Religion and Culture

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ABSTRACT

Of all the disciplines in the humanities, religion offers a unique problem in definition. It is generally conceded that no universally satisfactory definition of religion exists due to a number of factors: failure to delimit religious experience from non-religious experience; failure to agree whether a religion is purely an internalized experience or a predominantly behavioral experience; the tendency to define religion through differing disciplines, thereby interpreting religion in accordance with the discipline's limited role in knowledge. This paper will discuss these problems by reviewing some of the more important definitions over the past two millennia: Cicero, Lactantius, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Clifford Geertz. In addition, the relation of religion to culture will be addressed, how culture is viewed by the likes of E. B. Tylor, B. Malinowski, M. Mead, Ward Goodenough, and others.

Religion

The most significant accomplishment of higher mental functions is the ability to capture and make sense of the outside world, including the objective self. We only need to investigate the various neural processes that illustrate linguistic encoding and decoding to ascertain the complexity of such procedures and to realize that we understand the world primarily through indirect means, i.e., through linguistic symbolism. This form of symbolism, in order to be in a real and meaningful relationship with the non-symbolic realm, must be based upon a direct and non-linguistic experience with the world. The variables that arise are such that only general agreements can be realized. A specific and detailed comprehension of the world will more likely reveal an intrusion of personal interpretations that will less likely be understood by others. As such, "opinion," "interpretation" and "perception" will have taken on added importance in this light.

One means of understanding the outside world is through "definition." Definitions are the outcome of mental processes—linguistic, logical, semantic—that capture an understanding of other concepts often related to objects—internal or external—in nature. Yet, as much as we think that definitions describe the outer world, what they actually indicate are other concepts, other mental constructs. Definitions can never directly capture the extra-linguistic realm, so it is pointless to equate definitions with extra-linguistic reals; rather, they only capture symbols or words. With this in mind, the question arises, what are we really defining when we examine words and concepts such as "culture" and "religion?" Of the many definitions of "religion," for instance, are we content with defining merely its function or behavior? One such example by Peter Williams in his *Popular Religion in America* defines "religion" as a:

> System of symbolic beliefs and actions—myths, rituals, and creeds and their supporting social structures—which provides its adherents with a coherent interpretation of their universe. Religion is a process of cosmo-construction: it creates

> order out of chaos, and informs its constituency with a sense of meaning, purpose and significance that would otherwise be lacking. Religion creates order, an order which, ideally, is exhaustive and personally satisfying. Religion is, moreover, a social phenomenon.[1]

In this definition, certain component—"myths, rituals, and creeds"—are required as building blocks to create an "order" that has an effect upon the individual ("personally satisfying"). As an afterthought, religion is said to be a "social phenomenon" and not, one would surmise, an individual enterprise. This definition falls partially under the rubric of "operational definition," that is, a definition that includes a recognizable set of actions that will manifest the phenomenon.[2] An operational definition also encompasses more functional definitions of religion, usually suggesting that religion must affect the individual and community in some way or other. Perhaps the quintessential functional description of religion is that set forth by Marx:

> Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

There is an underlying assumption in Marx's definition that religion has a function in society: to alleviate distress in an alienated and unhappy humanity. The means of overcoming this suffering is equated to an opiate overcoming pain. Overcoming pain does not mean ending pain, however; it merely camouflages it. While the alleviation of pain and suffering is good; while the belief in the supernatural, joyous world that ends all sorrows is good, there is no denying, from Marx's perspective, that the source of all this comfort is strictly delusional.[3] He therefore makes the following observation:

> The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

Marx turns religion on its head. It is not the font of truth detailing the human condition but rather its opposite; consequently, it is the role of history to establish worldly truth and of philosophy "to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked."[4]

William James concurs, to a point, with Marx's view that religion is a palliative, when he writes, "Religion is nothing if it be not the vital act by which the entire mind seeks to save itself by clinging to the principle from which it draws its life."[5] For Marx, however, religion as a medication resembles a placebo; James, on the other hand, views religion as a highly effective medication, with its principal ingredient being the act of prayer.[6]

These examples give but a hint to attempts that are made to define religion: Is it a group or individual impulse or activity? Is it to be portrayed as primarily interiorized or exteriorized? Is it governed solely by faith or may reason play a part? Does it have distinguishing features separating it from philosophy, ideology, magic,

and spirituality? If so, what are these features? Is there a reality behind the linguistic symbol "religion" or is the reality a construct from the symbol?

