom 1:20). Luther asserted, "reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil" (Luther, *Luther's Works*, 19.55).

[48] NRSV: "18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles."

[49] See Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 14–38.

[50] At first, compromise was sought, but as Enlightenment thinkers distanced themselves from Protestant contexts, the value of revealed religion was effaced. Early philosophers like Francis Bacon (1561–1626) asserted the complementary function of revealed and natural religion, while the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant published *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson [New York: Harper, 1960]). For more on this dichotomy, see Feil, "From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*," 37–41; "Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 28–60; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 74–85; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 93–105.

An influential member of this rationalist movement was Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648)[51]—often styled the "father of English Deism"—who sought to distill all the known religions down to their "common notions," which resulted in his "Five undeniable Propositions":

> I. *That there is one Supreme God.*
> II. *That he ought to be worshipped.*
> III. *That Vertue and Piety are the chief Parts of Divine Worship.*
> IV. *That we ought to be sorry for our Sins, and repent of them.*
> V. *That Divine Goodness doth dispense Rewards and Punishments both in this Life, and after it.*[52]

The Protestant contours of the five propositions are glaring even while the Christian concepts of original sin and a savior are omitted in the interest of extending the category to include non-Western and newly recognized cultures.[53] That the essence of religion is asserted to be propositional presupposes that religion is fundamentally a set of truth claims or beliefs, which was a conceptual innovation of the (at the time still active) Protestant Reformation. Herbert also reduces all religion down to beliefs that are monotheistic, moralistic, and soteriological, tracing

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[51] See Peter Byrne, "Religion and Religions," in *The World's Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland et al. (London: Routledge, 1988), 15–16; Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, 61–73; Michel Despland, *La religión en occident: évolution des idées et du vécu* (Héritage et projet 23; Montréal: Fides, 1979), 285–87; Roger Johnson, "Natural Religion, Common Notions, and the Study of Religions: Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648)," *Religion* 24.3 (1994): 213–24; William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75–78; Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 33–34.

[52] Edward L[d] Herbert of Cherbury, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles, and Causes of their Errors Consider'd*, trans. William Lewis (London: William Taylor, 1705), 3–4, quoted in Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 93–96 [Nongbri quotes the 1711 reprint]; cf. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 75, who quotes a different version: Lord Hebert of Cherbury, *De Religione Laici*, trans. and ed. Harold R. Hutcheson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944), 129. The Latin reads: (I.) *Esse Deum summum,* (II.) *Coli debere,* (III.) *Virtutem, Pietatemque esse præcipuas partes Cultus divini,* (IV.) *Dolendum esse ob peccata, ab iisque resipiscendum,* (V.) *Dari ex Bonitaie Iustitiâque divina præmium vel pœnam, tum in hac vitâ, tum post hanc vitam* (Edward Baron Herbert of Cherbury, *De religione gentiulivm, errorumque apud eos causis* [Amsterdam, 1663], 2).

[53] Schilbrack, "What *Isn't* Religion?" *JR* 93.3 [2013]: 307–09. See also Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 16: "The discovery of the New World opened the door to knowledge of previously unknown societies that did not fit in the traditional categories for analyzing religious phenomena: revealed religion, heresy, idolatry, and natural religion. To what extent were these categories transformed by this new knowledge?"

round the idealistic and rationalistic frame that English Neoplatonists were piecing back together from the remains of the Renaissance.[54] Herbert dismissed the rituals and practices of the "pagans" as priestly corruptions of the original forms of worship,[55] betraying rationalism's appropriation of Protestant anti-clericalism. (While his intellectual descendants would blaze a trail out of Reformation theology, they would take the conceptual frameworks of Protestantism with them.) Nevertheless, Herbert's distillation of religion to its common conceptual denominators—without explicit appeal to Christ—and his naturalistic account of priestly involvement marked an intellectual turning point toward rational explanations for religion, as well as toleration of religious diversity, which would increasingly invest authority in the organs of the state.

These two trajectories would find more clear expression in the works of freethinkers John Toland (1670–1722) and John Locke (1632–1704), respectively.[56] Toland gave his 1696 publication, *Christianity not Mysterious*, the subtitle *Or, a TREATISE Shewing, That there is nothing in the GOSPEL Contrary to REASON, Nor ABOVE it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd A MYSTERY*. Drawing his epistemology from Herbert, Locke, and Descartes, Toland insisted that the Christian gospel stood on reason alone and that paganism was to blame for corrupting that natural form of Christianity. Catholicism was the main target of his critique, but Anglicanism and Protestantism more broadly were also indicted. His book was widely vilified,

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[54] See page 99 below.

[55] Nongbri quotes further from the English translation of *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles*: "I must lay this down for an *Establisht Truth*, That the *Religion* of the Antient *Heathens* was not so absurd and stupid as is generally imagin'd. . . . When the *Heathens* had receiv'd the Notion of the Attributes of the *Supream* GOD mention'd before, there sprung up a Race of *Crafty Priests*, who not thinking it sufficient that there should be just one GOD in all this *Universe*, judg'd it would conduce much more to their *Interest*, to join and associate some others to this *Supream Deity*. . . . Their *Design* of Introducing other *Gods*, drove farther . . . They also expected to reap more Profit, and have larger Stipends from the various *Rites*, *Ceremonies*, and Sacred *Mysteries* which they contriv'd and divulg'd" (Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 94–95).

[56] Unfortunately, space does not allow for a fuller discussion of the contributions of René Descartes (1596–1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Charles Blount (1654–1693), Matthew Tindal (1656–1733), Anthony Collins (1679–1729), Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), and many others.

though, and new blasphemy laws were enacted the year following its release. Although he rejected the deist label, Toland is seen by many as having catalyzed the deist controversy of the eighteenth century.[57]

Deeply concerned with the potential for persecution and other abuses at the hands of ecclesiastical authority, Locke, while in exile in Holland, sought in his 1689 *A Letter Concerning Toleration* to "distinguish exactly the Business of Civil Government from that of Religion, and to settle the just Bounds that lie between the one and the other."[58] His rhetorical target may have been the idealized enforcement of religious unity asserted by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651),[59] or those Catholic authorities who sought to impose their own brand of religious unity, or both. In one of his main lines of argumentation, Locke asserted that, "The care of Souls cannot belong to the Civil Magistrate because his power consists only in outward force: But true and saving Religion consists in the inward persuasion of the Mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God."[60] While he still envisioned public worship under the purview of a state church, Locke sought for the spiritual autonomy of the individual and to free up space for purely civic interests, which he described as "life, liberty, health, and indolency of the body; and the possession of outward things,

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[57] See Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion*, 94–102. Hudson paints an intellectual profile of Toland in *Enlightenment and Modernity*, 4–5 and 15–16. See also Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 96. Just a year before, Locke, who was an acquaintance of Toland's and is thought to have read an early draft of *Christianity not Mysterious*, tried to mediate between the deist and anti-rationalist positions by arguing in *The reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) that the fundamental and rational doctrine of Jesus as Messiah consolidated both parties (John Locke, *The reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered by the scriptures* [London: Awnsham & Churchill, 1695]). Because of the political fallout of Toland's treatise, Locke would later have to distance himself from that conciliatory position.

[58] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (London: Awnsham & Churchill, 1689). On Locke's contribution to the development of religion, see Despland, *La religión en occident*, 340–43; Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 20–23; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 78–80; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 101–05.

[59] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, Or The Matter, Forme and Power of A Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651).

[60] Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), 9, quoted in Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 21; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 78; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 101.

such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like."[61] In a postscript to *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke suggests that one religion may be distinguished from another by their "Rule of Faith and Worship," which, based on the provided examples, seems to have meant their authoritative texts.[62]

The fact that this construction of civic space over and against increasingly private and interior religious space coincided with increased European expansionism is no accident.[63] While different campaigns were waged under different ideological banners, a rhetorical pattern emerges of colonialism as liberation from oppressive and uncivilized superstition at the hands of the shining light of democracy and its concomitant capitalism. Of course, this liberation also happened to open up new markets and facilitate the exploitation of new lands, peoples, and their resources. In the Reformation, prior to the development of the secular/religious dichotomy, that exploitation and enforced enculturation was justified on the grounds that Christianity had sovereignty over all creation. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with nascent secularism blinking and stepping into the sun, it became a campaign of liberation from barbarous and superstitious claims to sovereignty. The developing dichotomy of religion v. secularism was helping European imperialism find itself.[64]

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[61] Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 17, quoted in Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 79; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 102.

[62] "Thus Turks and Christians are of different Religions: because these take the *Holy Scriptures* to be the Rule of their Religion, and those the *Alcoran*. And for the same reason, there may be different Religions also even amongst Christians. The *Papists* and the *Lutherans*, tho' both of them profess faith in Christ, and are therefore called Christians, yet are not both of the same Religion: because These acknowledge nothing but the Holy Scriptures to be the Rule and Foundation of their Religion; Those take in also Traditions and the Decrees of Popes, and of these together make the Rule of their Religion" (Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 57–58, quoted in Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 103).

[63] Timothy Fitzgerald discusses the ways the lack of a secular/religious dichotomy made interaction with Amerindians a challenge to the Christian worldview and facilitated slavery and other oppressive regimes in Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 133–42.

[64] See Timothy Fitzgerald, "Critical religion and critical research on religion: Religion and politics as modern fictions," *CRR* 3.3 (2015): 303–19; Warren S. Goldstein, Rebekka King, and Jonathan Boyarin, "Critical theory of religion vs. critical religion," *CRR* 4.1 (2016): 3–7; Timothy Fitzgerald, "Critical religion and critical research on religion: A response to the April 2016 editorial," *CRR* 4.3 (2016): 307–13. For an interesting discussion regarding how this secular/religious dichotomy catalyzed the transformation of Shinto into a religion in nineteenth century Japan,

Conclusion

What this brief outline is intended to show is that, while certain elements of our contemporary conceptualization of religion certainly existed in the past, they were not compartmentalized into a discrete and delineable domain of existence. Rather, those constituent elements were independent and integral parts of the broader worldviews of the examined cultures.[65] The slow development of religion as a discrete domain of existence was also not a process of simply dividing the religious from the secular. Both domains qua independent domains were originally conceived within the sociopolitical matrices of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and that conception was not a natural decoupling, but an original ideological composition. This process represents a reification of the concept of religion by and within specific historical contexts.[66]

Defining Religion

see Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). Cf. Sarah Thal, "A Religion That Was Not a Religion: The Creation of Modern Shinto in Nineteenth-Century Japan," in *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*, ed. Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 100–14; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 116–18.

