

Such textbooks constitute another site where the dominant discourse on *sui generis* religion continues to define the field and set the standard for creating future scholars. As I have argued throughout, in terms of the representative practices evident in such divergent areas as scholarship on Eliade, his texts, and his life, as well as classroom textbooks, this discourse on *sui generis* religion dehistoricizes, marginalizes, and plays a role in larger issues of power and privilege. Chapter 5 will press this issue further by examining a number of contemporary works that address the category of religion to detail the discursive conflict that continues to define the field. Apart from further documenting the regnant status of *sui generis* religion, that chapter will help delineate the oppositional discourse that, as I argue in chapter 7, offers a more-secure foundation and justification for the future of the institutionalized study of religion.

5.

The Category Religion in Recent Scholarship

[T]he current debate about the concept of religion is not as innocent as it may seem.

—Jacques Waardenburg

The implicit questions posed throughout this critique are relatively simple ones: what counts as religion? who gets to decide? what theoretical commitments are entailed in such decisions? and, most important, what are the material implications of our categorial choices? As suggested throughout chapters 1 through 4, and argued in detail in chapter 6, there is much more than purely intellectual, even social and institutional, issues at stake in the long-standing debate over whether religion is sociopolitically autonomous or simply a scholarly, analytical category useful in studying one aspect of what are otherwise complex human, historical practices. Although one could describe portions of this effort as constituting an analysis of definitions of religion, it is much more than this. By examining how our scholarly categories, methods, and theories together construct and legitimize sociopolitically relevant discourses, my analysis goes well beyond seemingly innocent debates about definition of religion.

Recently, a number of scholarly works have, if not explicitly, then implicitly addressed the categorial status of religion, further demonstrating not simply the hegemony of the discourse on *sui generis* religion but also, in a more detailed fashion, the contours of the oppositional or naturalistic discourse. This chapter examines some of these contributions in light of their place in this ongoing debate over the place of *sui generis* religion. Having moved from an analysis of Eliade's discourse on religion to discourses both on Eliade himself and world religions, this chapter turns to current scholarship on the category "religion" as a scholarly tool.

Should We Abandon "Religion"?

As noted in the introduction, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's thirty-year-old work, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, has, until recently, constituted one of the most impor-

tant critiques of the concept "religion" as it is used by scholars. Cantwell Smith's thesis is by now familiar: to examine what he understood to be the externals of religion (what he termed the cumulative tradition) as the sum total of religious experience reifies subjective human experiences by overlooking the more important internal element of personal faith in transcendence. In a nutshell, he advised against taking a part for the whole. Because this process of reification is so deeply entrenched in the modern study of religion, Cantwell Smith recommended that scholars no longer employ the category "religion" whatsoever. He maintained that research ought instead more accurately to reflect this double nature of religious organizations and experiences—namely, their outer institution with its observable and quantifiable aspects (tradition, myths, ritual, etc.) and their inner piety.

Although Cantwell Smith's work is by no means completely representative of the major trend in recent scholarship on religion (especially in light of his methodological rule concerning the authority and priority of the insider perspective over against other forms of hermeneutical inquiry), it is important to note that Cantwell Smith, like the many other participants in the discourse on *sui generis* religion, prioritizes interior and generally inaccessible personal experiences and religious convictions at the expense of observable, documentable data. (That such scholarship usually yields results with which few, if any, devotees would actually agree is another problem of course.) In other words, from the outset Cantwell Smith excluded the possibility that a nonreligious, naturalistic explanation could better account for the data as reported by devotees and adherents. For Cantwell Smith, like Otto before him and for all "sensitive men," religion is essentially an *a priori* mystery, "an open element, unknown and undominated" (1991: 1).

Given Cantwell Smith's *a priori* emphasis on the interiority and mystery of religion, his critique of the category of religion is most easily read as a critique of the naturalistic approach. Although his recommendation against using the category of religion in such a totalized and reified fashion has had considerable influence, not all contemporary critiques of the ways in which the folk term "religion" has become a scholarly category are necessarily concerned with defending the *sui generis* or private and interiorized nature of religious acts and systems. Even though we now seem to be in the midst of a minor renaissance of works that critically examine the history, implications, and continued usefulness of the theoretical category of religion, there is a mixture of perspectives in this debate that is characteristic of the two different discourses on religion. On the one hand, there are members of this new generation of scholars who have critical concerns that are significantly different from those of Cantwell Smith. For example, applying the critical reading methods gained from postmodern and postcolonial theorizing, Tim Murphy (1994b) argues that such universalized categories as religion—defined as essence or manifestation—are part of the intellectual baggage of Occidental humanism. And even though a number of recent contributors to this debate agree with Cantwell Smith in suggesting that the very category of religion ought to be

dropped, they do so for significantly different reasons. For example, Armin Geertz (1990; 1994b: 11 n. 21; 1995: 19) and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (1993a; 1993b: 367, 374 n. 21) have both noted that, given the difficulties with the very term "religion," there may be some use for the alternative term "ethnohermeneutics," "where the indigenous interpretations and models of thought and action (i.e., culture) are the objects of study" (Jensen 1993a: 120). Even more recently, Tim Fitzgerald (1995 and forthcoming) has argued that because scholarly definitions of religion are so hopelessly ambiguous and contradictory, what scholars ought to be studying are different institutionalized values (such as, in the case of his examples drawn from Japan, the junior/senior relationship, reciprocity, deference). Simply put, Fitzgerald suggests that "the adoption of a concept of cultural studies, based on the notion that values and their institutionalization are the real field of study" (1995: 8) would ensure that the study of this aspect of culture could be distinguished from "religious studies as a branch of theology."

What these most recent critiques of the category of religion seem to have in common are their efforts to identify religion as an analytical category useful in first-order, descriptive research *but not* at the level of second-order interpretive or explanatory analysis—a point I made earlier when discussing the reductionism debate. For example, Murphy, Geertz, Jensen, and Fitzgerald all replace the term "religion" when their scholarship moves from description to analysis, a move that is based on their own prior theoretical commitments concerned with either interpreting or explaining this aspect of human behavior. Whether their second-order language of analysis is grounded in politics, culture, economics, or whatever, all these critics would no doubt agree that the category of religion is itself part of the problem to be analyzed and *is not itself* a tool in its own analysis. Therefore, their efforts can be distinguished from Cantwell Smith's inasmuch as they are concerned with accounting for religion and discourses on religion in terms of nonreligious factors, whereas Cantwell Smith's work is representative of those who reinscribe religion within unexplainable, personalistic issues of faith. With Plato's *Euthyphro* in mind, we can characterize these two groups as taking very different sides in a long-standing debate: as asked by Socrates, is a pious act pious because the gods recognize it to be so, or is it pious simply because the gods treat it in a certain manner?