These questions arise mainly in academic circles, but what is even more important is the issue whether religion "is a *sui generis* dimension of human experience, recognizable cross-culturally and not to be analytically reduced to other categories such as culture, economics, and power."[7] Philosophically, this view echoes a Platonic perspective, a perspective that is tenacious in its durability, having already undergone two rebirths: born in ancient Greece, resurrected during the Renaissance, and now reborn surreptitiously into the academic mainstream. The problem in defining religion lies in the difficulty of understanding its true place in the human condition as well as the ongoing debate revolving around the question of reality. Furthermore "religion" is a uniquely Western concept. It was introduced to convey specific practices and ideas that developed in classical Roman society and culture and Christian dogma. Whether it is a local phenomenon or scan be exported to other parts of the world is another story. Thirdly, it did not represent an abstraction until fairly recently. It most definitely represented specific practices and attitudes within a limited framework. Finally, there is the common mental exercise to broaden, to generalize, and to expand the boundaries of the term's denotative attributes.

The Western foundations of the term "religion"—in this case I am discussing only definitions and not a phenomenon existing outside of language—are enunciated by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 BCE) in his *De Natura Deorum*.[8] Therein, his definition of "religion" is perhaps the first extensive discussion of "religion," and it is of interest that it is discussed in the context of Stoicism through the Stoic Quintus Lucilius Balbus. He discusses the topic under four headings: (1) that the gods exist; (2) their nature; (3) that they govern the world; and (4) that they care for the fortunes of humans.[9] On the first point, proof of the gods' existence is determined by the heavenly bodies and the sky. The second point concludes that the world is god.[10] It is under this second heading that "religion" comes into play. Balbus argues that "the regularity … in the stars, this exact punctuality throughout all eternity … is incomprehensible without rational intelligence and purpose."[11] Knowing the world and the heavenly bodies reveals also the gods, who strive "to preserve and to protect the universe."[12] After a discussion of the gods and their names, we come to the basis of the argument that Cicero is making: that there is a "true and valuable philosophy of nature" that has evolved into an "imaginary and fanciful pantheon."[13] The popular stories of the gods, such as those of the epics of Homer, carry little weight, but "though repudiating these myths with contempt, we shall nevertheless be able to understand the personality and the nature of the divinities pervading the substance of the several elements."[14] Cicero then concludes that the best way to worship the gods is to venerate them with purity, sincerity and innocence both in thought and in speech.[15] It is in this context that religion is contrasted with superstition. According to the etymology of the latter, those who are superstitious wish their children to survive them, for the term derives from *superstes* "survivor (of another's death)."[16] People, on the other hand, who are "careful" (*relegerent*) in undertaking all items involving worship of the gods are termed "religious" (*religiosi*): a term deriving from "being careful," "retracing," and "selecting" (*relegendo*). Words such as "selective," "discriminative," and "mindful" seem to capture the sense of *relegere*, with the root *leg-* also incorporated in *intellegere* (to understand) and *neg-legere* ('to neglect').[17] In

a previous section of *De Natura Deorum*, religion and superstition are described in the following manner: superstition implies a groundless fear of the gods, but religion consists in the pious worship of the gods.[18] This is a view of the Academic skeptic, Cotta, who states, in answer to Valleius' Epicurianism, the question as to why worship is owed the gods if the gods do not respect humans. If piety (*pietas*), i.e., the "sense of responsibility," and "loyalty," is defined as justice towards the gods (*iustitia adversum deos*), and "religion the pious worship of the gods (*...religionem quae deorum cultu pio continetur*), he protests, then how can "any claims of justice exist between us and them, if god and man have nothing in common?[19] And so the argument goes. What is learned from this discussion are the following:

1) "Religion" is characterized by worship.
2) This worship is directed toward the gods—not the gods trivialized in Homer—but rather the gods who are known through the regularity of the heavenly bodies, thereby revealing an intelligence and design behind this regularity.
3) Not only do the gods reveal the order, the intelligence and design of the universe, they also preserve and protect the universe from disorder.
4) The worship of the gods must be correct and "pious," implying a sense of duty.[20]
5) Worship that is not proper, but rather is based upon the fear of the gods or ignores the gods by wishing merely to be survived by the worshipper's children is not classified as religion but as superstition.
6) Religion as conceived by Cicero is more subjective due to his emphasis on the correct intellectual and emotional stance towards the gods.
7) In sum, "religion" is the "responsible and proper worship of the gods."