[65] For a recent discussion of atheism in the ancient world, see Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).

[66] An analogy could be drawn with the game of football. Irrespective of when or how we understand it to have developed as a separate and discrete game, if we look further into the past and find independent iterations of the kicking of a ball, or of running, or of a pitch, or of teams, we have not identified "football," just independent features that would later become constitutive parts of the game. Their coalescence into that game was not simply a process of naming, discovering, or identifying naturally occurring and related phenomena, but an intentional process of delineation, combination, and prescription. Those independent features also still exist outside and independent of football. Similarly, we can identify numerous constituent features of what we today call religion in antiquity, but they did not exist as part of an arrangement into a discrete domain, nor are their modern manifestations limited today to that domain as it has been reified. As will be discussed further below and in later chapters, those features commonly understood to be essential to religion also regularly appear outside of religion.

The conventional academic wisdom holds that before we engage in analysis of a phenomenon or concept, it is necessary to establish precisely what it is we will be analyzing.[67] This usually takes the form of a section committed to defining terms, but in the previous chapter I argued that, when it comes to conceptual terminology, definitions are more about creating semantic boundaries than about identifying them. A definition of a conceptual category presupposes that its formation and use was and is governed by some underlying conceptual substructure, which is demonstrably *not* how our minds function.[68] Additionally, the previous section showed that that is not how the category of religion developed. S*ui generis* categories with empirical existence outside of our discourse about them need not rely on that presupposition, but even if we accepted that there was something empirically "out there" called "religion" that exists apart from our discursive cultural reification of it, our inability to produce a serviceable definition raises questions. Despite

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[67] Max Weber famously stated in 1922 that 'To define 'religion,' to say what it *is*, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study" (Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff [Boston: Beacon Press, 1993], 1). As has been pointed out by virtually all who have cited him, Weber did not conclude the study with a definition. For other recent discussions on defining religion, see Melford E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (Oxford: Routledge, 1966), 85–126; Thomas A. Idinopulos and Brian C. Wilson, eds., *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, & Explanations* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk, eds., *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Andrew M. McKinnon, "Sociological Definitions, Language Fames, and the 'Essence' of Religion," *MTSR* 14.1 (2002): 61–83; Arthur L. Greil and David G. Bromley, eds., *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and Secular* (Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald, 2003); Victoria S. Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-cultural World," *IJPhilRel* 59 (2006): 133–52; Stewart E. Guthrie, "Opportunity, Challenge and a Definition of Religion," *JSRNC* 1.1 (2007): 58–67; William Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, "On the Definition of Religion," in *The Sacred is the Profane: The Political Nature of Religion*, ed. William Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17–30; Doug Oman, "Defining Religion and Spirituality," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. Second Edition*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York: Guilford, 2013), 23–47; Jeffrey Guhin, "Religion as Site Rather Than Religion as Category: On the Sociology of Religion's Export Problem," *SocRel* 75.4 (2014): 579–93; Juraj Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" *Religio* 22.1 (2014): 3–27; Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," *JAAR* 82.2 (2014): 495–520; Nathan Rein, "When Is a Religion Like a Weed?: Some Thoughts on Why and How We Define Things," *BSR* 44.4 (2015): 10–18; J. Aaron Simmons, "A Search for the 'Really' Real: Philosophically Approaching the Task of Defining Religion," *BSR* 44.4 (2015): 19–26; Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "A Deep-Seated Schism: Fundamental Discussions in the Study of Religions," *BSR* 44.4 (2015): 27–23.

[68] See above, pages 44–49.

movement away from that concern for definition in the last century, proponents of essentialist approaches to religion are still very much active.[69]

One question that might be raised: how can we be sure the category has been accurately constituted up to this point? It is phenomenally rare that anyone probes the academic identification of long-acknowledged religious traditions *qua* religions. The task is seldom, if ever, to test Christianity or Islam or Judaism to see if they are, in fact, religions; their membership in the category is the very point of departure. In fact, it is virtually axiomatic in that scholarship that asserts the need for a definition that an adequate one must subsume the entire catalogue of currently acknowledged religions, meaning we accept without examination that those traditions today carrying the label "religion" were accurately labeled. In an essentialist approach, this presupposes they were all accurately determined to possess some necessary and sufficient feature that we, unfortunately, have yet to identify. That approach invests a wildly irresponsible degree of faith in the unconscious prescience of the authorities of the past. As has been shown, the far more parsimonious conclusion is that that labelling was rather arbitrarily conducted based on existing cultural frameworks and rhetorical exigencies, but has just become so deeply embedded in our worldviews and in the intellectual foundation of our academic edifice that it sits beyond reproach. This would mean religion exists only insofar as it is reified in discourse about religion.[70] To

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[69] Some examples are Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 197; Ilka Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works: Towards a New Cognitive Science of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 227; Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 3–27; and Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 495–520.

[70] Kocku von Stuckrad describes discourses as "*practices that organize knowledge in a given community; they establish, stabilize, and legitimize systems of meaning and provide collectively shared orders of knowledge in an institutionalized social ensemble. Statements, utterances, and opinions about a specific topic, systematically organized and repeatedly observable, form a discourse*" (Kocku von Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion: Approaches, Definitions, Implications" *MTSR* 25.1 [2013]: 15, emphasis in original). Von Stuckrad provides the following discursive definition: "*RELIGION is the societal organization of knowledge about religion*" (p. 17, emphasis in original). See also, even more recently, Frank Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion* (Heidelberg: Springer VS, 2016).

preempt this section's analysis a bit, the only feature shared by all and only all phenomena that are labeled religion is precisely that all and only all those phenomena have been *labeled religion*.

Such discursive frameworks will not do for many, but the alternative—to abjure a definition—is also often considered unacceptable.[71] Public policy and other legal consequences must be considered, for instance. A lot is resting on being able to distinguish religion from not religion. How will we know know which organizations should receive additional rights and protections? How will we determine tax exemptions? There seems to be the tacit suggestion in some scholarship that Western tax assessors and the courts are struggling to function without the final word from anthropologists and scholars of religion. To my knowledge, they are not.[72] The most widely cited concern with a lack of definition, however, is the putative inability of our field of study to figure out precisely what it is it has been studying for lo these many, many years. From a recent publication on the question: "If we resign from attempting to provide at the very least an approximate definition, not only will the study of religion fail to demarcate the object of its study but it will also be at pains to formulate its basic theoretical postulates."[73] This would seem to

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[71] Even Jonathan Z. Smith, who insists that religion, "is not a native category," goes on to insist that "it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon" (Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998], 281–82). Although, refreshingly, see Jonathan Jong, "On (not) defining (non)religion," 15–24.

[72] This is not to make light of the serious consequences for the way religion is defined by the courts, but there are working definitions being used and refined, and if scholars of religion arrive at the conclusion that no adequate definition can be critically and empirically formulated, drumming one up anyway is certainly not the best way forward. For a helpful discussion of how defining religion bears on international law, see Jeremy T. Gunn, "The Complexity of Religion and the Definition of 'Religion' in International Law," *HHRJ* 16 (2003): 189–215. On a brief history of US courts' definitions, see Jeffrey Omar Usman, "Defining Religion: The Struggle to Define Religion under the First Amendment and the Contributions and Insights of other Disciplines of Study Including Theology, Psychology, Sociology, the Arts, and Anthropology," *NDLR* 83.1 (2007): 159–87; cf. Jesse David Covington, "Taken on Faith: The Concept of Religion in First Amendment Jurisprudence" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2007). See also Jesse H. Choper, "Defining 'Religion' in the First Amendment," *UILR* (1982): 579–613; Eli A. Echols, "Defining Religion for Constitutional Purposes: A New Approach Based on the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg," *PILJ* 13.1 (2004): 117–44.

[73] Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 4 (3–27); cf. Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 510–11. See also Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und*

suggest not only that the study of religion is capable of operating from a dispassionate and objective distance from that object of study, but also that that study is necessarily prescriptive. Both of these positions strike me as deeply problematic. The study of religion does not require a definition of religion; it only requires a critically robust understanding of existing discourse about religion—not a particularly difficult task, especially given that academic study is one of the key contributors to that discourse.

This section will examine key attempts to define religion and the ways those attempts have constructed and contributed to the embedded frameworks to which we now default when analyzing and discussing the Hebrew Bible. The concerns described above are being actively addressed in the fields of anthropology and sociology, but they have yet to achieve much circulation within the study of the Hebrew Bible. The discussion will address two broad types of definitions: essentialist and family resemblance/prototype approaches.

Essentialist Definitions

Essentialism is the most widespread approach to defining religion in the modern West, in large part because our concept of categories is built on Aristotelian philosophical frameworks, including our understanding of definition, which Aristotle described as ἔστι δ᾽ ὅρος μὲν λόγος ὁ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι συμαίνων, "a phrase indicating the essence of something."[74] Essentialism seeks to identify

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Heilsversprechen: eine Theorie der Religionen (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2007), 24: ". . . man ohne einen allgemeinen Religionsbegriff keine Religionstheorie formulieren." Over and against this skepticism, von Stuckrad argues that a discursive approach offers "perhaps the most promising interpretive framework for the study of religion today" (von Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion," 21).