Despite the fact that a number of contemporary scholars of religion would no doubt choose the second, social-constructionist option—an option that surely Plato himself would not have sanctioned—a number of other scholars continue to perpetuate the discourse on *sui generis* religion by echoing Cantwell Smith's assertion that religion, in part, identifies an essential, ahistorical element shared by the great diversity of private human experiences. Perhaps there is no better current example than John Cumpsty's (1991) position that the category of religion refers to a person's sense of belonging to what he has somewhat problematically referred to simply as "the ultimately real."² Clearly, then, the divide already documented in a wide variety of discursive sites continues to plague this field—it cannot be

argued away, minimized, or banished to some earlier stage in the field's historical development.

To one degree or another, it is fair to assume that scholars on both sides of this divide would generally agree with Eric Sharpe, who writes that the term "religion" "is an intellectual construction, a device through which the rationalist passion for classifying and pigeonholing expresses itself" (1983: 46).³ After all, Cantwell Smith as well as A. Geertz, Jensen, and Fitzgerald all seem to recognize that assorted criteria will decide whether this analytical category has any future usefulness for scholars (and here I side with Wiebe [1994a: 845] in maintaining that "students of religion have no need to abandon their use of the term 'religion'"—they simply need to be explicit about what they mean by the term). But given the somewhat pejorative connotations of Sharpe's choice of terms (e.g., "passion" and "pigeonholing"), one is justified in inquiring whether or not researchers are warranted in maintaining that the methods and theories of the academic study of religion can somehow surpass or transcend the human "passion" for analysis that comes about through generalizing, comparing, and even "pigeonholing." In other words, and this is where the divide is evident, members of the naturalist discourse on religion argue that although religion may not be the most useful analytical category for research—indeed, they have suggested using others—all scholarship, possibly even cognition itself, is a form of pigeonholing. But analytical study is not arbitrary, for when it is done properly, it is based on theoretical premises and a rationale that can be delineated systematically, argued, tested, and defended. Scholarship carried out from within the discourse on *sui generis* religion does not fulfill these criteria.

Although postmodernism seems to have provided a variety of discourses (among them the theological discourse) with a new basis for claiming authority within the public context of the university, acknowledging, along with Derrida, that *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* ("there is nothing outside of the text") means not simply a relativity of acceptable discourses but, more important, the intrinsically and inescapably taxonomic, practical, and even tactical nature of all human language, knowledge, and "passions." In other words, knowledge of, and access to, historically and linguistically entrenched humans making claims and performing actions is all we've got—regardless of the fact that some of them routinely claim to transcend (or have information that transcends) their historical contexts. If anything, postmodernist destabilizations of authority should further construct the discourse on religion in a naturalistic or anthropological fashion: at its base, the study of religion is not about studying *sui generis* religion but is one heuristic used to study an aspect of human behavior and culture.

The Antiessentialism of Saler, Oberoi, and Asad

Recently, there have appeared three useful examples of studies that conceptualize religion not as an essential, ahistorical category but as a historical aspect of cul-

ture. The first would be Benson Saler's *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (1993), which, unlike Cantwell Smith's essentialist focus, proposes a multifactoral approach for developing open-ended definitions of religion, definitions Saler believes will be of greater use to anthropological observers.⁴ By breaking down the "hard-and-fast boundary between 'religion' and 'non-religion,'" such a multifactoral approach is "ineluctably comparativist, for . . . it renders religion an affair of more or less rather than, as in the digitized constructs employed by essentialists, a categorical matter of 'yes' or 'no'" (25). So even though the category "religion" is a tool employed by "us" to study "them," such an open-ended category defined roughly in terms of family resemblances, can help, in Saler's opinion, to overcome the inevitably entrenched nature of scholarship. Thus, from the start, both observers and informants are separated by a gulf, each inside their own cultural and historical context, making neither position ultimately authoritative or normative.

Regardless of the gap in respective starting points, however, it is clear from Saler's work that this initial gulf can be bridged to some extent and that some convergence of understanding is desirable; developing transcultural understanding and addressing the limitations brought on through scholarly ethnocentrism are the goals of his anthropology. Although it is uncertain whether this gulf will ever be completely overcome, Saler's effort to diminish "our" and "their" situatedness is a three-fold task. First, it is incumbent on scholars to acknowledge the culturally entrenched, and hence partial and limited, nature of their own observational starting point, that is, recognizing the entrenched nature of our idealized, prototypical notions of just what constitutes "religion"—and for that matter, what constitutes and counts as race, kinship, nation, gender, society, and all other folk categories that we as scholars translate into analytical, comparative categories. Second, because of this perspective-bound nature of our starting prototypes, we must always hold them tentatively, as exemplars instead of norms. Accordingly, we must be thoroughly familiar with their history, implications, limitations, and various uses. This is accomplished by conceiving of them as "unbounded categories," whose members are to be distinguished in terms of loose sets of family resemblances that are always open to being revised. Third, because of the variety not only of behaviors and beliefs but also of folk and scholarly categories that can be grouped together and compared through shared family traits, Saler calls for scholars to explore the use of other people's folk categories as possible scholarly, analytical categories. Although the other may or may not study us through what we can only hope are equally open-ended categories, we can venture to explore, using their categories as our own starting points. And as a starting point for transcultural dialogue, regardless of where or when, if ever, such dialogue ends, Saler maintains that such unbounded categories as religion serve as the best possible bridges; from the outset, they exclude

no one from the dialogue and the bridge-building game. In other words, since they are unbounded categories, we never know where they will lead us nor who will join in the conversation.

In large part, Saler's work will help us in the effort to incorporate the best aspects of the postmodernist challenge and construct a naturalistic discourse on culture in general, and religion in particular, that can maintain the analytically productive demarcation between subject and object without the ontological, essentialist, and normative loadings of former efforts at demarcation. In this regard, Saler must be commended. But in his recommendation to employ indigenous terms on the path toward increased understanding, Saler's work may create more problems than it solves. Because Saler's recommendations are related to those of Ninian Smart, to be examined later in this chapter, I will delay addressing the issue of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a topic that needs to be addressed, because it is intimately (and rightfully) related to a number of critiques of former attempts at generating naturalist theorizing in the study of other people's cultures. But merely because it has been linked to past reductionist theorizing—a link based on the mistaken but widespread assumption that to compare and reduce is implicitly to judge—does not mean that the relationship is a necessary or even desirable one.