The mention of a "fear of the gods" may reflect also the attitude of the Cicero's contemporary, the poet Lucretius (99 – 55 BCE), who personifies "Religion" as a malevolent force.[21]

In late antiquity, another etymology was proposed by Lactantius (260 - 340 CE) in his *Divinae Institutiones* (*Divine Institutes*), IV, xxviii that connects *religio* to *re-ligare*, the latter having the connotation of 'reconnecting.' The importance of this definition is to demonstrate the central act in Christianity, the death and resurrection of Jesus in order to reestablish that special relation to God that was severed by the Fall of Adam. Since Lactantius's understanding of *religio* is so clearly in tune with Christian doctrine, it is not surprising that his definition is by far the more popular.[22]

Religion continued to be discussed in the ensuing centuries, but the important point to be made in Cicero's and Lactantius' interpretation is that there is a realization of the "More," of something beyond human power and experience and that humans strive to make positive contact with it. The essential ingredients of the popular view of religion are already present:

1) The More, the Beyond, sometimes the Transcendent;
2) The Means of making contact with the More;
3) The intension to do so;
4) The underlying assumption that the above is unfailingly true and real.

These ingredients derive mostly from Lactantius' etymology, but it is clear too those other developments arise that are important in the growth of the term. For one, Smith points out that the Christian life was far more comprehensive than the other cultic practices [23] since it included the moral, liturgical, intellectual, and social dimensions in addition to the purely ritual dimension. Secondly, during the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino introduced the notion, in keeping with Plato, that *religio* is natural to humanity, an instinct divine in its source allowing us to perceive and worship God.[24] This is a very powerful argument that no doubt makes a great deal of sense among the participants of the religious life. What he introduced that was unique was the notion that "one member of a genus may be the full representative of the essence of that genus."[25] This natural tendency of humans is to seek good, to seek God and to respond to His presence.

It is a tendency that seems normal and reasonable to many. One such example appeared in the *New Straits Times* of October 7, 2001.[26] Entitled "The Essence of Religion," the author, Appa, writes that every religion has a "set of principles that are universal in nature—and eternal—and a set of rules and codes derived from these principles," with too much emphasis on the latter and too little on the former. "Religion is a deliberate and conscious effort to reach God," he continues, much in the same vein as Ficino. Although various paths and methods are devised to do so, none may be considered invalid. This is also hinted at in Appa's article:

> "I think whatever name we give Him; Her/It makes no difference. As the saying goes, a rose by any other name smells as sweet. What is important is that we are agreed that God is love, God is peace. And we know that love is a fire with transforming power.

This, he says, is the essence of religion. "We should not argue over externals but rather look to the internal and towards the eternal." Again, this echoes Ficino: "all opinions of men, all their responses, all their customs, change—except *religio*."[27]

Appa also makes one further observation regarding the missing ingredient in religion as it is practiced today—conscience—a notion that is reminiscent of Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), who offers one definition of religion as "the recognition of all duties as divine commands."[28] This emphasis on duty is evident in the definition of "conscience":

> "...a state of consciousness which in itself is duty. ...Hence the consciousness that an action which I intend to perform is right is unconditioned duty. The understanding, not conscience, judges whether an action is really right or wrong. ... But concerning the act which I propose to perform I must not only judge and form an opinion, but I must be sure that it is not wrong; and this requirement is a postulate of conscience, to which is opposed probabilism, i.e., the principle that the mere opinion that an action may well be right warrants its being performed. Hence conscience might also be defined as follows: it is the moral faculty of judgment, passing judgment upon itself.[29]

Kant's discussion of religion is intriguing: in one sense, a product of the Enlightenment; in another sense, timeless. The above quote reflects the importance of reason, the "organon of the age,"[30] and explains why Kant chose to identify "true religion" as laws.[31] In one passage, this is partially explained through the idea of the association of the "highest good" with "the purely moral disposition," and that the impulse to the highest good is achievable through the cooperation of a "moral Ruler of the world."[32] True religious belief accepts the existence of God as the source His laws and, as Judge, "speaks to our conscience according to the holy law which we know."[33]

The contribution of Kant to understanding Religion is significant. Based upon his emphasis on reason, morality, conscience, and law, the goal of a religion of reason is the moral improvement of the individual. If there is only one religion, there are many faiths. Whereas an ecclesiastical faith is external, religion is "hidden within and has to do with moral dispositions,[34] and a moral religion lay within reason.[35]