[74] Aristotle, *Topica* 1.5 (Forster, LCL). A more recent translation renders "a phrase which signifies the what-it-is-to-be" (Aristotle, *Topics: Book I and VIII with excerpts from related texts*, trans. Robin Smith [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997]). This reflects the notion of the essence as "that which makes a thing what it is." Aristotle distinguished the essence of a thing from its accidents, which were incidental to its membership in a given category. He argued, "If 'man' has one meaning, let this be 'two-footed animal'. By 'has one meaning' I mean this: if X means 'man', then if anything is a man, its humanity will consist in being X. . . . If anything can be truly said to be 'man', it must be 'two-

religion's "essence," or the central property (or properties) shared by all members of the category and distinguishing it from all others.[75] This essence constituted, according to Aristotle,

ἔτι ὅσα μόρια ἐνυπάρχοντα ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ὁρίζοντά τε καὶ τόδε τι σημαίντοντα, ὧν ἀναιρουμένων ἀναιρεῖται τὸ ὅλον

all parts immanent in things which define and indicate their individuality, and whose destruction causes the destruction of the whole.[76]

The essentialist approach, consequently, usually treats religion as a *sui generis* category that exists apart from our cultural reification of it,[77] and it has almost unilaterally governed attempts to define religion from at least ancient Greece down to the twenty-first century.[78]

One of the first and most well known essentialist definitions of religion from the modern era is that of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (see above), published on the very cusp of the Enlightenment. Herbert's five propositions constituted his estimation of the necessary and sufficient features of religion, although the selective reliance on decidedly Protestant conceptualizations of religion and its salient principles obviously warped the data. Herbert insisted, for instance, that the heathen worship of the sun was symbolic, and could be reduced to his first proposition: a single deity. The new field of comparative religion was also too inchoate and volatile during the early

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footed animal'; for this is what 'man' is intended to mean" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.4.8, 14–15 quoted in Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 22–23).

[75] "A 'REAL DEFINITION' OF RELIGION is a definition that aims to capture the essential characteristics that make religion what it is. In other words, a real definition seeks to describe the necessary and sufficient conditions for something being a religion" (Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 495). The reference to an essentialist definition as a "real" definition draws from Spiro, "Religion," 85–126.

[76] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 5.1017[b], quoted in Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 22).

[77] For instance, Eric J. Sharpe states in his influential *Comparative Religion: A History* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986) that "Religion is simply *there* as an identifiable factor of human experience" (p. 318).

[78] As Jonathan Jong has quipped, "The ghost of Aristotle haunts us still, and we intuit that the only adequate definition of religion is one which specifies the essence of religion, that lists the necessary and sufficient conditions for a phenomenon to count as religious" (Jong, "On (not) defining (non)religion," 16). Cf. page 78, note 7 above.

Enlightenment for Lord Herbert's groping at a definition to gain much long-term purchase, but his approach would be influential on later Enlightenment thinkers.[79]

Deeper into the maturation of the discipline of comparative religion,[80] Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917) offered what has become the single most influential definition of religion of the modern era, defining religion as "the belief in Spiritual Beings" and coining the term "Animism" in reference to that belief.[81] Religion is still about belief for Tylor, but here it has been whittled down to a single belief—a slightly more inclusive version of Herbert's Proposition I. Tylor betrays his Enlightenment roots in describing the principles of "savage religion" on the whole as "essentially rational" and "Spiritualistic as opposed to Materialistic," but he incorporates an evolutionary framework in asserting "the natural evolution of religious ideas among mankind."[82]

Despite the influence of Tylor's definition, it was immediately criticized on a variety of fronts. The eminent J. G. Frazer (1854–1941) argued that it was too inclusive and erroneously consolidated magical worldviews under the category of religion.[83] Frazer suggested religion was to be understood as "propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life."[84] R. R. Marett (1866–1943) argued

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[79] Stroumsa asserts Charles Blount plagiarized Herbert in *The Origins of Idolatry* (1695) and that "similar ideas were to be repeated and developed in the following decades, in particular by John Toland (1670–1722)" (Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 34).

[80] On the development of this discipline, see Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; Stroumsa, *A New Science*.

[81] Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1871), 383–84. For a discussion of Tylor's essentialism, see Byrne, "Religion and the Religions," 16–18; Wilson, "From the Lexical to the Polythetic," 145–47; Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 10–12; Schilbrack, "What *Isn't* Religion?" 309–310. Regarding the influence of Tylor's definition, Schilbrack points out that "J. Z. Smith notes that Tylor's definition was the organizing taxon in the *HarperCollins Dictionary of Religions* for which he served as editor (see J. Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004], 165)" (Schilbrack, "What *Isn't* Religion?" 309, n. 28).

[82] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 384.

[83] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 87–94. As Brian C. Wilson comments, this ushered in the debate about the relationship of religion and magic, which continues to this day (Wilson, "From the Lexical to the Polythetic," 146).

[84] J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough, A New Abridgement* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46, quoted in Arnal and McCutcheon, "On the Definition of Religion," 19.

against an exclusively theistic conceptualization of religion on the grounds that some religions "did not involve anthropomorphic spiritual beings."[85] For instance, Theravada Buddhism and other pre-theoretically religious traditions ostensibly asserted no concept of deity or spiritual beings.[86]

While essentialist definitions of religion have been widely criticized since the mid-twentieth century,[87] they are not without their advocates even today.[88] In a 2014 *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* article,[89] Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell argued that a "real" definition of religion is required, but also asserted that "stipulative" and "functional" definitions are just a species of real definition.[90] These approaches presuppose that there is something "out there" uniting the members of the category "religion," and thus a definition is possible. Be this as it may, there is a reason even functional definitions have also historically failed to adequately uncover

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[85] Wilson, "From the Lexical to the Polythetic," 146–147; cf. Schilbrack, "What *Isn't* Religion?" 310–12; Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 11–12.

[86] Additionally, many self-identified adherents to traditionally theistic traditions are staunchly atheist. This will be discussed further below. The atheistic nature of Theravada Buddhism is debated. See Martin Southwood, "Buddhism and the Definition of Religion," *Man* 13.3 (1978): 363; Marco Orrù, Amy Wang, "Durkheim, Religion, and Buddhism," *JSSR* 31.1 (1992): 58–59; Ilka Pyysiäinen, "Buddhism, Religion, and the Concept of 'God,'" *Numen* 50 (2003): 147–71; D. Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 68–84.

[87] Wittgenstein's linguistic theories are partly responsible for concerns with essentialism, and that has been taken up and given empirical support within the field of Cognitive Linguistics, but anthropology, and particularly Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*, has raised serious concerns about the transhistorical and transcultural nature of religion (see below). For concerns with essentialism, see Robert McDermott, "The Religion Game: Some Family Resemblances," *JAAR* 38.4 (1970): 390–400; Wilson, "From the Lexical to the Polythetic," 141–62; Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 87–157; McKinnon, "Sociological Definitions, Language Games, and the 'Essence' of Religion"; Arnal and McCutcheon, "On the Definition of Religion"; von Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion"; Jong, "On (not) defining (non)religion."

[88] In 1966, for instance, Melford Spiro asserted the following "real" definition of religion: "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro, "Religion," 96).

[89] Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion." *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* published two responses to Schaffalitzky de Muckadell's article and a rejoinder from her in December of 2015. See Rein, "When Is a Religion Like a Weed?"; Simmons, "A Search for the 'Really' Real"; Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "A Deep-Seated Schism."

[90] She gives three reasons for the necessity of defining religion: (1) it is needed for evaluating theories; (2) it improves and refines scientific language by making it more precise; and (3) it is politically necessary (Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 510–11). I would point out that all three concerns reflect prescriptivism, which is fundamentally about control. Her framework is, as described by Franek, "'power-based' social constructionism" (Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 15–19), although they both appeal to similar concerns about the necessity of a definition.

religion's essential feature(s).[91] It is not that there is no such feature, it is just frequently overlooked because most scholars have been digging in the wrong place. As has been stated above, religion as a discrete category does not occur naturally; it is reified in discourse about religion. This is the lexical approach that Schaffalitzky de Muckadell only briefly addresses early in her article, and it is the only necessary and sufficient feature that unites all phenomena called "religion." That lexical approach is also the "working" or "implicit" definition that often undergirds functionalist and other types of definitions.[92] Scholars do not have to presuppose a "real definition," they just have to operate with the semantic boundaries drawn up by the use of the word—the category as reified by speakers and writers.[93]

Ironically, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell seems to acknowledge precisely this fact when she suggests that the adequacy of a "real definition" could be empirically tested, "compared to the way the term religion actually is applied."[94] She even suggests that a definition could be adjusted according to psychological experiments, presumably aimed at understanding precisely what people mean by their usage of the term.[95] In the end, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell tacitly

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[91] Saler acknowledges this: "The phenomena commonly comprehended by applications of the word 'religion' are too complex and variable, and often too enmeshed with other phenomena in a larger universe, to be confined analytically within sharp, impermeable boundaries. The world as we experience it is untidy—or, if you prefer, very rich in its multiplicity" (Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 197).

[92] As Wittgenstein has said, "For a *large* class of cases—thought not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1.43).

[93] See page 96, note 69 above.

[94] Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 510. Here she appeals to a "lexical" concept of religion.

[95] This would appear to require the recruiting of fields like cognitive linguistics, but a leading framework within CL is prototype theory, and Muckadell has already dismissed that approach on the grounds that (1) prototypical conceptualizations of religion will differ from individual to individual, (2) essential, typical, and associated traits are indistinguishable, and (3) because prototype effects occur even in very strictly defined categories (like prime numbers), "a prototype account does not make definitions superfluous" (Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 501). I would argue that objection (1) has been well known since the formation of the theory and hardly constitutes an obstacle; objection (2) misrepresents prototype theory in suggesting there exist "essential . . . traits" in any given category that can be distinguished from typical and associated ones; and objection (3) is only true of some categories. Prototype theory does not eradicate definitions where they are perfectly serviceable.

acknowledges that the primary locus of religion's existence is our discourse about it, but she nevertheless insists on pushing on toward identifying a complex and arbitrary arrangement of "essential constituents."[96]

A brand of essentialism can also be found in contemporary CSR.[97] According to several prominent voices in that field, religion is reducible to beliefs and practices related to "minimally counter-intuitive agents," which has reference to a theoretical model within CSR that describes the cognitive mechanism responsible for belief in deities, ghosts, souls, spirits, and buddhas.[98] Pascal Boyer, for instance, has stated that "religion is about the existence and causal powers of nonobservable entities and agencies,"[99] despite acknowledging elsewhere that "the very existence of some thing called 'religion' is largely an illusion."[100] Stewart Guthrie argued in the 90s that,

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[96] Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 510. These essential constituents constitute two domains: practical and cognitive, the latter requiring (1) content of a supernatural character, of sufficient scope, and with normative implications, and (2) sufficient importance and internalization. This is not so much a definition as a descriptive schematic that attempts to tag every possible base by relying on what appear to be rather arbitrary judgments about sufficient importance, scope, normative implications, etc.