Like Saler, Harjot Oberoi, in his *Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (1994), makes a strong case for just such an antiessentialist study of human identity through the construction and maintenance of socially relevant boundaries. In his interesting and provocative book, he presumes from the outset that religion in general is "a social and cultural process; not something given, but an activity embedded in everyday life, a part of human agency" (23). I have termed Oberoi's book provocative not only because such an explicitly stated theoretical approach would be problematic to many scholars but because, in the study of some particular religions, Sikhism being one, such a theoretical approach is even more problematic to devotees. Clearly, this is not the place to enter such a debate, but suffice it to say that Oberoi's work should be of great interest to scholars who are not willing simply to reproduce informant accounts—regardless of the sociopolitical investments insiders may have in such accounts.

Regarding the insider/outsider distinction, Oberoi comes down squarely in support of developing etc, theoretical generalizations: "Historians are at fault when they simply reproduce these [insider] value judgments and employ categories invented by a section of the Sikh elites to discredit specific beliefs and rituals" of other members of the Sikh community (32). In stressing the development of non-religious accounts of the construction of social identity, Oberoi's method entertains the position that insider accounts are not self-contained and autonomous, simply in need of scholarly systematization and interpretation, but that they may be powerful social, political, even ideological tools.

Related to Saler's and Oberoi's antiessentialist thesis is Talal Asad's collection of eight essays whose Foucauldian influence is evident in its very title: *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (1993). From the outset, Asad demonstrates that the presumed sui generis status of religion and the popular "theoretical search for an essence of religion invites us to separate it conceptually from the domain of power" (29). Having successfully segmented issues of power, domination, and opposition from the realm of religion through the use of the sui generis strategy, scholars and insiders proceed to create a "distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other" (27). One can think here of the current protective effect of appeals to the essentially religious, cultural, or ethnic nature of an issue or debate. For good or ill, claims to sociopolitical autonomy bring with them powerful means for protecting and camouflaging all sorts of other claims and programs.

For those naturalistic reductionists in our field, however, who might at first welcome Asad's strong critique of the political implications of the nonreductionist program, his postmodernist stance is equally critical of the imperializing that commonly passes for social scientific research.⁵ In this regard, especially relevant is his first essay, "Religion as an Anthropological Category" (27–54), in which Asad, in a manner related to Murphy's critical focus already noted, critiques what he considers to be the problems of Clifford Geertz's widely influential but nonetheless universalist definition of religion. If a search for the essence of religion is theoretically and politically problematic, so the reasoning goes, then universalist definitions must be as well. According to Asad, by offering a universal, monothetic definition in the first place, Geertz's category of religion yet excludes how the authoritative status of religious myths, rituals, institutions, texts, and the like, are "products of historically distinct disciplines [in the Foucauldian sense of disciplinary associations, discourses, presuppositions, etc.] and forces" (54).

In place of such universal definitions, Asad recommends that students of particular religions should unpack such "comprehensive concepts" as "religion" and "culture" into their heterogeneous and historically specific elements, each of which reflects a variety of power relations in local situations. Although this respect for local details is most important, one cannot help but think that Asad's recommendation lands the researcher in a bit of a problem. As important as it is to avoid universal generalizations that effectively ignore local details, it is equally problematic to generalize about "particular religions." For example, when we say Buddhism do we mean Hinayana or Mahayana? And when we say Mahayana, which variety do we mean? And do we distinguish varieties of local details by appealing to yet other abstract generalizations, such as nations (e.g., Vietnamese Buddhism) or more complex national/ethnic categories (e.g., African-American religion)? Simply put, what counts as local? Related to this, Asad's recommendation all but rules out generating widely applicable, cross-cultural theories about certain sorts of human

actions—in this case, actions and beliefs that involve gods or transcendent, nonempirical states. So it would appear that, depending on one's prior interests (e.g., to explain why people populate the heavens with gods in the first place, to account for the great diversity of gods, or to counteract hegemony in the form of missionizing), what counts as local will vary dramatically. Hence, Asad's well-intentioned advice turns out to be not so easy to follow, but at least it does draw our attention to two important and related issues that I will return to: (1) the need for a clearly articulated theoretical rationale to justify one's decision regarding what counts as locale and of scholarly interest; and (2) the relations between ethnocentrism and scholarly generalizations and reductionism.⁶

Autonomy in the Classroom and the Autonomy of Conscience

For many, the reductionism debate can be considered the foremost indicator of the discursive divide in the field. For this reason, the volume edited by Thomas Idinopulos and Edward Yonan, *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion* (1994), is of utmost importance. Most of the major contributors to the debate as it has taken shape over the past decade in various scholarly journals (Robert Segal and Daniel Pals come immediately to mind) are represented in this volume. Some of the essays were originally presented at a conference held in the United States in 1990, but the volume has been supplemented with a number of invited or reprinted contributions—amounting to sixteen essays in total. A number of the essays explore just what “reductionism” means (see especially Arvind Sharma's and Ivan Strenski's useful individual surveys of types of reductionism and the detailed essay by Thomas Ryba on reductionism in the natural sciences), some revisit Segal's and Eliade's contributions to the debate, while others investigate specific issues (for example, William Paden's study of the category of the sacred in Durkheim's work clearly distinguishes one use of the term from what must be considered the dominant Eliadean usage).

The reductionism debate has occupied us earlier in this book, and we need not return to it in the same manner. However, George Weckman's contribution, “Reductionism in the Classroom” (1994) is worth mentioning, for it places this debate in a context directly relevant to chapter 4, investigating how the non- or antireductionist agenda (i.e., the discourse on sui generis religion) makes more sense when understood as not only a strategy for gaining much-needed intellectual and institutional turf in the 1950s and 1960s but, more important, as a pedagogical tool in the undergraduate classroom. It was with the former functions in mind that previous chapters were able to offer reasons for the popularity of Eliade's methodology, which arrived on the North American scene just when issues of institutional autonomy and methodological demarcation were arising. Eliade's efforts to distinguish essential differences, something that we now find in his own

early nationalist writings, were easily applied to the problem of institutional identity. Elsewhere I have suggested that, at this early stage of institutional and discursive formation in North America, “Eliade's nationalist strategies seem to have been very useful for his fellow scholars, intent upon differentiating themselves not from Transylvanians or the French but from anthropologists and other social scientists” (1993: 662).