We come now to the modern day. The Enlightenment and scientific enquiry predominant (despite a postmodern challenge that seems to be taking hold of segments of academia, namely, the humanities and social sciences) and religion is no longer considered as serious a subject and as mainstream as it once was in earlier decades. Religion is viewed by its investigators as a phenomenon, not a noumenon. Nowadays, with the presence of thousands of religions functioning throughout the world, it is highly unlikely that their common traits will be isolated. It is equally doubtful that religion possesses an "essence," but attempts to find one are not lacking. One of the first to question this possibility was Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.[36] He makes a number of interesting points:

1) There are no false religions.[37] Mention has already been made of those practices that do not qualify, such as Cicero's "superstition"[38] or, within the last century, the use of the terms "cult" and "sect." "False" may not even apply to another or second religion but rather within the same religion. Thus Zwingli's *De Vera et Falsa Religione Commentarius*[39] is a good example of the latter. Such an example appears in literature, a specific example being *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, where the Anglican priest, Thwakum, confides: "When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England."[40] Obviously, it is the species and not the genus that is considered most meaningful in this quote.

2) All religions possess a sense of the supernatural, i.e., the "world of the mysterious, of the un-knowable, of the un-understandable."[41] Yet, mysteries were not always so profound nor removed nor unexplainable. Furthermore, the concept of the supernatural is merely the negation of natural order, "that the phenomena of the universe are bound together by necessary relations, called laws."[42]
   Indeed, the gap between faith and reason does not appear to be as ancient as we might assume. The scholasticism of the Middle Ages,

especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas is based upon the St. Anselm's motto, *fides quaerens intellectum*, "faith seeking understanding."[43]

3) Divinity is not present in all religions, so it is not surprising that the assertion of a bond between the human mind and the "mysterious mind," as proposed by M. Réville (*Prolegomena to the History of Religions*, 25)[44] does not hold up for the reason stated above.

4) Not all rites are religious, yet religious phenomena are based upon rites and beliefs.[45] And here we find that magic also shares many of the same ingredients. Yet, there is an opposition between the two, according to Durkheim. The basic difference, according to Durkheim, is that a religion comprises a determined group adhering to a common body of beliefs. The key term here is that it is a society with a common faith, i.e., a Church.[46] Magic, on the other hand, does not manifest itself in a Church but through the magician, who in turn has a clientele.[47] From this discussion comes Durkheim's definition of religion:

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

This definition, as well as the definitions preceding it, is guideposts to the thoughts of some of the great philosophers and scholars on this subject. As insightful as they are, none are fully satisfactory for a number of reasons that need not be dealt with in this paper. This includes the one that follows, that of Clifford Geertz's definition in his article, "Religion as a Cultural System,"[48] perhaps the most significant and influential definition from the 1960s to 1990s:

> (1) A system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

This definition has been criticized in the influential and stimulating essay by Talal Asad, "The Study of Religion in the Current Political Moment."[49] First, Asad takes the position that "there cannot be a universal definition of religion."[50] He reasons that this is the case because religion's "constituent elements and relationships are historically specific" and that "definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes."[51] As I understand these observations, the definition of "religion" as opposed to "a religion" is not of a concrete phenomenon but rather an abstract concept that presupposes an unchanging order. Furthermore, the concept is itself product of "discursive processes" over time. We have, therefore a definition of a concept in a timeless realm that bears little or no resemblance to the actual functioning phenomenon.[52]

Another problem with Geertz's definition involves what Bruce Lincoln describes as the "locus of the religious (as symbols, moods, motivations,

conceptions)."[53] For Lincoln, this works well with certain types of religiosity that form more oriented towards orthodoxy and belief, such as fundamentalist Protestantism; it does not work well with orthopraxic religions such as Catholicism and Islam.[54] What Asad asks is this: "What are the conditions in which religious symbols can actually produce religious dispositions? Or, as a nonbeliever would put it: How does (religious) power create (religious) truth?"

"Power" is the operative word, and Asad reaches back over the centuries to an idea conceived by St. Augustine, who sums up the need for power as *disciplina. Disciplina* is the "active process of corrective punishment, 'a softening-up process,' a 'teaching by inconveniences'...."[55] Power, therefore, is the corrective that held evil tendencies in check. Indeed, "although religious truth was eternal, the means for securing human access to it were not."[56]