[97] The quotes from Boyer, Guthrie, and Pyysiäinen are also quoted in Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 6–7.

[98] Minimal Counterintuitiveness, or MCI, has been championed primarily by scholars like Pascal Boyer and Scott Atran (Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble, "Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-Cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations," *CogSci* 25.4 [2001]: 535–64; Scott Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 100–07; Scott Atran and Ara Norenzayan, "Religion's evolutionary landscape: Counterintuition, commitment, compassion, communion," *BBS* 27.6 [2004]: 730–70), although it has been adopted by most CSR scholars (Jesse M. Bering, "The folk psychology of souls," *BBS* 29.5 [2006]: 453–98; Tommaso Bertolotti and Lorenzo Magnani, "The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings: An Abductive Approach," in *Model-Based Reasoning in Science and Technology: Abduction, Logic, and Computational Discovery*, ed. Lorenzo Magnani et al. [Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2010], 239–62; Justin L. Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying Counterintuitiveness in Religious Concepts: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *MTSR* 20 [2008]: 308–38; Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* [Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2011], 104–06; Pyysiäinen, "The Cognitive Science of Religion," 27). It has more recently fallen under heavy criticism, and in no small part because of its reliance on modularity. See, particularly, Benjamin Grant Purzycki and Aiyana K. Willard, "MCI Theory: A Critical Discussion," *RBB* 6.3 (2016): 207–74, which includes several responses. For a critique of the concept of counterintuition from outside the field of CSR, see Russell T. McCutcheon, "Will Your Cognitive Anchor Hold in the Storms of Culture?" *JAAR* 78.4 (2010): 1183–85.

[99] Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 7. This comment occurs in a paraphrase of findings from the field of anthropology, but it fits comfortably and consistently with his descriptions elsewhere in *Religion Explained* as well as the more recent *The Fracture of an Illusion*.

[100] Pascal Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion*, 9.

"All religions do share a feature: ostensible communication with humanlike, yet nonhuman, beings through some form of symbolic actions."[101] Finally, according to Ilka Pyysiäinen,

> 'Religion' is a concept that identifies the personalistic counter-intuitive representations and the related practices, institutions, etc. that are widely spread, literally believed, and actively used by a group of people in their attempts to understand, explain and control those aspects of life, and reality as a whole, that escape common sense and, more recently, scientific explanation.[102]

Juraj Franek contends that these definitions and many others from CSR contribute to an empirically testable theory of religion that makes it possible to posit a definition of religion (based on "minimally counter-intuitive agents") that resolves the methodological problems inherent in previous attempts. Franek identifies four main issues this definition would have to address: The definition must (1) be sufficiently differentiated from Tylorian definitions to avoid the charge of naïve essentialism; (2) account for pre-theoretically "religious" traditions that do not entertain concepts of spiritual or supernatural beings; (3) overcome the social-constructionist critique; and (4) avoid the charge of structuring power and values.[103]

Addressing issues (1) and (3), Franek attempts to sidestep the accusation of theoretical essentialism by making a case for religion as an innate universal principle, appealing first to Kant regarding the existence of *a priori* knowledge "to which all objects of experience necessarily conform,"[104] and then to Chomsky regarding linguistic modularity and the existence of "cross-

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[101] Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 197.

[102] Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works: Toward a New Cognitive Science of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 227.

[103] Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 19–20.

[104] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B XVII–XVIII. The translation is Norman Kemp Smith, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 23, quoted in Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 21.

cultural universals."[105] He concludes:

> In a sense, the CSR is set to replace the false dichotomy of naïve essentialism on the one hand and free-for-all social constructionism on the other with a synthetic approach recognizing the relatively stable sets of constraints, which are generated by our cognitive architecture designed during the evolutionary history of our species, as well as deep intercultural variation among religious concepts, beliefs and practices.[106]

Issue (2) is resolved with the concept of minimally counter-intuitive agents, an empirically established principle that solves previous concerns with the use of problematic categories like "gods," "spiritual," "supernatural," "sacred," etc., as well as the exclusion of ostensibly atheistic traditions like Theravada Buddhism (which can include some concepts of counter-intuitive entities).[107] Regarding issue (4), Franek argues that CSR minimizes the risk of abuse by relying on critical scientific methodologies, particularly by focusing primarily on processes related to intuitive beliefs rather than reflective ones. According to Franek, it is the latter that tend to be more firmly associated with "the conscious manipulation of religious concepts (e.g., to fulfill political needs or strengthen the existing or desired power distribution)."[108]

Some significant concerns can be raised with Franek's case. The concept of counter-intuitiveness is certainly more empirically grounded than "sacred" or "spiritual," but while it solves certain issues of exclusiveness, it creates others. Although ostensibly accounting for so-called "atheistic" traditions like Buddhism, I would suggest that the framework still

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[105] "[D]omain-specific intuitive principles constitute *cross-cultural universals*" (Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994], 111, emphasis in original). For more on these "universals," see Ara Norenzayan and Steven J. Heine, "Psychological Universals: What Are They and How Can We Know?" *PB* 131.5 (2005): 763–84.

[106] Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 24.

[107] See Pyysiäinen, "Buddhism, Religion, and the Concept of 'God,'" *Numen* 50 (2003): 147–71; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57–172.

[108] Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 26.

problematically reduces religion to codifications of doctrine, which is a modern notion that does not even necessarily reflect the contemporary experiences of individual adherents.[109] Certainly many Buddhists do acknowledge a variety of counterintuitive agents, but it is just as certain that many entirely reject them—at least insofar as they are distinguishable from "secular" concepts of counterintuitive agents (see below). Religious traditions are performatively constituted by their adherents, not by the formulation of doctrines, and they are not monolithic in terms of supernatural agents, irrespective of the tradition.[110] Pew's "2014 Religious Landscape Study" found that 17% of self-identified Jewish respondents, 27% of self-identified Buddhist respondents, 10% of self-identified Hindu respondents, and even 3% of self-identified Orthodox Christian respondents *do not believe in God or a universal spirit*.[111] In those cases of non-Western religious traditions that may hold to concepts of supernatural agents, but rather marginally, the broadened concept of "counterintuitive agents" employs the feature on which Western concepts of religion ostensibly pivot to cleverly draw into the net traditions that pivot on other concepts, but luckily happen to include "ours." This still assimilates religious traditions to a Eurocentric framework. While other cultures may have adopted that framework through the machinations of colonialism or because of their own interests in structuring power, an essentialist definition that succeeds by conquest is, for lack of a better phrase, a bad idea.[112]

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[109] CSR scholarship absolutely wanders into "power distribution" if it begins to insist certain kinds of adherence to religious traditions constitute more or less pure, pious, or legitimate devotion.

[110] See, for example, Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[111] To contextualize this a bit, only 92% of self-identified atheists reported not believing in God, up from 73% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, Nov. 3, 2015, "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious," 48 [http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_full_report.pdf]). The objection might potentially be raised that atheist Jews and Christians are simply cultural or ethnic participants in these traditions, but the counter-objection might also be raised that blithely asserting they "don't count" seems rather arbitrary and question-begging. If we insist religion has existed as long as human society has existed, more or less all religious participation has been cultural/ethnic.

[112] For more on that process of assimilation to European/American conceptualizations of religion, see page 93, note 63 above and Okot p'Bitek, *Decolonizing African Religion: A Short History of African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Brooklyn: Diasporic African Press, 2011); James L. Cox, *The Invention of God in Indigenous Societies* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2014).

Additionally, counterintuitive agency creates other concerns with *inclusiveness*. The principle fills a conceptual category that extends well beyond what is conventionally recognized as religion, and this is acknowledged by, for instance, Boyer, who states, "*Religious agency (gods, spirits, ancestors, etc.) belongs to a larger repertoire of 'supernatural agents' defined as violations of intuitions about agents*."[113] Since hyperactive agency detection and counterintuition are thought to be universal cognitive predispositions, non-religious reifications of counterintuitive agents will also occur, such as imaginary companions, ghosts, Bigfoot, the "invisible hand" of the market, or naïve personifications of Science, Evolution, Justice, the State, the Universe, and even Religion or Christianity.[114] Whether or not religious manifestations of these features of our cognitive architecture are "spandrels," "byproducts," or "parasitic,"[115] those broader features can hardly suffice to define those more limited manifestations.[116]

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[113] Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion*, 74, emphasis in original.

[114] For a few examples of scholarly treatments of the notion that conventionally "secular" frameworks can be argued to constitute religion, see Mariano Artigas, *The Mind of the Universe: Understanding Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000); Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Mary Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears* (London: Routledge, 2002); Mika Luoma-aho, "Political Theology, Anthropomorphism, and Personhood of the State: The Religion of IR," *IPS* 3.3 (2009): 293–309.

[115] On the spandrel metaphor, see Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme," *PRSL B205* (1979): 581–98; D. M. Buss, M. G. Haselton, T. K. Shackelford, A. L. Bleske, and J. C. Wakefield, "Adaptations, Exaptations, and Spandrels," *AmPsy* 53.5 (1998): 533–48. The debate on the parasitic nature of religious belief is divided between advocates of the "byproduct" and "adaptation" models. See Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 311; Joseph Bulbulia, "The Cognitive and Evolutionary Psychology of Religion," *BP* 19 (2004): 655–86; Jesse M. Bering, Katrina McLeod, and Todd K. Shackelford, "Reasoning about Dead Agents Reveals Possible Adaptive Trends," *HN* 16.4 (2005): 360–81; Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43–72; Jesse M. Bering, "The Cognitive Psychology of Belief in the Supernatural," *AmSci* 94 (2006): 142–49; Ilka Pyysiäinen and Marc Hauser, "The Origins of Religion: Evolved Adaptation or Byproduct?" *TCS* 14.3 (2010): 104–09; *The Fracture of an Illusion*, 73–75; Joseph A. Bracken, "Actions and Agents: Natural and Supernatural Reconsidered," *Zygon* 48.4 (2013): 1001–13.