Regarding the latter, pedagogical function of sui generis religion, it is indeed clear that the voices of religious people ought not to go unheard—which of us will forget that our students and many of our colleagues are more than likely religious people. As I argued in chapter 4, this realization does necessitate a careful teaching technique at times. As Weckman words it, in such a “setting more tolerance of other options, even those which one considers to be flawed, is necessary and expected” (1994: 213). But the over-zealous application of non-reductionist positions—something Weckman acknowledges to have occurred—leading to the virtual a priori exclusion of reductive studies, often results simply in reporting dehistoricized details, sometimes even to the celebration of the diversity of insider perspectives. As a corrective to what some consider to be the image of reductionists as the “cultured despisers of religion,” it must be recalled, as Robert Segal has repeatedly pointed out, that far from silencing religious accounts, proper social scientific method requires scholars to listen *intently* to insider reports, for such reports are the basis for all social scientific work. It is just that the social scientist's theoretically grounded questions do not provide these emic accounts with final explanatory authority. As he puts it, “To refuse to accept the believer's reason for being religious as the ultimate account of the believer's religiosity is not to disregard it” (1992: 5). Accordingly, social scientific theorizing is not competing with insider accounts but offering explanations from specific nonreligious, rational, theoretical frameworks. (Despite Segal's use of the term, social scientific explanations and frameworks are not to be confused with “ultimate” or final explanations and frameworks. I return to this point in chapter 7.) If the devotee wishes to ignore all such theorizing because it has somehow missed what they consider to be the essential, private element of faith (a move made not only by devotees but also by members of the discourse on sui generis religion), that is most certainly their prerogative. But such a rejection should have no bearing on the continued effort to generate theoretically grounded explanations and generalizations by naturalistic scholars and teachers. Therefore, using sui generis religion as a classroom teaching technique may have its understandable advantages, but in terms of its a priori exclusion of explanatory accounts, it has severe limitations as well.

Finally, given the distinctions we generally make between form and content, what is most interesting about *Religion and Reductionism* is not the content or arguments of each individual essay but the form of the debate, that is, the fact that the contributors represent such varied positions in this debate as to provide an

excellent example, in one volume, of the divide within the discourse as a whole. There are essays by those most associated with the naturalist side as well as essays that maintain the traditional and—if the critique offered here has any weight—rather weak argument, as does Wayne Elzey's unsupported assertion that reductionist theories "missed the irreducibly religious, that is, the maturely and authentically human essence of religion as it existed in non-Western cultures" (85). On one level, then, the volume serves an extremely important function, because it provides a succinct picture of the clash that has traditionally defined our field. On another level, however, it perpetuates a crucial oversight that, in turn, contributes to the inevitable clash: that reductionists and antireductionists, or the naturalist as opposed to the sui generis discourse, are addressing the same issues and have a common discursive ground. On the contrary, these two discourses are addressing different objects; where one studies essentially disembodied experiences and states of being, the other studies human actors in complex cultural contexts.⁷

Related to the naturalist critique of normative and ahistorical scholarship is Bryan Turner's collection of essays, *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* (1994). Turner is the author of *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978), published the same year as Edward Said's influential study of Orientalism. The connection between work on Orientalism, postmodernism, and the category of religion should be clear from my discussion of Asad: one of the primary strategies identified by Said and others in the process of Orientalization is that of minimalizing or dehistoricizing the other—in this specific case, the Muslim other. When applied to the study of religion, essentialized constructs (be they the supposedly monolithic Orient or the sacred) can function to minimize historical human agents and camouflage sociopolitical agendas. With such a critique in mind, it is Turner's fourth essay, "Conscience in the Construction of Religion" (53–66), that is of particular interest. There, Turner provides a useful critique of the late University of Chicago Islamicist Marshall G. S. Hodgson's attempts to redress what he took to be the shortcomings of traditional work on Islam, published as *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1974). Although Turner acknowledges the value of Hodgson's attempts to give "full consideration to the variety of ways in which Islam was determined or influenced by sociological, economic, and geographical factors," he contends that because of presuppositions that grounded his research, in the end, "Hodgson's approach still fails to extricate itself fully from the sociological pitfalls of traditional Orientalism" (53–54). In a vein explicitly indebted to Cantwell Smith, Hodgson emphasizes the primary causal role played by private and individual "conscience," which in turn, he maintains, led to various external, cultural or social manifestations.

Much as in the case of those who employ sui generis religion, Hodgson employs the category of conscience as a "creative, irreducible activity in [the] history of private individuals" (Turner 1994: 54). And, just as for a number of scholars of religion who currently advocate the social autonomy of religious experiences

rather than public, political acts, Hodgson allows historical categories into his analysis only inasmuch as social, political, and economic factors provided simple environmental conditioning for a noncontextual faith—merely, in Hodgson's own words, setting the "limits of what is possible." (This reminds one of Eliade's assertions that even though all religious manifestations are by definition historical, the task of scholarship is to determine the abstract, atemporal essence that informed each historical manifestation or hierophany.) Turner rightly identifies the suspect nature of this sort of scholarship that employs religion, for whatever reason, as a means for constructing a private, privileged zone, exempt from critical scholarly scrutiny.

Similar to Oberoi, then, Turner strongly supports taxonomic uses of the construct "religion" over the interiorized, politically autonomous notions of sui generis religion, which continue to define our field. In critiquing the personalist approach of Hodgson, he explicitly supports the use of a naturalistic discourse on religion as part of culture: "all social beliefs, indeed all beliefs as such, are determined. There is no residual category of beliefs which are not causally determined" (65). Simply put, scholarship is not finished once we employ such categories as "conscience," "faith," or "meaning"; in fact, it has only just begun, for social scientific research can then offer explanatory accounts of these very categories.

Lifting the Thick Veil over the Reality of Religion?

As I have suggested throughout, and as identified in Turner's critique, categorical autonomy can sanction or construct sociopolitical privilege for either the insider or the interpretive scholar. With this in mind, it is worthwhile mentioning some aspects of *Religion in History* (Despland and Vallée 1992), a collection of eighteen essays from a Canadian conference on the history of the category "religion" which took place in 1989.⁸ Specifically, this conference brought together three scholars who have all published important studies on this topic—Cantwell Smith (1991), Michel Despland (1979), and Ernst Feil (1982)—and presented them with the opportunity to reconsider and enlarge on their original positions and to interact with a small group of invited participants.