What, then, can we conclude about religion? Assuming it cannot be adequately defined to meet the satisfaction of all its investigators, existential phenomena are recognized to exist within the individual and society that are identified as religious. If abstracted, it can be defined in a way that is satisfactory to a portion of the human community but not the whole community. One cannot argue that there is no religious phenomenon because there is no universally accepted definition. Definitions are like photographs. Both indicate existents beyond the words or photographic images. Both reflect but are not equivalent to the existent(s). The question arises, however, whether the existent is to be located solely in the behavior of the individual or group or within the brain-mind of the individual. We may speculate that religious behavior is somewhat akin to language behavior. We can observe specific actions connected to the two although admittedly it is easier to determine linguistic rather than religious behavior. Both may be said to function according to a deep structure that provides the "architecture" of the two. It is possible to locate specific areas of the brain that processes language activity whether it is language input or output. So too is it entirely likely that a deep structure exists for religious behavior in the neuro-biological sphere. The work of Andrew Newberg and the late Eugene d'Aquili in their books, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (1999) and *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (2001) as well as a number of other publications[57] suggest that there may be "neural paving stones leading to God."[58] Whether or not it is the brain responding to a supernatural, transcendent entity or whether the brain is creating this entity out of some need is a matter of debate and further research.

Culture

The heart of anthropological research is "culture," a term that was first employed in 1871 in its modern sense by E.B. Tylor in his influential study, *Primitive Culture*. It is a term borrowed from German *Kultur* and is defined by Tylor as:

> Culture or civilization . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Over the decades, dozens of definitions have been advanced enough to lead to anthropologists, A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, to publish a monograph devoted to this topic in 1952. Titled *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, 164 definitions were included and organized in 7 major groupings. Some of these definitions range from "learned behavior" to "ideas in the mind," "a logical construct," "a statistical fiction," and "a psychic defense mechanism." It is revealing that the authors preferred the definition to be "an abstraction from behavior" because it were simply behavior, it would come under the rubric of psychology.[59]

If we examine a wide range of definitions, certain ingredients are revealed:

1) *Culture has content:*

This originates from Tylor and carries over into more recent definitions. For instance, Kluckhohn and Kelly[60] define culture in part as "that complex whole which includes artifacts, beliefs, art, all the other habits acquired by man as a member of society, and all products of human activity as determined by these habits."

2) *Culture involves transmission of content:*

This notion appears in Malinowski's definition[61]: "Culture comprises inherited artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits, and values."

Margaret Mead concurs[62]: "Culture means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation."

3) *Culture is rule-governed:*

"Culture is the sum total of the ways of doing and thinking, past and present, of a social group. It is the sum of the traditions, or handed-down beliefs, and of customs, or handed-down procedures.[63]

4) *Culture is habit:*

". . . culture, the traditional pattern of action which constitute a major portion of the established habits with which an individual enters any social situation."[64]

5) *Culture is learning:*

"culture is the sociological term for learned behavior, behavior which in man is not given at birth, which is not determined by his germ cells as is the behavior of wasps or the social ants, but must be learned anew from grown people by each new generation."[65]

These components do not exhaust the possibilities and varieties of definitions, but there is one component that cannot be ignored, and that is knowledge. The cognitive view of culture involves a sharing of like views of the world. Such is the view of Ward Good enough in his "Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics"[66]:

> ...a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role hat they accept for any one of themselves. Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct

> from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning: knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term. By this definition, we should note that culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behavior, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.

Since the time of Tylor, the concept of "culture" has for the most part appropriated all areas of investigation. Somewhat facetiously, perhaps, may be the argument that two areas of inquiry exist: anthropology and history. Anthropology claims to investigate the totality of human experience from the synchronic perspective of present day experience; history claims to investigate the totality of human experience from the diachronic perspective of development of the culture. All other categories of investigation are subsets of these areas. Religion, therefore, may be viewed as a cultural phenomenon, and as such is limited to the investigative constraints of anthropologists. This, and the imposition of the scientific method to explain religious phenomena require a limitation upon what can be investigated in the area of religion. It is not by oversight that Geertz ignores the position of the supernatural in his definition of religion, for science investigates nature, not "supernature." What anthropologists and other scientific investigators assume is that culture is a human phenomenon, so that all activity and phenomena must of necessity originate only from humans. This is explicitly stated by Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge in their study, *A Theory of Religion*,[67] who set forth a deductive analysis based on a series of axioms, propositions, and definitions. Unlike most other studies, the authors provide a more sophisticated approach to the issue of culture and religion that reflect the variety of real life that often are ignored in other studies. First, the authors take on the issue of culture and society, the latter defined as "a closed structure of social relations," [68] the former as "the total complex of explanations exchanged by humans."[69] This complex of explanations add up to form a cultural system,[70] of which a religion is considered to be. The proposition that is set forth by the authors, then is that "[a]ny culture contains a number of cultural systems,"[71] of which religion[72] is one such example. In addition to cultural systems, there is the instance of "cultural specialization," defined as "the tendency of individuals to master parts of their culture and to engage in exchanges with others who have mastered different parts."[73] Since such specialties divide cultural systems, we may say that religion as a cultural system, i.e., a "Church" or formally organized structure, may be defined as "systems of general compensators based on supernatural assumptions."[74] This definition is connected with the proposition that certain explanations may prove valuable enough to convert cultural specialties into cultural systems. Such is the case of a "general compensator."[75] The definition of religion given above is primarily assumed to be associated with a social organization, which is explained as a collective enterprise "that specializes in providing some particular kinds of rewards."[76]