[116] While the universality of the cognitive features of which religion appears to be a byproduct is largely accepted, I would challenge the use of the modularity framework, which comes from generative linguistics. According to cognitive linguistics, our general cognitive abilities arise not from an innate and discrete linguistic module, but from embodied experience. "This view is that general cognitive abilities, like our kinesthetic abilities, our visual or sensorimotor skills, and above all, our typically human categorization strategies, especially our tendency to construct categories on the basis of prototypical basic-level subcategories or exemplars jointly account, together with cultural, contextual and functional parameters, for the main design features of languages and for our ability to learn and use them. The so-called 'language faculty' is, thus, claimed to be a product, or rather a specialization, of general cognitive abilities" (Antonio Barcelona and Javier Valenzuela "An overview of cognitive linguistics," in *Cognitive Linguistics:*

These more recent essentialist approaches to religion betray just how deeply embedded the reification of religion is. Even those who are aware of and who academically engage with the development of the concept frequently feel the need to assert an essentialism based on the more recent conceptualization of the concept. The concern on the part of these scholars for our field of study's methodological integrity strikes me as thin and ill-conceived, if not a bit disingenuous; it seems to me to be more closely related to the prescriptive power that is facilitated by a firmly delineated category. While not being necessary for the study of religion, it certainly makes things easier, particularly for those looking to draw value judgments about patterns of behavior. This is not to say such judgments are on the horizon for Franek or Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, but simply that the embedded frameworks they reinforce certainly facilitate those judgments for some.

'Family Resemblance' and Prototype Definitions

As early as 1902, William James acknowledged that there "seems to be no elementary religious emotion, but only a common storehouse of emotions upon which religious objects may draw, so there might conceivably also prove to be no one specific and essential kind of religious object, and no one specific and essential kind of religious act."[117] Wittgenstein formulated a more formal expression of this observation with his "family resemblances" framework, which approached linguistic categorization not according to an essential feature or set of features, but to "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities,

Convergence and Expansion, ed. Mario Brdar, Stefan Th. Gries, and Milena Žic Fuchs [HCP 32; Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011], 19). For a recent book-length treatment of the problems with a modular model of linguistics, see Vyvyan Evans, *The Language Myth: Why Language is not an Instinct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[117] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), 28.

sometimes similarities of detail."[118] The family metaphor draws from the observation that the

children in a two-parent family may be identifiable as members of the family because of different

features not shared by all members of the family. A child may share red hair in common with one

parent, but brown eyes in common with the other, and so on. Thus, no single feature is necessary

and sufficient to determine membership in the family, but membership is established by the

relationship of different arrangements of features. This has been schematized in the following way:

Prototype Religion = A + B + C + D + E + F + G characteristics
Religion 1 = C + D + E + F characteristics
Religion 2 = B + D + F + G characteristics
Religion 3 = A + B + C + D + E + F characteristics
Religion 4 = C+ E + F characteristics
. . . etc.[119]

A number of scholars of religion have appealed to family resemblances in an effort to avoid

the methodological pitfalls of essentialism, although that effort is sometimes for nought.[120] An

early but careful example is Ninian Smart's discussion in "Numen, Nirvana, and the Definition of

Religion."[121] He describes two advantages to the family resemblance approach:

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[118] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1.66.

[119] This is taken from Wilson, "From the Lexical to the Polythetic," 159.

[120] See, for instance, Byrne, "Religion and Religions," 3–28; Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Manifestations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Smart, "Theravada Buddhism and the Definition of Religion," *Sophia* 34.1 (1995): 161–66; Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*; McKinnon, "Sociological Definitions, Language Fames, and the 'Essence' of Religion," 61–83; John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent, Second Edition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World," 133–52. As Victoria Harrison has stated, "At one stage, the Wittgensteinian family resemblance approach was almost universally accepted as the best method available for understanding 'religion'" (Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World," 151, n. 30). For critical engagement with these texts, see Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 54–97; Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" 3–27, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 500–02.

[121] Smart, "Numen, Nirvana, and the Definition of Religion," *CQR* 160 (1959): 216–25.

First, and negatively, it discourages attempts to define 'religion' in an essentialist manner, which leads to misinterpretations accruing upon trying to formulate some common insight in all faiths—there may be different sorts of spiritual insight. Second, and positively, it allows of a sort of disjunctive account of religion; thus, for instance (and crudely), the activities and doctrines associated with worship, sacrifice, *bhakti*, etc., on the one hand, and those associated with the yogic endeavor towards inner enlightenment and with other similar endeavours on the other hand, are two centrally important items in a number of major religions; but we need not insist on the central presence of both or of any particular one of these items for something to count as a religion.[122]

Smart is sensitive enough to the framework to disentangle some of the associations that have long plagued the academic study of religion, but not others. He abjures essentialism, for instance, advocating that we "abandon the old-fashioned notion of definition and throw off the fascination of essences,"[123] and he argues for breaking up principles like Rudolph Otto's insistence on categorizing mysticism as worship. At the same time, he insists "there is no genuine concept of god or God without worship, and conversely."[124]

In light of the variability of religion within his model, one wonders what it is that qualifies something as a religion, but Smart stops short of identifying our discourse about the category as the constitutive element. Indeed, elsewhere he seems to advocate for understanding religion as existing apart from our reification of it. In his 1998 *The World's Religions*, Smart fleshes this about a bit by identifying seven dimensions of religion that help us to "appreciate the nature of the religions"[125]: (1) the practical and ritual, (2) the experiential and emotional, (3) the narrative or mythic, (4) the doctrinal and philosophical, (5) the ethical and legal, (6) the social and institutional, (7) the material. These dimensions obviate the need to provide a further definition for Smart, but at the same time he acknowledges the ways they overlap with secular worldviews:

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[122] Smart, "Numen, Nirvana, and the Definition of Religion," 223.
[123] Smart, "Numen, Nirvana, and the Definition of Religion," 223.
[124] Smart, "Numen, Nirvana, and the Definition of Religion," 221–22.
[125] Smart, *The World's Religions*, 12–22.

we have seen enough of the seven-dimensional character of the secular worldviews (especially nationalism and state Marxism) to emphasize that the various systems of ideas and practices, whether religious or not, are competitors and mutual blenders, and can thus be said to play in the same league.[126]

Some scholars are uncomfortable with leaving the question in this manner, but that is often the way conceptual categories like these are formed and function, and it does us no good to force boundaries where none are operable.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, Wittgenstein's theory of linguistic categorization presaged prototype theory, which adduced a great deal of empirical support from findings within the field of cognitive psychology to formulate a similar framework for conceptual categories.[127] According to prototype theory, the semantic focus of a given category is toward the center, not the periphery, thus boundaries are largely arbitrary and often irrelevant. Membership is graded, with better and poorer members, and is determined by some manner of similarity to a prototype or small group of prototypes. Unlike other approaches to defining religion, prototype theory is lexical in orientation and gives priority to conceptualization over definition. In other words, it does not require or presuppose the existence of the conceptual category outside of our discourse about it. A prototype approach describes how people *conceptualize* religion, not necessarily *what religion is* or *how it functions*.[128] This disconnect from the fundamental presupposition of essentialism and from the

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[126] Smart, *The World's Religions*, 26. Smart's seven dimensions have come under heavy criticism in Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 54–71.

[127] See pages 44–49 above. For an extended discussion of this development and the similarities and differences of the two models, see Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 12–57. For a recent discussion of the form and function of her theoretical model, see Rosch, "'Slow Lettuce,'" 89–120.

[128] Ilka Pyssiäinen seems to have taken issue with this aspect of prototype theory. He explains, "It is important to realize, however, that this only tells us about how people recognize something as religious. It does not tell us what makes the category of 'religion' coherent. These are two different questions. The category of odd numbers, for instance, can be clearly defined with reference to sufficient and necessary conditions by saying that it consists of numbers that are not multiples of 2. Yet people tend to judge certain numbers as more prototypically odd than others"

gravitational pull that presupposition exerts on family resemblance approaches provides perhaps the most promising application to the category of religion.

Benson Saler's *Conceptualizing Religion* remains the most direct and thorough engagement with prototype theory as formulated by Eleanor Rosch and her colleagues, although that engagement is somewhat superficial and seems to lean equally on elements of Wittgenstein's family resemblance approach.[129] Despite that superficiality, the Brandeis anthropologist's discussion is sensitive and insightful. He settles on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as the three prototypes of religion, carefully noting that all three are monolithic abstractions of collections of millions and millions of adherents whose individual notions of their religious identities all differ from each other synchronically as well as diachronically.[130] Each tradition itself displays marked prototype effects as well, with self-identified adherents to innumerable sects, factions, or interpretations within the broader categorization filling every nook and cranny of the spectra of activity, belief, devotion, etc. The category of "religion" is thus phenomenally reductive shorthand for a culturally reified domain of existence that offers little in the way of analytical insight or heuristic value.

(Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works*, 3). The concern, if I understand it correctly, seems to be that prototype theory is unable to clearly delineate religion despite being able to delineate odd numbers. If this is truly the concern, it reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how prototype theory works, but one that is shared by Schaffalitzky de Muckadell (although pointed in the other direction). She states that the definability of prime numbers problematizes a prototype approach to religion, since, "a prototype account does not make definitions superfluous" (Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," 501; see note 97 above). Of course, the goal is not to render definitions superfluous, or to reify them where they have been historically problematic, it is to provide a framework for understanding how categories form and are used, whether or not the particular category is amendable to definition.

[129] In a 1999 article, Benson Saler describes his approach to defining religion as "combining the idea of family resemblances with insights derived from prototype theory" (Saler, "Family Resemblance and the Definition of Religion," *HR* 25.3 [1999]: 391–404). See also Fitz John Porter Poole, "Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion," *JAAR* 54.3 (1986): 411–57.