Apart from the retrospective essays that were written by one of the three main contributors, there are essays on such varied topics as the seventeenth-century's tendencies toward intellectual reification (J. Samuel Preus), Troeltsch's and van der Leeuw's use of the category "religion" (Jean Richard and Richard Plantinga, respectively), the roots of a "theoretically reflective study of religion" in Asia (Michael Pye), the already-cited survey article on the development of the category "world religion" in assorted textbooks and introductory surveys of religions (Katherine Young), and Jacques Waardenburg's defense of an "open" concept of religion. Specifically, Waardenburg's thoughts on the ideological uses of scholarly research, quoted at the outset of this chapter, bear closer scrutiny, because they

shed some light on the deeper reasons for the continued interest in who gets to decide what counts as religion and on the potential dangers of our categories:

If knowledge leads to power, at least certain kinds of power, knowledge of religion and religions brings this power in its own way, if not to the scholars, then to those who use their knowledge either for better or worse. Consequently, the current debate about the concept of religion is not as innocent as it may seem; knowledge and insight about religions and religion may serve the human quest for truth, but they also veil truth when used ideologically. (1992: 226)

As I have suggested, the debates on religion may have more to do with theoretical and political issues relevant to scholars of religion and their institutional settings—and possibly to devotees as well—than with attempting to obtain an accurate one-to-one correspondence between the concept and reality.

As useful as Waardenburg's comments are in shedding some light on the renewed interest in this debate on category formation, his reliance on a somewhat problematic positivistic stance undermines his own comments on ideology. As he phrases it later on the same page, "the reason why I stress so much the risk of ideological manipulation of religious matters is precisely that ideologies destroy the very ability to observe and interpret correctly what people 'outside' the 'ideological circle' mean when they express themselves." Simply put, Waardenburg yet presumes that the *right* conception of religion (used in identifying what really are "religious matters") can be employed to identify when ideological manipulation is taking place. But surely any critic of Marxist notions of false consciousness, a term not explicitly used by Waardenburg but surely implied at this point, would be quick to point out that supposedly correct interpretations are correct only insofar as they satisfy rules internal to the discourse itself. Therefore, Waardenburg's appeal to correct interpretations may be as groundless as the very ideological manipulations that he warns his readers about.

Of related interest is Gérard Vallée's introduction to this collection of essays, which concludes with the following assertion: "Any academic step that might contribute to lifting the thick veil over the reality of religion and to giving back to religion its *droit de cité* will have to be considered a positive step amidst the uses and abuses of religion in our world" (6). In spite of his comments about the practical uses for knowledge, Waardenburg ultimately seems to agree with Vallée's normative statement: just as for other members of the discourse on sui generis religion, there appears to be a *proper* reality to religion that needs to be recovered and restored. Presumably, it falls to the scholar of religion first to discover and subsequently to reinstate this category. Sadly, and indeed this is ultimately the undoing of such normative approaches, just how to access this mystery behind the veil—and then confirm that indeed you have hold of the right mystery—is never, nor, I may add, can it be, made clear. Thus, such a socially redemptive role for scholars of religion is ill fated at best.

The Encyclopedia of Religion as Site of Contestation

Vallée's proposal that scholars must engage in "lifting the thick veil" that currently covers, and undoubtedly obscures, the actual "reality of religion" draws into sharp focus the undefendable ontological assumptions that operate in the discourse on sui generis religion. That such restorative efforts are not the explicit concern of such scholars as Saler, Oberoi, Asad, and Turner should be more than evident. This conflict within the academic discourse on religion—a conflict Burton Mack (1989) has aptly summed up in terms of scholars being either caretakers or critics of religion—is most evident in the scholarly reception of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987). That much of the *ER* itself constitutes but one more instance of the sui generis discourse is not in need of further debate, for it has already been argued quite persuasively (among others, see McMullin 1989a and 1993). Rather than assess the *ER*, then, my intent here is to look at some of the representative assessments themselves as further evidence of the rather sharply drawn discursive lines.

Opinions of the *ER* vary from excitement and enthusiasm for such a massive publishing project (sixteen volumes in all) to mild suspicion and even outright denunciation. The reviewers of this work fall into three general categories: those who unquestionably approve of the work represented by the encyclopedia and its various editors and contributors; those who disagree with minor aspects of it, for example, on matters of presentation, arrangement, or content; and finally those who call the entire project into question, that is, those who question underlying structural, theoretical, and political issues. In spite of the apparent differences within the first two groups, both operate within the same discourse and are simply arguing over just what should take priority within the consensually agreed on bounds of the acceptable. It is for this reason that they can be characterized together as representative of the official reception of the encyclopedia. (Of particular importance is that several of the official reviewers are themselves contributors to the encyclopedia. Of the thirty-seven reviews that appeared in journals in the study of religion, eleven were written by contributors.) The third group is clearly representative of a far smaller proportion of the reviewers—and of the field itself—and constitutes the oppositional stance to this regnant discourse, one that questions its implications in a manner not available to the official critics. Although both groups undoubtedly utilize various rhetorical strategies to support their case, the purpose of these strategies differ significantly. It is for this reason that one could utilize de Certeau's strategy/tactic distinction to suggest the oppositional or tactical nature of some of these reviews, as opposed to the manner in which many other assessments strategically authorize and reproduce the discourse on sui generis religion. To put it succinctly, the notable discrepancies in the assessments of the *ER* are not simply the result of the idiosyncrasies of their authors or merely differences in opinion. Rather, they constitute further evidence of the fracture within the discourse.

As might be expected, the *ER* received extensive reviewing, not only in individual survey articles but in the form of review symposia or collections of reviews that all appeared in one issue of a specific journal. Single review essays appeared in *Religion*, *Parabola*, the *Journal of Dharma*, *Expository Times*,⁹ and *The Christian Century*. Multiple reviews, each treating a specific aspect of the text (e.g., the religions of India or theorists and methods), appeared in *Religious Studies*, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, the American Academy of Religion (*AAR*) and Society of Biblical Literature's annual *Critical Reviews of Books in Religion*, the *Journal of Religion*, *Religious Studies News*, and *Annals of Scholarship*. In total, over thirty reviews appeared, occupying a considerable portion of the space these periodicals usually devote to original papers on various research topics.

As but one example of the divergence of opinion on the *ER*, take Ninian Smart's and Dewey Wallace's reviews, which appear together in the same issue of *Religious Studies Review*. Smart's relation to the regnant discourse is ambiguous. Although he is not to be explicitly associated with the Eliadean project, his recent writings, more than ever, suggest that for him the distance between a naturalistic and a sui generis discourse is not as great as one might suspect. However, Smart—even though he contributed articles to the *ER* on the comparative-historical method and on soteriology—has some biting criticisms of the text. In it he finds embedded ethnocentric, Americentric, and Orientalist attitudes (e.g., where new religious movements are covered only for white and "honorary white" countries [i.e., Japan]). He complains, too, that the text shies away from viewing religion "on the ground" and that it is "rather conservative":

It keeps to the traditional ways of thinking of philosophy and the social sciences, and does not integrate the multi-disciplinary approach into a genuinely poly-methodic one. It is heavily dependent on older concepts and ways of dividing religions and the world and does not venture into the wider analysis of worldviews beyond the "religions." In some respects it is still ethnocentric. It tends to stress the interests of Eliade: and these are not necessarily determinative of the field. (1988: 197)

Although he disagrees with the stance the text takes on such movements as Marxism (like the religions, it qualifies as yet another worldview for Smart) and complaints of the outmoded data and theoretical tools used by its contributors, Smart's criticisms only provide the opening for a truly oppositional stance. His complaint that, for example, the anthropology articles often depict small-scale societies and their religions as if they were in a "dreamtime" (198) is very close to criticizing the ahistorical and idealist nature of the discourse. Unfortunately, Smart's concern is not to deconstruct the traditional conception of sui generis religion but to widen it to include what was formerly thought only to have been specifically political or social movements. For example, his comments on the "terrible tragedies which small-scale societies have been undergoing" is relevant to the study of religion only

inasmuch as it may shed light on the vaguely conceived "spiritual significance" of such societies (198).