Stark and Bainbridge's explanation of cultural, cultural systems, religion and religious phenomena up to this point makes good sense. A problem arises, however, with that part of the definition of religion mentioning "supernatural assumptions." The authors define "supernatural" as referring "to forces beyond or outside nature which can suspend, alter, or ignore physical forces."[77] Only the "gods" are mentioned since "[h]umans will tend to conceptualize supernatural sources of rewards and costs as

gods."[78] The only point that they are willing to concede is the opinion that as "societies become older, larger, and more cosmopolitan they will worship few gods of greater scope."[79]

This is an astounding statement that flies in the face of historical fact. First, it eludes to evolutionism, a theory abandoned early in the 19th century. Second, the move from polytheism to monotheism did not take place in "older, larger, and more cosmopolitan" societies but in societies that were relatively homogeneous and restricted in area. Age seems not to have been a matter of importance in this shift. One need only turn to the Hebrew, Arab, and Iranian experience with their respective religions: the Hebrew religion—later Judaism—Islam, and Zoroastrianism. Third, gods need not be active in the natural realm. What of the *deus otiosus*, the god who is disengaged with this world? Fourth, the authors totally ignore the idea of a two-fold meta-empirical tier: the realm of "imagination" or that realm where the gods who are active in this world, and the transcendent—totally free of the "imaginal," having no involvement with this world, totally apart from this world, however it is interpreted. Thus, the *Upaniṣadic* "brahman-," the Buddhist *nirvāṇa*, the Christian and Muslim God come to mind. The argument presented here strikes me as naïve, yet it is a view that might lead to a more plausible explanation, which I would like to propose in the following section.

Conclusion

After all is said and done, the most sophisticated insights and interpretations of "religion" have not added a great deal more to our sense of what a religion is. We arrive at the conclusion that religion is a human enterprise, that it is part of culture, that it reflects human insight about the human condition and that which lies beyond the human. As a human enterprise, thought, word, and physical activities combine to form a system comprising verbal patterns (prayer, myth), physical patterns (ritual, yoga, dance), patterns of conduct (ethics and law), communities, and material monuments (painting, sculpture, architecture, and symbolizing natural objects). None can be called religious in and of themselves. Devoid of any relation to the More, they are cultural expressions with no religious content. Art and music are only viewed aesthetically without the More. Myths are fictions, prayers empty words, ethics are arbitrary, law merely contractual. Their transformation from the non-religious to the requires individual and communal intentions to establish and maintain a relationship with the More. Although religions are cultural in expression, what distinguishes religions from culture is that which lies outside the religious system and religious phenomena: the More. It is not culture that creates the More; we as humans seem to be disposed toward it. Our brains are hard-wired to consider it. Whether the brain, because of the way it is wired, is the source of the More, or whether the More is responsible for hard-wiring the brain, is a matter of irresolvable debate. Of course, our reason and emotions may reject it but that is beside the point. When the More is incorporated within a religion or in religious phenomena or spirituality, it is then interpreted and articulated within the confines of the cultural system.

Another aspect of a religion that is fundamental to human disposition rather than culture is desire in its most basic sense. Humans, because they are material and mental beings, have needs and desires that must be fulfilled. The regulating principle

of a religion is primarily a system of exchange. It is a form of religious or spiritual potlatch; in other words, the idea of *do ut des* "I give so that you (will) give (in return)." Of course this assumes that someone some "person" will give in return. If that is not so, there is the related idea that "I work so that I get *something* in return." No one gives in return in the latter statement, but the reward nonetheless comes. No doubt this resembles capitalism, the Protestant Ethic, and karma. In the case of Buddhism and Jainism, what is gained or achieved is not a relationship, fellowship, or salvation, but rather perfection.

