


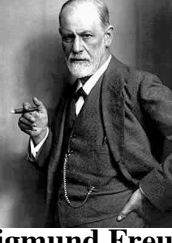



REL 298: Thinking about Religion

The "Rough Guide" to The Academic Study of Religion

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SETTING THE AGENDA: RELIGIOUS THINKERS

 <p>Jonathan Zittell Smith</p>	<p>"That is to say, while there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious—<i>there is no data for religion</i>. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study." —<i>Imagining Religion</i> (1982)</p>	O.R.I.R*
 <p>Karl Marx (1818-1883)</p>	<p>"<i>Religious</i> suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a <i>protest</i> against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of the soulless situation. It is the opium of the people." —"Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right"(1844)</p>	O.R.S.E*
 <p>Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)</p>	<p>"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church." <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> (1912)</p>	O.R.S.E*
 <p>Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)</p>	<p>"Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neuroses of children, it arises out of the Oedipus Complex, out of the relation to the father. If this view is right, it is to be supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of a process of growth, and that we find ourselves at this very juncture in that phase of development." <i>The Future of an Illusion</i> (1927)</p>	O.R.I.E*
 <p>Rudolf Otto (1869-1937)</p>	<p>"'Holiness'—'the holy'—is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion. . . . While it is complex, it contains a quite specific element or 'moment', which sets it apart from 'the rational' . . . in the sense that it completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts." <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> (1917)</p>	I.E.I.E*

* Insider/Outsider. Essentialist/Reductionist. Individual/Society. Evolutionist/Relativist.



Psychological Approach

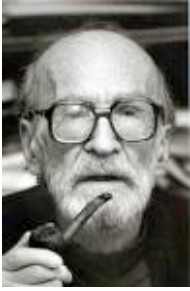
Axiom: Religion is defined by an experience, which is accompanied by a sense of meaningfulness and value, and is felt to be uniquely real.

Theory:

1. "Voluntarism," which maintains that consciousness is essentially active, selective, interested, and teleological. We "carve out" our world from "the jointless continuity of space."
2. "Pragmatism" a theory of knowledge which argues that the function of an idea is to indicate "what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it and what reactions we must prepare."
3. "Radical empiricism" is a philosophy of "pure experience."

Method: 1. Define religious experience, usually by example
2. Discuss the function of religion

Example: "Religion . . . shall mean for us the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they have apprehended themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider to be divine (James 1982 [1902]: 31)



Phenomenology and the History of Religions

Axiom: Religion is an underlying ahistorical *sui generis* essence that irrupts into the world as manifestations of the sacred.

Theory: 1. Religion can be articulated as hierophanies — Any purported appearance or experience of the sacred.
2. These modalities of the sacred can be compared ahistorically using typological methods — is a list of structural similarities among a given group of phenomenon.

Method: 1. *Epoche*, bracket off religious phenomenon
2. *Enföhlung*, empathic understanding
3. Eidetic vision, typographical

Example:

"[T]he sacred is the opposite of the profane" (Eliade 1957, 10).

"[T]he religious historian must trace not only the history of a given hierophany, but must first of all understand and explain the modality of the sacred that that hierophany discloses" (Eliade 1958, 5)



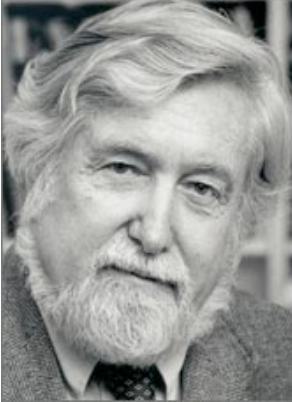
Feminism, Gender and Religion

Axiom: Women are agents in religion and religious studies.

Theory: Critical of androcentric orientation. This includes such things as explicit patriarchal institutions and implicit phenomenon such as the textual bias of much of the study of religion.

Method: 1. Suspicion of the nature of sources
2. Attempt to recover women's voices, or to recreate those lost
3. Challenge notions of universality

Example: "The *sui generis* concept thus stands in a contradictory relationship to the premises of feminist scholarship. By making power irrelevant to the 'nature of religion', it denies the scholar of religion a language with which to make a critique 'from below', relegating the very basis of a distinction between a 'view from above' and a 'view from below' to the realm of crass reductionism (Shaw 1995, 70).



Anthropological Approaches to Religion

Axiom: Religion is a cultural phenomenon.

Theory:

1. Primary interest is in social and communal aspects of religion.
2. Religions ought to be studied in a holistic approach that does not separate it from other social institutions and concepts.
3. Religions should be understood from an *emic* position.

Method:

1. Understand the local "thick" meaning of religion
2. Contextualize it in social and cultural phenomenon
3. Explain what religion does in a particular cultural situation

Example: "Religion is: (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(Geertz 1968, 4).



Ritual Theory : Rituals are patterned behaviors that create privileged differences through highly structured performance. As highly potent fields of significant practice, rituals generate affective and communicative elements as well as play a large part in the training bodies. By "molding" specific types of bodies, as well as using emotion and habit to "bypass" critical reflection, ritual can be ideological.

In principio creavit Deus coelum 1.
et terram. *Terra autem erat inanis 2
et vacua, et tenebrae erant super fa-
ciem abyssi, et spiritus Dei ferebatur
super aquas. *Dixitque Deus: Fiat 3
lux! et facta est lux. *Et vidit Deus 4
lucem, quod esset bona, et divisit lu-
cem a tenebris. *Appellavitque lu- 5
cem diem, et tenebras noctem. Fa-
ctumque est vespere et mane dies
unus.

The Theory of Myth: Myths are the discourses by which people construct models for understanding the world and their place in it. Myths work on an abstract level to justify institutions and practices, as well as on an unconscious level by shaping and validating patterns of thinking and categorizing the world. By legitimizing asymmetrical power relations, myth can be ideological.