In spite of the fact that Wallace—who also contributed two articles (on free will and predestination, and theocracy)—believes himself able to examine the work with some neutrality, he has little but glowing comments for the text. The *ER*, he observes, "impressively caps the many achievements of Eliade, and is as well a magnificent new reference work. It is up-to-date, comprehensive, readable, and destined for wide use both by scholars and the educated public" (1988: 199). Concerning his ostensibly neutral position, he writes,

Let me clarify my relation to *ER* and my attitude to the work of the editor in chief. As the author of two middle-sized entries in *ER* I think that I look at it with neither the possible animus of one not invited to contribute nor the vested interest of a major contributor. With regard to Mircea Eliade and his work, I am neither a disciple nor opponent: I regard him as a creative and seminal shaper of the field of religion but I remain sympathetically skeptical both about many of his detailed interpretations as well as much of his larger framework of interpretation. (200)

With his opinion of Eliade in mind, as well as his reference to disagreements with some of Eliade's detailed interpretations, it appears that Wallace's assessment accurately reflects the discourse on sui generis religion's restriction concerning explanatory and reductive accounts, a restriction explicitly made in Eliade's preface to the work. Eliade writes, "Wishing particularly to avoid reductionism and Western cultural bias, we have given far greater space to the religions of non-Western areas than have earlier reference books on religion" (Eliade 1987: vol. 1, xi). (Unfortunately, there as elsewhere, Eliade is not at all clear as to what exactly reductionism as a methodological option has to do with the Christian and Eurocentric biases of previous reference works. If anything, this appears to be a thinly veiled attempt to discredit reductionist theorizing. Surely the well-known work of Hendrik Kraemer would qualify as but one example of a nonreductionist, descriptive approach that is, nonetheless, highly suspect for its overt Christian and European biases.)

Unlike Smart's more systemic criticisms, Wallace's critique is limited to differences over interpretive issues rather than differences over the role that interpretation ought to play in the field. And when he does touch on a foundational issue, his comments are defused. For example, as accurate as he is to point out that the "*ER* is downright polemical when it comes to evolutionary-reductionistic schemes," his observation is minimized when he proceeds to suggest that the "*ER* is more interested in what can be found in or done with religious data than in the exact details of its origin and provenance. This probably accounts for what sometimes seems the less 'historical-critical' spirit of the newer work" (205). The observation of the polemical nature of the entire text is minimized not only by

Wallace's use of such qualifiers as "probably," "sometimes," "seems," "less historical-critical," and so on, but also by his taking it for granted that religious data can simply be presented, neutrally and objectively, to the researcher.

Overlooking both the editor-in-chief's exclusion of all reductionist theorizing and the general lack of methodological and theoretical coherence and identity evident in the modern field, Wallace is representative of the official reception of the *ER* when he concludes that it

represents an era in which Religious Studies has come into its own as a discipline, approaching religious phenomena as a whole and possessing considerable self-consciousness about methodology and theory. . . . All of this suggests a discipline come of age and will no doubt also have importance in the further shaping of a sense of disciplinary coherence, always a concern of the editor in chief. (201)

A significantly different, oppositional, reading of the encyclopedia comes out of the collection of reviews published in *Annals of Scholarship*. According to Robert Segal, who introduces the collection, what was "most surprising is the severity of the criticisms by some of the reviewers. They fault the Encyclopedia either for the quality of the scholarship or the theological underpinnings of the project" (1988: 230). Perhaps Donald Wiebe's review best sums up these criticisms. Disagreeing dramatically with assessments like Wallace's, Wiebe concludes:

This new encyclopedia . . . does not, it seems to me, advance the field in any essential or significant fashion. Indeed, in important aspects it blocks new development, for it espouses, consciously and determinedly, the very assumptions that lie half-hidden in the structures of its predecessors—and this despite the claim to have moved beyond them. Consequently, though new it is also old; it is already dated. (1988: 268)

Such an assessment is echoed by E. Thomas Lawson, who notes the conservative nature of the text: "The *Encyclopedia of Religion* is sometimes authoritative, but is rarely progressive. It is in fact largely a rearguard action on behalf of a view of religion that has dwindled in importance" (1988: 242). Specifically, Lawson recognizes that many of the difficulties with the encyclopedia are grounded in its contributors' and editor's conception of the field as an autonomous discipline. He writes: "Part of the problem here is the view current among many historians of religions that, because they have a distinct subject matter, therefore they also have, or ought to have a method distinct from the other disciplines in the university. That such a view can still be held onto when many of the other disciplines are eagerly reaching out to each other . . . is most disturbing" (244). Lawson, like Wiebe, is representative of the oppositional, naturalistic discourse on religion when he concludes by unequivocally stating that the "idea of complete autonomy of either subject or method is quite dead." Writing in the same journal, Ivan Strenski describes the *ER* in the following, more animated, manner:

I regret to say that the *Encyclopedia*, which will henceforth represent the study of religion, is a good deal duller and less acute than the field itself. It represents in the end an attempt to enshrine and immortalize the Eliade era of the history of religions, just when that program, though laudable in many ways, has run its course of vitality. . . . [H]ere everything is under the control of the dead hand of academic politics: no unruly dissenters from the reigning paradigm—only the suave consensus of patrons and their eager clients. (259–260)¹⁰

Contrary to these highly critical opinions, James O. Duke, like Wallace, represents those scholars who have little or no difficulty with the particular discourse represented by the *ER*. If anything, the *ER* is portrayed as polymethodic and as a virtual caretaker of religion. For example, near the opening of his review, Duke writes:

The very thought of Christianity-in-and-of-itself is now known to be only one thought among many, each a function of the thinking of some thinker(s) rather than others. Thinking of many different sorts goes on within the study of religion; *ER* honors them all by thinking that the study of religion is pluralistic and that religion, including the Christian religion, is a topic upon which every discipline, approach, and method may cast some light.