Without the More, minus the intentional process, we have the religious system—all those elements that channel our thoughts and activities toward our goal, the means of visualizing and explaining the More, which is culture-bound. The religious system today, although a part of the culture of the community, affects the community to the degree that it is taken seriously. There is no doubt that religion no longer plays a significant role in European society, perhaps to the point that the material religious culture of Europe is now more of an aesthetic rather than a religious value, the same cannot be said in parts of the Muslim world or the Medieval Christian world. Religion therefore can play a role that ranges from dominant to insignificant. It can be a force for good or bad. It can be peace-loving or violent. It is important to note that it is not the religious system that is important, but to that which it is directed. Despite its failings and successes, the one consequence of its existence that uplifts humans from the trivial and destructive is its proclamation of the More. We find this aptly proclaimed in an oft-quoted remark by Albert Einstein:

> We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent being toward God.

Endnotes

[1] Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980, p. 9.
[2] On "operational definition," see *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operational_definition.*
[3] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (Feb. 1844). Available on the Internet at *http://www3.baylor.edu/~Scott_Moore/texts/Marx_Contr_Crit.html.*
[4] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right."
[5] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (NY: Modern Library Edition Random House, 1994): 34-35. Quoted from the article by Christopher Stawski, "Definitions and Hypotheses: William James, Religion, and Spiritual Transformation," *Cross Currents* (Sept.,22, 2003). Available through *High Beam Research* (*http://www.highbeam.com*).
[6] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience, 34-35.*
[7] Paul J. Griffiths, "The Very Idea of Religion," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life,* May 1, 2000. (Available through *High Beam Research).*
[8] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, with an English translation by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1961). Cicero seems to reflect much of the early Roman sentiment about religion, but through the lens of a version of Stoicism as understood by Cicero. On an overview of the Latin term, see Wilfred Cantwell

Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991 [1962, 1963], 19 – 22.

[9] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, with an English translation by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1961), 124 and 125 (Book II, 3).

[10] *De Natura Deorum,* 166 and 167: *qua ratione deum esse mundum concluditur.*

[11] *De Natura Deorum,* 174: *"Hanc igitur in stellis constantiam, hanc tantam tam variis cursibus in omni aeternitate convenientiam temporum non possum intellegere sine mente ratione consilio.*

[12] *De Natura Deorum,* 181.

[13] *De Natura Deorum,* 191.

[14] *De Natura Deorum,* 193.

[15] *De Natura Deorum,* 192 and 193: *Cultus autem deorum est optimus idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimusque pietatis ut eos semper pura integra incorrupta et mente et voce veneremur.*

[16]Literally, "to stand over" and by extension: "to outlive."

[17] *De Natura Deorum*, 193 (Book II, 72): *qui autem omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter retractarent et tamquam relegerent, sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo, ut elegantes ex eligendo ex diligendo diligentes ex intellegendo intellegentes*

[18] *De Natura Deorum*, 112 and 113 (I, 117 – 18): *Horum enim sententiae omnium non modo superstitionem tollunt in qua inest timor inanis deorum,sed etiam religionem quae deorum cultu pio continetur.*

[19] *De Natura Deorum*, 112 and 113 (I, 116 – 17).

[20] If "divine beneficence and divine benevolence" are extinguished, as Epicurus suggested (according to Cotto), so too will religion be exterminated from the human heart.

[21] *De Rerum Natura*, I, 62. On the Latin text, see *De Rerum Natura* by Titus Lucretius Carus, III Intra Text Edition (Eulogos 2002): http://www.intratext.com/X/LAT0019.htm and *On the Nature of Things*, translated by Wiliam Ellery Leonard, at *http://classics.mit.edu/Carus/nature_things.html.*

[22] The term is discussed by W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion, Chapter 2.* See also *The Catholic Encyclopedia* at http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12738a.htm for a discussion of the same.

[23] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion,* 25.

[24] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion,* 25. See also Peter Beyer, "The Modern Construction of Religions in the Context of World Society: A Contested Category in Light of Modern Chinese History," a paper presented at the Second Conference ("Religion, Ritual, Myth") at http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~pbeyer/chinese%20history.htm.

[25] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, note 72, p.222.

[26] This article derives from HighBeam Research.

[27] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 33. The quote comes from *Theologica Platonica* [Smith takes the text from the 1576 Basel edition of his works: *Marsilii Ficini Florentini, insignis Philosophi Platonici, Medici, atque Theologi clarissimi, Opera,* 2 vol. Vol. I, 320: *Omnes himinum opinions, affectus, mores, excepta religione, mutantur.* See Smith, notes 65 and 71 (pp. 221 and 222).