[130] In that sense, those abstractions function well as prototypes. As was noted in Chapter 1, a prototype is rarely an actual member of the category, but rather cognitive exemplars or idealized conceptualizations, depending on the specific conceptual structure of the category.

Conclusion

The quest for a definition for religion is beset with pitfalls and temptations. I have shown the shortcomings of essentialism in light of the reified nature of the concept of religion, and while a family resemblance approach solves some of those issues, the application has been problematic in many instances. The most fruitful framework for engaging the conceptualization of religion and the contours of the category as it is constituted today may be prototype theory, but while it overcomes the methodological problems with asserting the empirical and independent existence of religion, it has limitations of its own. Saler's appeal to the "Western monotheisms"[131] may grate against sensibilities in light of all the concern I have expressed for the way the European/American conceptualization of religion has been privileged and prioritized in the scholarship and the conventional thinking, but as stated above, prototype theory provides a framework for understanding the ways in which a category is formed and functions, and, as this chapter has shown, that focus on the modern European/American reification of religion is precisely how the category of religion most commonly functions.

The large and small non-European/American traditions—the ones that so frequently problematize an essentialist approach—sit at a distance from the prototypes, and because of the graded nature of linguistic categories, would be considered poorer examples of religions. Because conceptual categories frequently have quite fuzzy boundaries, membership for those entities sitting at a greater conceptual distance from the prototypes would be debatable. In such situations, prototype theory does not provide a resolution; it does not settle boundary disputes, which, as I have suggested, is one of the primary deliverables of a working definition of religion for those scholars of religion in search of one. In fact, in many ways, a prototype approach to religion—

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[131] Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 225.

without the necessary caveats and warnings—may perpetuate the very Eurocentrism from which many have been seeking release.[132] Prototype theory can bring us to a more precise understanding of the shape of the category in contemporary discourse, but it cannot save it.

Studying Religion

The intent of the previous two sections has been to show that religion is best understood as a cultural reification that defies definition precisely because, as a reification, it does not occur in nature, but is born of discourse. Because of the long process of development outlined above, and the disparate ways in which we describe and define the phenomenon, our contemporary conceptualizations of religion and its constituent elements have little to do with the broad and pluriform traditions of antiquity that we so frequently sweep up under that rubric. If we cannot agree on what constitutes religion today and what its features are—and this is not an indictment of the scholarship, but an observation about the nature of the category—on what grounds can we presume to determine what constituted religion within ancient communities to which we have sparse and unclear access? Because the reified nature of religion has gone entirely undetected for so long, a number of frameworks associated with that reification have become deeply embedded within the modern study of religion and now constitute the frame round which we trace when we attempt to define or even describe the ideologies of the Hebrew Bible and early Judaisms.[133] This

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[132] For the study of religion in modernity, I would echo the sentiments of Andrew McKinnon: "There is no essence of religion outside the discourse of religion. There is no religion *per se*, *pour soi*, or *an sich*. Of course, concepts like 'religion' have real social consequences, and are important constitutive elements in the construction of global, national, and local social formations. In that sense, however, there is such a 'thing' as religion—or at least, it is a term we cannot do without, and we 'know' what it means. In this respect, Wittgenstein should get the last word: 'the best that I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate how the *application* of the picture goes'" (McKinnon, "Sociological Definitions, Language Games, and the 'Essence' of Religion," 81).

[133] A recent engagement with the category of "religion" as it applies to the Hebrew Bible can be found in the proceedings of what Christoph Uehlinger has called a "private seminar of sorts" held in 2014 at the University of Zurich, published in 2015 in the journal *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*. The articles are Christoph Uehlinger, "Distinctive or Diverse? Conceptualizing Ancient Israelite Religion in Its Southern Levantine Setting," *HeBAI* 4.1

final section will briefly examine some of the most firmly embedded of these principles and how they have influenced the study of religion and/or the Hebrew Bible and early Judaisms.

Belief

One of the most critical of these frameworks is the dichotomization of belief and practice, and the prioritization of the former over and against the latter, a product of the ideological processes by which religion was interiorized in the Renaissance, by which materiality and practice were marginalized in the Reformation, and by which belief came to define religion in the era of comparative religion.[134] Prior to this dichotomization, the intuitive conceptualization of human identity as embodied, socially reified, and entangled within complex material networks exercised far greater influence on the understanding of and interaction with the environment, with other human persons, and with the divine. What we identify as worship constituted performative interactions with the material world, throughout which the divine was infused.[135]

In the early Jewish and Christian traditions, the divine was treated as anthropomorphic and corporeal, and it was encountered in sacred images, spaces, sounds, smells, bodies, and food.[136]

(2015): 1–24; Amihai Mazar, "Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Reḥov and Their Implications Regarding Religion in Northern Israel," *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 25–55; Omer Sergi, "State Formation, Religion and 'Collective Identity' in the Southern Levant," *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 56–77; Seth Sanders, "When the Personal Becomes Political: An Onomastic Perspective on the Rise of Yahwism," *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 78–105; Terje Stordalen, "Horse Statues in Seventh Century Jerusalem: Ancient Social Formations and the Evaluation of Religious Diversity," *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 106–32.

[134] "Non-material elements of religiosity such as religious experiences, beliefs, philosophies, psychologies, doctrines, textual history, literature, ethics, mythology, folklore, and so on, are common areas of specialization. The specifically material aspects of religion, however, are either examined under the rubric of religious art or architecture (or perhaps 'iconography' or 'symbolism'), or are engaged peripherally as mostly unacknowledged elements of larger studies in sociology or anthropology, or under considerations of ritual within the social sciences" (Julian Droogan, *Religion, Material Culture and Archaeology* [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 23–24).

[135] A recent attempt to reorient archaeologists to the material in their study of cult objects is Mary Weismantel and Lynn Meskell, "Substances: 'Following the Material' Through Two Prehistoric Cases," *JMC* 19.3 (2014): 233–51. A related approach is taken for Judean pillar figurines in Erin Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

[136] Christianity would be the first to abandon anthropomorphism, thanks to the reflective influence of early apologists. See David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant

While the seeds of interiorization were planted early in the Christian tradition by Pauline denigration of the law and by neoplatonic influence, early Christians continued to center the human body in their theology and their worship. The most important ritual in the Catholic tradition, the Eucharist, was the "supreme *locus divinitatis*, the ultimate materialization of the divine."[137] Relics, holy water, statues, incense, pieces of wood, and sacred spaces also played important roles in materializing and presencing divine power for Medieval Christians, but by 1518, reformers began to rail against the use of holy water.[138] By 1522, they were rejecting images and other sacred objects, asserting that *finitum non est capax infiniti*, "infinitude cannot be conveyed by the finite."[139] The "othering" of divinity, the interiorization of worship, and the exaltation of belief radically altered the landscape where the human interacted with the divine, and this new landscape would form the foundation of the modern concept of religion.

The result for modern scholarship is a reductionism that trains our focus on a specific framework that either holds only marginal importance for adherents of non-European/American traditions or misconstrues their ideologies and values. This significantly distorts our reconstruction of both ancient and modern cultures, and for multiple reasons.[140] First, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith noted in 1962, the contemporary conceptualization of religion is uniquely focused on belief:

Witnesses," *HTR* 83.2 (1990): 105–16. For an insightful outline of the process by which anthropomorphism was abandoned in Judaism, see Shamma Friedman, "Anthropomoprhism and Its Eradication," in Willem van Asselt et al., *Iconoclasm and Iconoclash*, 157–78.

[137] Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World*, 1450–1650 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 28.

[138] Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 55–61.

[139] Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 3, 61–65.

[140] "The academic study of religion in the modern West has been shaped by the idea that a religion is what someone believes, which consists of a discrete, subjective experience of assent to propositions concerning the origin of the cosmos, the nature of humanity, the existence of deities, or the purpose of life. When seeking to understand a religion, scholars have long tended to ask: what are its teachings? Focus on 'belief' as a set of teachings derives from the creedal tradition of Christianity, which was intensified by Protestantism. From there, belief passed beyond the realm of religion into the philosophy of language, where it came to be strictly defined in terms of the truth-value of a proposition" (Morgan, "Introduction," 3).

The peculiarity of the place given to belief in Christian history is a monumental matter, whose importance and who relative uniqueness must be appreciated. So characteristic has it been that unsuspecting Westerners have . . . been liable to ask about a religious group other than their own as well, 'What do they believe?' as though this were the primary question, and certainly were a legitimate one.[141]

While Smith's comment primarily addresses modern religions, the impact is even more distorting on the analysis of ancient ideologies, not only because the imposition of the "religion" rubric prioritizes the wrong things, but also because our modern concept of "belief" sits on the near side of a significant shift in the semantic senses of the terminology in the Hebrew Bible and Christian scriptures related to "belief." The blazon of early Christianity was "faith"—*fide* in Latin and πίστις in Greek.[142] The concept is overwhelmingly considered synonymous with "belief" today, and both words are frequently translated that way, but the salient sense in early Christianity was a socially oriented notion of "trust" or "confidence."[143] Even the English "believe" appears to have meant "to hold dear" in earliest usage, transforming into a declaration of loyalty and finally to the modern concept of a conviction or an opinion about the truth of a given proposition.[144] Finally, the academic treatment of "belief" within the study of religion tends to be remarkably one-dimensional and flat. It is all too often treated as mere affirmation of the truth of a proposition, but

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[141] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 180. Similarly, Talal Asad concluded his discussion of religion as belief stating, "It is preeminently the Christian church that has occupied itself with identifying, cultivating, and testing belief as a verbalizable inner condition of true religion" (Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 48).

[142] Note, too, that to refer to a religion as a "faith" additionally frames it in terms of Christian self-understanding. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's universalization of "faith" is one of the most frequently criticized aspects of his *The Meaning and End of Religion*. See Malcolm Ruel, *Belief, Ritual & the Securing of Life: Reflexive Essays on a Bantu Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 54–56; Morgan, "Introduction," 2.