The appeal of this thinking goes without saying. There is hardly a scholar of religion anywhere whose life of teaching, research, and conventioning has not been enriched by it. And recent scholarship has shed much light—and much of it new—on religion, the religious, and the religions, including Christianity. *ER* collects and then trains so many rays of light on the Christian religion and from so many angles, that the picture which comes into view is uncommonly radiant. Staring at it long and hard, one suspects that it is even a trifle over-exposed, for if there were such a thing as Christianity-in-and-of-itself, it would likely be somehow or something less than what here meets the eye. (1989: 41–42)

Given this description, it is difficult to understand the scholar of religion as anything but a detached, free-floating mind, concerned with essences and in no way interested in sociopolitical theorizing. But on the basis of *ER*'s complete exclusion of naturalist theorizing, it turns out to be entirely false to maintain that the *ER* "honors" all approaches to the study of religion. The kind of methodological and theoretical pluralism Duke describes, then, implies an abundance of thinking, description, and understanding, but nothing else.

The "many-splendored thing," therefore, which the study of religion has become—in Duke's, if not Wiebe's, Lawson's, and Strenski's opinions—totally and unapologetically overlooks the relations between thinking and acting, in other words, all forms of naturalistic explanation. Although Duke may be correct in claiming that there is "hardly a scholar . . . whose life . . . has not been enriched by [this thinking]," the *ER*'s pool of scholars certainly is limited from the outset. The trained rays of light include "every discipline, approach, and method" except, of course, materialistic, naturalistic analysis. Only in this way can one ensure that the

interpretation of Christianity—repeatedly referred to by Duke, in suitably nineteenth-century fashion, as being one among a generic class of religions—as distinct historical phenomenon not only comes into “view” but is “radiant” as well. Duke’s review, then, illustrates how the ban on reductionism is not so much a restriction within which the contributors worked but rather—to many practitioners in this discourse at least—an unquestioned, undefended, and axiomatic assumption. It constitutes the regnant discourse in the contemporary academic study of religion, rationalized by the sui generis claim, exemplified in the work of countless scholars, promoted by an institutionalized school of thought, and disseminated and celebrated in an authoritative text, the *ER*. It is but one instance of a discourse on power and privilege, with explicit political implications camouflaged within appeals to self-evidence, neutrality, classification, and academic honesty.

The various naturalistic options in the modern field are not absent from representations of the discourse at large, such as the *ER*, because of ineffectual planning but rather because of the very requirements of the discourse on sui generis religion. That reviewers can differ so dramatically over the contribution of the *ER* suggests that there is more than initially meets the eye in this minor controversy in the modern field. In a manner of speaking, whereas one group concentrates on minor issues of content, scholars of the oppositional, tactical discourse critique the very form taken by the document and the unspoken conditions of its production. In other words, the oppositional discourse critiques not the details of religious experiences and how they ought to be described and compared but the very use and construction of religion as a private domain.¹¹

The Status of Religion in the IAHR

I will draw this examination of recent skirmishes in the debate on the usefulness of the category of sui generis religion to a close by looking in detail at a timely collection of essays, *The Notion of “Religion” in Comparative Research*. Edited by the late Ugo Bianchi (1994), the volume contains fifteen invited and ninety selected papers from the most recent quinquennial meeting of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), held in Rome in 1990. Appropriately enough, the theme of this gathering drew specific attention to “the varying national and factual implications of the use of the term ‘religion’” (ix). The volume is international in character, representing only a portion of the research presented at the IAHR meeting by scholars from thirty-four different countries—though over seventy percent of the participants represented Italy, Germany (what was then West and East), America, Canada, Japan, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark. This volume is of particular interest for, unlike the AAR, which welcomes theologically based methodologies that often amount not simply to a mere description but also a celebration of religion and religious perspectives, the IAHR has a long tradition of emphasizing historically and empirically based methodologies. (For an extensive

survey of the IAHR’s ongoing contribution to methodology and theory in the study of religion, see McCutcheon 1995b.) In other words, as representative of an explicitly historically grounded association of international scope, this volume provides us with an excellent opportunity to see just how far the conflict over sui generis religion extends.

The ninety selected papers that make up this collection are grouped into assorted categories that are based on religious traditions (e.g., Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity), geographic areas (Oceania, Africa, America, and Mesoamerica, East Asia and India, Iran and Egypt), and methodological or theoretical themes (anthropology, methodology of comparative research, and phenomenology). Understandably perhaps, there are a number of papers on such topics as whether Yoga, Zen, or the New Age are religions, whether there is such a thing as implicit and even anonymous religion, and the use of the category “religion” in assorted contexts in which there is no equivalent indigenous term.

The difficulty in critiquing such a diverse collection of essays should be obvious. From the outset, then, let the reader beware that my analysis makes no claim to be in any way an exhaustive account of this interesting book. Precisely because the postmodernists inform us that we all see through lenses of varying shades and thicknesses, the lens through which I have chosen to examine the discursive conflicts evident in this book is as follows. Because of the popularity of, or, better put, what almost amounts to a preoccupation with, reflecting on the pitfalls of the past and the promises of the future of the study of religion (recall the number of essays published in the past twenty-five years bearing the title “Respect and Prospect”¹²), the concluding session of the IAHR Congress, “The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect,” constitutes a concise picture of the field and a useful place to assess how the category of religion is used by five very different international scholars positioned at the opening of the 1990s. Sung-Hae Kim (Seoul), Ninian Smart (Santa Barbara), Donald Wiebe (Toronto), Giulia Sfermeni Gasparro (Messina), and Ugo Bianchi (Rome) all addressed the Congress on what they considered to be the issues most pressing for the field as it enters the late-twentieth century. Although this is an admittedly small group of scholars, the issues that arise in their comments confirm for us the significant discursive divide that has already been identified in a number of other sites. Moreover, even though much of this book has been devoted to North American scholarship, the IAHR volume shows that the discourse on sui generis religion is clearly not limited by national and geographic boundaries.

To Safeguard the Integrity of Humanity

Uppermost for Sung-Hae Kim (1994), as it is for Smart, is the issue of inadequate international representation at such congresses. As the only non-European or non-North American member of this panel, Sung-Hae’s very presence is an indication

of the need for what Michael Pye, former secretary-general of the IAHR, terms regional diversification. That the long-standing European dominance in the field is viewed as a problem that needs to be addressed is clear from much of Pye's opening report in the IAHR collection as well as from the location for the successful 1995 meeting in Mexico City. However, Sung-Hae goes so far as to suggest that an indication of the field's coming of age will be when it "outgrow[s] its initial stage as a western learning" (897). Although few scholars of religion would deny the need for organizations like the IAHR (since it is international) to represent the widely differing scholarly needs, research interests, institutional structures, and indigenous languages of all its members, outgrowing certain aspects of what some might label the field's "Western history" threatens to alter the very foundation of the field itself.