[28] *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft)*, trans., with introduction and notes by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (1934), reprinted with an essay by John R. Silber (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 142 (Book IV, Part I). Kant's essay was written in 1794). A second definition occurs on p. 156: "The one true religion comprises nothing but laws, that is, those practical principles of whose unconditioned necessity we can become aware, and which we therefore recognize as revealed through pure reason (not empirically)."

[29] *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone,* 173 – 74.

[30] Theodore M. Greene, "The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's *Religion,* in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, ix.
[31] See note 28.
[32] *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 130.
[33] *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 130 – 31.
[34] *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 99.
[35] *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 102.
[36] Translated from the French *(Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*) by Joseph Ward Swain (NY, The Free Press, 1965). Reprinted from the 1915 edition (George Allen & Unwin).
[37] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, 15.*
[38] Or Kant's "religious *superstition,"* described as the "illusion of being able to accomplish anything in the way of justifying ourselves before God through religious acts of worship" (*Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 162).
[39] Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary of True and False Religion,* ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1981 (1929). Discussed in Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 35.
[40] Quoted in Paul J. Griffiths, "The Very Idea of Religion, *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* (May 1, 2000). The quote derives from Book 3, Chapter 3.
[41] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 39.
[42] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 41.
[43] For information on Saint Anselm, see the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm.*
[44] As quoted in Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 44.
[45] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 51.
[46] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 59.
[47] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 60. Durkheim's view that magic is divisive, immoral, and opposed to religion connects it with witchcraft and sorcery, *i.e.,* black magic, or magic viewed negatively. For an excellent overview of magic, see Murray and Rosalie Wax, "The Notion of Magic," *Current Anthropology*, vol. 4, no. 5 (December 1963): 495 – 503.
[48] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, 4th ed. Ed. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1979), 78 – 89. See also Henry Munson, Jr., "Geertz on Religion: The Theory and the Practice," *Religion* 16 (1986): 19 – 32.
[49] In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27 – 54.
[50] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* 29.
[51] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* 29.
[52] Jonathan Z. Smith has asserted that "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy." This quote appears in "Map is Not Territory," in *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 290.
[53] *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.
[54] Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*,1. I added the adjective "fundamentalist," which fits better the description contained therein.
[55] P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (quoted in Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* 34.)
[56] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* 35. In a recent publication, Dell deChant (*The Sacred Santa: Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture* [Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002], begins his definition of *religion* in the following manner: "Religion is about power. It mediates our

relationship with the source(s) of ultimate (sacred) power...." The definition or "working description" is quite involved and quite insightful.

[57] *NeuroTheology: Brain, Science, Spirituality, Religious Experience*, ed. R. Joseph (San Jose, CA: University Press, 2002, 2003); Matthew Alper, *The "God" Part of the Brain.*

[58] A discussion of this subject appears in "Exploring the Biology of Religious Experience," reported by Rich Heffern, *National Catholic Reporter* (April 20, 2001). This article is located on the Internet through HighBeam Research.

[59] Leslie White, "The Concept of Culture" (1959).

[60] *The Concept of Culture* (1945)

[61] "Culture", *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1931), IV: 621 – 46.

[62] *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples,* 1937.

[63] E.S. Bogardus, "Tools in Sociology", *Sociology and Social Research,* vol. 14 (1930): 332 – 41.

[64] G.P. Murdock, "Anthropology and Human Relations", *Sociometry*, vol. 4 (1941): 140 – 50.

[65] Ruth Benedict, *Race, Science and Politics* (1947).

[66] In *Language in Culture and Society,* ed. Dell H. Hymes, (NY: Harper & Row, 1964), 36 – 39.

[67] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1996 [originally published in 1987 by Peter Lang]).

[68] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 61.

[69] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 63.

[70] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 64: "[S]ociety can do this job [of unifying culture], but cohesion also results from the fact that when two rewards are added the result is also a reward. Explanations are a class of reward. Therefore, two explanations can be added together to produce another, greater explanation that is their sum. Indeed, ...explanations tend to be composed of parts, like steps in the directions for assembling a model kit or in the recipe of baking a cake. Related explanations are connected to form a *cultural system.*

[71] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 65.

[72] A religion is this sense refers to "well-developed manifestations of the religious phenomenon" (Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 73), that is a formally organized religion. The authors make that point that religious phenomena may exist minus a religious system or religion as a cultural system. In the public mind, this is what separates a "religion" from "spirituality."

[73] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 70.

[74] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 73.

[75] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 73.

[76] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 76.

[77] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 81.

[78] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 82.

[79] Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion,* 86.