[143] See Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language, and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference between Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Ruel, *Belief, Ritual & the Securing of Life*, 36–59. For an excellent cognitive linguistic examination of more recent translations of "thinking" and "believing" in the Bible, see José Sanders, "Translating 'Thinking' and 'Believing' in the Bible," in *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies*, ed. Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 253–76.

[144] Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 105–27.

the social-scientific study of the use of the term has unraveled "belief" as indexing a far more complex and multifaceted assemblage of phenomenological domains.[145] Additionally, in its usage within and between religious communities, it primarily serves interests of identity politics, and so is central only as a function of religious pluralism and diversity.

We impose modern Protestant-colored lenses when we insist on reducing the Hebrew Bible to codifications of belief or faith. Richard Hess' *Israelite Religions* is an example of a relatively recent engagement with the concept of Israelite religion that helpfully moves beyond a monolithic conceptualization of a single Israelite ideology, but still fundamentally orients the evaluation towards belief:

> this study proposed to reexamine the extrabiblical and biblical evidence for the religions of the southern Levant in the Iron Age (c. 1200–586 BC) and to locate features that might be distinctive in terms of the religions of Israelites and Judeans. If it succeeds at all, it will at best serve as an initial body of data that can be used for the study of Israelite religion. . . . In the end it will argue that, while there existed a bewildering variety of religious beliefs and practices in the relatively tiny states that were Israel and Judah, this does not exclude, in terms of logic or of evidence, the possibility of a single core of beliefs among some that extended back, perhaps far back, into Israel's preexilic past.[146]

The argument for a core group of beliefs extending "far back" into Israel's past reveals the conceptual banner under which the data and the methodologies are to be subordinated. The influence of this subordination plays out in the material and textual remains Hess chooses to examine, and the directions those examinations go. For example, in discussing Late Bronze Age archives, Hess begins in Egypt, commenting that,

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[145] Morgan, "Introduction," 3–12; Michael H. Connors and Peter W. Halligan, "A cognitive account of belief: a tentative road map," *FiP* 5 (2015): 1–14.

[146] Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 14–15.

Egyptian religious practices that can be related to later West Semitic forms are found in the second half of the second millennium. The Cairo Hymn to Amun in Egypt (c. 1500/1400 BC) portrays Amun as the sole deity before he created the other deities. Much closer to the belief in a single, unique god is the teaching of Akhenaten. For this fourteenth-century BC pharaoh, the worship of Aten alone was necessary.[147]

Ostensibly aimed at illuminating Egyptian *practice*, the discussion begins with exclusive focus on a belief, *monotheism*,[148] which raises another dichotomy that has heavily distorted the analysis of ancient Israel and early Judaism, namely the monotheism/polytheism dichotomy.

Monotheism/Polytheism

In the ancient world, the dividing and hierarchizing of cults according to whether they reflected a belief in the existence of one sole deity or of more than one likely would have been considered laughably arbitrary, and in no small part because the prioritization of the *beliefs* manifested by the cult would have been a flagrant category error. That does not seem to be how they organized knowledge. The concept is, like religion itself, a modern one: the first known use of the word "monotheism" comes from 1660 in Cambridge Platonist Henry More's treatise *The Grand Mystery of Godliness*.[149] And yet, despite increasingly widespread contemporary knowledge of the concept's seventeenth century CE origins, there has been a great deal of debate in the last few decades aimed at identifying the threshold of monotheism in ancient Israel and fleshing out its

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[147] Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 91–92.

[148] Hess moves on to discuss the attestation of prophecy and the "earliest substantial written evidence for many of the towns that the Bible associated with Israel in the subsequent centuries" (Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 92).

[149] Henry More, *The Grand Mystery of Godliness; or, A True and Faithfull Representation of the Everlasting Gospel Of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Onely Begotten Son of God and Sovereign over Men and Angels* (London: F. Flesher, 1660). "Atheism" and "atheist" are known from a century earlier (Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 6, n. 4).

precise nature and function in early Judaism. A helpful corrective has been provided in Nathan MacDonald's 2003 *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*,[150] which examined the development of the concept of monotheism in its Enlightenment context and argued, among other things, that the "intellectualization implicit in the use of 'monotheism' is not found in Deuteronomy."[151] His text did not engage Deutero-Isaiah, but others have arrived at similar conclusions about that text. This increased scholarly engagement with the possibility that the monotheism/polytheism dichotomy fails as an adequate framework for analyzing the Hebrew Bible and literature of early Judaism may help mitigate the imposition of modern frameworks onto ancient texts about deity, but the question is still most commonly couched in terms of "religion" and it remains deeply embedded.[152]

Two patterns stand out to me as reflecting pretty clear attempts to shoehorn the modern dichotomy into the ancient texts where they best serve the rhetorical needs of contemporary scholarship. The first pattern pertains to scholars of the Hebrew Bible, for whom Deutero-Isaiah most commonly represents the threshold of the modern concept of monotheism, which they almost unilaterally define as belief in the existence of a single deity (there's that "belief" again).[153] The

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[150] MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 5–52.

[151] MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 210.

[152] For instance, James S. Anderson acknowledges in *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) that the term first appeared in 1660 (citing MacDonald) and even goes on to say that Hebrew Bible scribes "most likely had no word nor any clearly defined concept for a monotheism which implies the denial of any other gods' existence but one's own," but on the very next page states that Isaiah 45 "can be considered monotheistic in the modern sense of the term" (pp. 1–2). The book concludes with an argument for considering Israel to have become a "properly monotheistic religion" in the Achaemenid period (pp. 117–18). See also Mark S. Smith, "Monotheism and the Redefinition of Divinity in Ancient Israel," *JISMOR* 9 (2014): 3–19.

[153] This list could go on for pages, but some representative examples are Robert Karl Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 207; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10; Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 435; John Day, *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 340; Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 79; André Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007), 8; Hywel Clifford, "Deutero-Isaiah and Monotheism," in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 267; Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baa*l, 1.

"no other god" rhetoric of Deutero-Isaiah represents, for these scholars, the breakthrough to the rejection of the existence of other gods, and therefore the threshold of monotheism. This interpretation is rightly challenged by a number of scholars, most effectively on the grounds that the rhetoric appearing in Deutero-Isaiah is essentially no different from that of Deuteronomy, and does not deny the existence of the other gods, just their relevance and power compared to YHWH.[154]

The second pattern involves New Testament scholars looking at monotheism in early Judaism as a background for christology. These scholars still seem to presuppose that monotheism is to be found in their subject matter, but there are frequent and explicit references to other gods in Greco-Roman period Jewish literature, which forces them to rework the definition of monotheism into something more akin to what a Hebrew Bible scholar might call monolatry or henotheism[155]—the worship of one God alone without the concomitant denial of the existence of other gods.[156] Larry Hurtado, one of the most prominent advocates for this approach, has stated that "monotheism does

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[154] See P. de Boer, *Second Isaiah's Message* (Leiden: Brill, 1956), 47; James Barr, "The Problem of Israelite Monotheism," *TGUOS* 17 (1957–58): 52–62; Ulrich Mauser, "One God Alone: A Pillar of Biblical Theology," *PSB* 12.3 (1991): 259; R. W. L. Moberly, "How Appropriate is 'Monotheism' as a Category for Biblical Interpretation," in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North (London: T&T Clark, 2004): 229–31; Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18.1 (2008): 9–15; cf. Saul M. Olyan, "Is Isaiah 40–55 Really Monotheistic?" *JANER* 12 (2012): 190–201.

[155] See Juha Pakkala, *Intolerant Monolatry in the Deuteronomistic History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 53–54; Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism*, 9; Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 166–69; Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?"; Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 147–48; Ellen White, *Yahweh's Council: Its Structure and Membership* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 146.

[156] See also Peter Hayman, "Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" *JJS* 42.1 (1991): 1–15; Paul Rainbow, "Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article," *NovT* 33.1 (1991): 83; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Worship and Monotheism in the Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 86–89; William Horbury, "Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age," in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 16–44; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 13–16.

not involve denying the *existence* of such beings, only that they properly cannot be compared with the one deity in status and significance, and even in nature."[157]

This represents a radical departure from both the contemporary notion of monotheism and the conceptualization applied to the study of the Hebrew Bible. Hurtado, however, declares that if this "causes problems for some modern expectations that 'pure' monotheism should entertain no such beings . . . the real problem is in imposing such expectations."[158] In both patterns, what we have is the accommodation of the concept of monotheism to the literature in which it is presupposed. Abjuring the presentistic application of an incommensurate category in favor of some other more accurate descriptor—monolatry, for instance—seems wholly unacceptable for these scholars, which suggests to me the use of "monotheism" primarily functions as an act of identity construction meant to assert theological continuity with the objects of study.

Scripturalism

Another frequently employed conceptual framework in the study of religion in general and the Hebrew Bible more specifically is the notion that sacred or authoritative texts play a central role in governing and codifying religion.[159] This framework is primarily a product of the centralization

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[157] Hurtado, "Monotheism," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 961; cf. Hurtado, "Monotheism, Principle Angels, and the Background of Christology," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 546–64.

[158] Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 120. Regarding the acknowledgement of the other gods, Hurtado seems to me to argue that because Jewish worship was aimed at one single deity, the references to other gods can be dismissed as not compromising monotheism: "scholars argue largely about whether ancient Jews conceived of more than one figure as divine, and they seek to answer the question almost entirely on the basis of semantic arguments about the meaning of honorific titles or phrases, without always studying adequately how ancient Jews practiced their faith. But in the same way that modern principles of linguistics persuasively teach us that the particular meaning of a word in any given occurrence is shaped crucially by the sentence in which it is used . . . so it should be recognized as a basic principle in the analysis of religious traditions that the real meaning of words, phrases, and statements is always connected with the practice(s) of the religious tradition" (p. 116).

[159] See Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 110–13.

and prioritization of the Bible within Reformation and post-Reformation Christian ideology. It is

not difficult to adduce evidence for this perspective as a yardstick for civilization and a facilitator

of colonial ideologies—often masked as proselytism or liberation—in early comparative religion.

Richard King calls this "scripturalism" and provides the following description:

> Scripturalism: that each ('world') religion is fundamentally grounded in 'scripture' and a closed canon, and that such texts—treated primarily in terms of their cognitive meaning rather than as ritual artefacts—constitute the primary authoritative yardstick by which the beliefs and practices of each tradition are to be evaluated.[160]

Understanding a community or culture's foundational or shared texts as "scripture"

immediately imports a host of European/American and largely Protestant presuppositions about

the origins, forms, and functions of those texts. For most early traditions, however, texts were

simply a means of facilitating memorization—the oral recitation and/or aural consumption were

the primary loci of significance, which was fundamentally phenomenological.[161] Colonial India

and Hinduism present one of the most fascinating examples of the distorting effects of this

framework. "Hindu" was a regional/cultural designation until it became reified in the nineteenth

century as a religion.[162] As this process began, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were distinguished

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[160] King, "Colonialism, Hinduism and the Discourse of Religion," in *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*, ed. Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde (London: Routledge, 2010), 105.

[161] Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued that a more fundamentalist type of scripturalism is at work in Islam. He notes, "Many years ago I advanced the view that the notion of a parallel between the Muslim Qur'ān and the Christian Bible, as two instances of the genus scripture, is of course a first approximation, but only that; closer to the truth of the two situations is an analogy between the role of the Qur'ān in Islamic life and thought, and the role in Christian life and thought of the figure of Christ. For Christians, God's central revelation is in the person of Christ, with the Bible as record of that revelation" (Smith, "Scripture as Form and Concept: Their Emergence for the Western World," in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Miriam Levering [New York: State University of New York Press, 1989], 30). It could certainly be argued that Islamic scripturalism has influenced popular conceptualizations of the nature of scripture in contemporaneity. On the development of prose narrative within the traditions that would form the earliest texts of the Hebrew Bible, and the significance of orality and memory in that process of textualization, see Pioske, *Memory in a Time of Prose*.

[162] Nongbri records a fascinating breakdown in communication between an employee of the British East India Company named Malcolm Lewin and the House of Commons. During this testimony, Lewin objected to the

from Hinduism as religions "of the book." Through Max Müller's sweeping efforts to gather and translate the literature of the East, the *Rig-Veda* and later the *Upanishads* were translated and framed as the Hindu "scriptures" or "Bible."[163] This syncretism served to consolidate a variety of traditions and practices under a single scriptural heading and also gave Hinduism a place at the religious table.[164] Regarding this "booking" of Hinduism, Gregory Price Grieve has commented that,

> Through orientalism, scripturalism was imported from Europe and America to South Asia. For instance, as Joanne Waghorne has shown, when European 'orientalist' scholars first encountered Indian religions they forced the diverse traditions and practices into a Procrustean Bed of scripture. As Richard King has argued, such scripturalism has forced Indian religions into a 'world religions' echo of Christian theology.[165]

Similar issues plague our study of the Hebrew Bible. As "scripture," it is viewed by many as a repository for ancient Israelite and Jewish belief or doctrine, but just as map is not territory, scripture is not devotee.[166] There likely never have existed a single Israelite, Judahite, or Jewish person who understood their social identity in precisely all the terms prescribed in the Hebrew Bible (at least as we interpret it). Despite this, numerous publications purport to evaluate and

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characterization of "Hindoos" as "heathens" and explained that a Hindoo could also be a Christian. He appears to have been using the term as a cultural or nationalistic marker, but then goes on to explain that "a Hindoo is a person of the Hindoo faith." The term seems to have been in the process of transitioning from a cultural designation to a religious one. See Nogbri, *Before Religion*, 109–10, quoting "First Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories; Together with the Minutes of Evidence," in *Reports from Committees* (London: House of Commons, 1853), 281–82.

[163] Max Müller, ed. and trans., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita: The Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans*, 4 vols. (London: William H. Allen and Co., 1849–1862); Max Müller, ed. and trans., *The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 1: The Upanishads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879).

[164] Joanne Punzo Waghorne, "Hinduism and the Fate of India," *WQ* 15.3 (1991): 51–52.

[165] Grieve, "Symbol, Idol and *Mūrti*," 61, citing Waghorne, "Hinduism and the Fate of India"; and Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-colonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East'* (New York: Routledge, 1999); cf. Gregory A. Barton, "Abolishing the East: The Dated Nature of Orientalism in the Definition and Ethical Analysis of the Hindu Faith," *CompS* 29.2 (2009): 182–90.

[166] The observation that "map is not territory" has a long history that begins in mathematics and physics in the 1930s, but was adopted into the study of religion most conspicuously with Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

uncover the theology of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.[167] In each instance, what is being

accomplished is an artificial reconstruction that would have had little relationship to the ways

individuals lived and perceived their traditions, even if it were not more than two millennia

removed from the composition of the texts it is evaluating.[168] Now, strides have been made in

recent years in loosing the scholarship from its textual moorings so that it can explore other

approaches to understanding the worldviews and lived experiences of ancient Israelite and Jewish

communities, but these concerns are primarily coming out of archaeology, anthropology, and even

the cognitive sciences, and are still struggling for space to extend their theoretical roots within

biblical studies proper.[169] There is a great deal of work left to be done.

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[167] See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Bd. I, *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957); Murray H. Lichtenstein, "An Interpersonal Theology of the Hebrew Bible," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 61–82; Graham Davies, "'God' in Old Testament Theology," in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004*, ed. André Lemaire (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 175–94; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[168] Obviously, to some degree I am doing the same in this thesis with my focus on the conceptualization of deity in the Hebrew Bible, although two considerations support the value of its contribution: (1) I openly acknowledge the artificial locus of meaning reified at the level of the text, and (2) the grounding of my approach in the cognitive sciences is intended to facilitate looking behind the curtain to some degree to consider the relationship of the textual reflections of deity and divine agency to their perception on the personal and material level. In other words, instead of claiming to uncover the theology of the Hebrew Bible, I am claiming to uncover the ways deity and divine agency would have been conceptualized by Israelites and Judahites, as well as the way the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible worked with or against those conceptualizations in the service of their own rhetorical goals.

[169] Ellen van Wolde, for instance, has published numerous explorations of the Hebrew Bible through the lenses of CL, but the largest impact her work has achieved was primarily negative when her analysis of the Hebrew ברא was ludicrously sensationalized in British media (*The Telegraph* ran the headline "God is not the Creator, claims academic," http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/6274502/God-is-not-the-Creator-claims-academic.html) and was not favorably reviewed by scholars. On that controversy, see Ellen van Wolde, "Why the Verb ברא Does Not Mean 'To Create' in Genesis 1.1–2.4a," *JSOT* 34.1 (2009): 3–23; Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, "To Create, To Separate, or To Construct: An Alternative for a Recent Proposal as to the Interpretation of ברא in Gen 1:1–2:4a," *JHS* 10.3 (2010), article 9; Ellen van Wolde and Robert Rezetko, "Semantics and the Semantics of ברא: A Rejoinder to the Arguments Advanced by B. Becking and M. Korpel," *JHS* 11.9 (2011), article 3; John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 5–6. On her application of cognitive linguistics to biblical studies, see Ellen van Wolde, ed., *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Ellen van Wolde, "Cognitive Linguistics and Its Application to Genesis 28:10–22," in *One Text, A Thousand Methods: Studies in Memory of Sjef van Tilborg*, ed. Patrick Chatelion Counet and Ulrich Berges (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125–48; Ellen van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Ellen van Wolde, "Cognitive Linguistics: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of the Concept of Defilement in Ezekiel 22:1–16," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. Katherine J. Dell and Paul M. Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 257–71; Ellen van Wolde, "Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah," in Howe and Green, *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies*, 193–222.

Conclusion

The study of religion has long been hindered by the frameworks that have developed to systematize both our understanding of conceptual categories in general and the concept of religion more particularly. Biblical studies has lagged even further behind because of additional theological commitments and the methodological frameworks that have developed to serve the interests of those commitments for so many generations. These stultifying conventions cannot be overcome through the continued application of the same theoretical models that have for so long fostered and nurtured them. Rather, what is required is the imposition of outside methodologies, and that imposition has demonstrated the reified nature of the category of religion. If it is to be gainfully studied going forward, it must be as a modern social construct and not as a transhistorical and transcultural constant.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that religion is a modern reification that (1) has become embedded within the methodological presuppositions of contemporary biblical scholarship, and (2) substantially distorts the modern study of what is understood as religion as well as the reconstruction of the ideologies of the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism. In light of all this, the category of "religion," irrespective of the specific framework or definitional approach, fails entirely as a heuristic or organizing principle for the study of the ancient world. Not only are the central principles of that framework incommensurate with the priorities and ideological foci of individuals living in first millennium BCE Southwest Asia, but the division of their world into domains, of which religion is simply one, sits at odds with the worldviews of non-European/American and non-modern

peoples. As Ittai Gradel has remarked in his analysis of emperor worship in the Roman world, "even our view of religion as a dimension, or aspect of the human spirit, separable from other spheres of human experience and common to all mankind, is ultimately christianizing and directly relevant only to a Christian cultural sphere, or such as are influenced by it."[170]

In the context of my analysis of divine agency, perhaps the most damaging distortions would be the subjugation of practice and materiality to texts and mythologies, as well as the strict boundaries that would be presupposed to separate the sacred from the profane and the divine from the human. Other fields with closer methodological links to anthropology and other disciplines are beginning to exploit the cracks in the foundations of those presuppositions. To return to Gradel, close methodological examinations of the rituals and cults associated with emperor worship,

> illustrate the fallacies of interpreting traditional religious practice in the light of philosophical or mythological texts or arguments. . . . For divine cult was an honour, differing in degree but not in kind from 'secular' honours; and this by itself implies that there is something wrong with our usual and ingrained oppositions, of religion versus politics, of man versus god, when applied to pagan practice.[171]

Gradel asserts that a dichotomous framework is distorting, and that ancient Romans conceptualized of the divine and the human rather in terms of a continuum or spectrum, which allowed for concentration at the poles, but also overlap and integration near the center. Other scholars have appealed to this framework as well, and I will discuss it in greater detail in Chapter 5. At this point, however, I turn to the foundational concepts of agency and personhood.

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[170] Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 6.
[171] Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 2–3.