For example, for Sung-Hae the study of religions has a role to play, in cooperation with other fields in the humanities, "to testify [to] the authenticity of faith statements in the actual history of religious communities" (897). Although a precise reading of this statement is not possible, it certainly appears to recommend that the academic study of religion has a role to play in making normative judgments concerning just what constitutes true religion and "authentic faith." After identifying what are no doubt the inherent limitations of such scholarly polarities as sacred/profane when applied in cross-cultural and comparative work, Sung-Hae goes on to recommend that scholars "should have freedom and sensitivity to choose categories and methods that fit and enhance the true understanding of a religious tradition" (898). Calls to avoid methodological and theoretical orthodoxy are one issue Sung-Hae undoubtedly shares with most scholars who favor cross-disciplinarity, but the concern with *enhancing* the *true* understanding of religions is entirely another issue and recalls an era when scholars of religion were preoccupied with constructing and defending disciplinary boundaries, engaging in what amounts to tactical skirmishes over academic and institutional turf. And, reminiscent of the creative hermeneutics, not only is the "religious value" at times intimately involved with "safeguarding the integrity of humanity itself" but the study of religion as well, according to Sung-Hae, "has paramount importance not only in the understanding of what human is, but in subsisting the preservation of humanity itself" (898).

Amidst Sung-Hae's call for scholars to *respect* differences between religious traditions, the references to religion's "unique character," "function of its own," and "ultimate reference," and the need for scholars of religion to "safeguard the integrity of humanity," one detects not simply a clash between West and East, as some would describe it, but the clash between the discourse on *sui generis* religion and the naturalistic discourse on religion. It amounts to a clash between empirically testable claims and those that are themselves part and parcel of the datum scholars of religion purport to be studying, interpreting, understanding, and, ultimately, explaining. In other words, the clash Sung-Hae outlines is not between cultures

but between two divergent conceptions of the field, based on two significantly different theoretical perspectives.

To characterize this difference as one of culture is indeed confusing and misleading, for the separation of nonreligious scholarship from religious scholarship that is intent on saving humanity is evident within any number of cultural, historical, and academic contexts. One need only think of the Christian theologian John Hick's extremely well-attended address at the 1994 AAR meeting to find that the willingness for many North American and European-based scholars to entertain and devise religious interpretations and explanations of religion continues to dominate the academy. Responses from scholars who practice nonreligious, or naturalistic, methods of interpretation and, more important, explanation have little in common with such religious hermeneutics. As already indicated, to assert that they do amounts to a virtual confusion of each discourse's rules of formation.

An instance of just this sort of confusion can be found in Peter Clarke and Peter Byrne's recent book, *Religion Defined and Explained* (1993), in which, along with very useful chapters devoted to surveying philosophical, socioeconomic, sociological, and psychological theories, there appears a chapter on religious theories (rather than, in the case of Hick's own title, *interpretations*) of religion. The confusion mentioned above is evident in this chapter, which is largely a commentary on Hick's work in the area of religious pluralism, in how the term "theory" is used. Theories have much to do not only with hypotheses and predictions that can be tested but—if one follows Karl Popper's influential conception of science—ultimately, with attempts at explanation that conceivably can be falsified. But surely one of the criteria that distinguishes religious from scientific discourses is that only the latter are falsifiable. Simply put, I know of no way to disconfirm such statements as "Jesus loves me," "Muhammad is the prophet of Allah," "Mahavira was the twenty-fourth Tirthankara," and, in the case of Hick's own work, "all religions worship the same transcendently real focus." Accordingly, insider accounts for such issues as how the world came to be (cosmogonies in general and creationism in particular are excellent examples), claims concerning the common sacred essence to all religion (religious pluralism), and explanations of why people are religious in the first place (e.g., because a deity bestowed something upon people, or possibly because the sages of old simply heard something) are not, strictly speaking, theories and labeling them as such glosses over a very important distinction. What is missed in the confusion is that religious accounts are the *data* for scholars who develop sociological, psychological, socioeconomic, and so on, theories of religion. Accordingly, religious accounts are not competing theoretical accounts.

If Sung-Hae's use of the construct "culture" and his call for the increased representation of non-European scholars of religion at such gatherings as the IAHR is linked to his call for promoting, practicing, and advocating the very datum scholars ought to be engaged in studying, then scholarship of this nature is already more than adequately represented in the academy. Finally, Sung-Hae's prescription

for the field ends in a contradiction: on the one hand, there is the acknowledgment that the study of religions is by no means unique and that other students of the humanities are needed in our studies, but on the other hand, there is the common assertion that religious experience is itself unique. Given Sung-Hae's reliance on, and promotion of, *sui generis* religion, the future of the field is not all that dissimilar to its past.

Internationalization and the Problem of Ethnocentrism

Like Sung-Hae, Ninian Smart (1994) is very much concerned with increased international representation in academic organizations, for "the days of mutually isolated cultures is [sic] over" (901). Smart opens his remarks by noting the progress that has occurred in the field. He recalls that at the previous IAHR Congress, held in Rome (1955), he counted only "seventeen scholars . . . teaching all religions other than Christianity in the universities of Britain" (901). But given Smart's past writings (his recent proposals for a World Academy of Religion [1990: 305] notwithstanding¹³) and his long-recognized interest in methodological and theoretical issues, it seems evident that the kind of changes advocated by Sung-Hae are not what Smart would necessarily call progress. Smart observes that, in spite of the many theoretical shortcomings of such scholars as Pettazzoni, Heiler, and Zaehner, they nonetheless made hypotheses that fellow scholars in the field could test and critique. Like Popper, who he approvingly quotes to close his paper, Smart seems to care little for where our hypotheses about religion come from; even though Eliade was, in Smart's estimation, "in a disguised form, a preacher" (901), Smart acknowledges that he fueled the field with innumerable hypotheses, all of which have been applied by countless scholars and are now being thoroughly criticized. No doubt, Smart would maintain that the progress in the field is not simply to be measured in terms of a greater number of scholars teaching and researching in religions outside of Christianity. More than this, progress in any scientific pursuit is evidenced by the number of discarded theoretical perspectives. Far from burying the work of Eliade because it is outmoded or biased, for example, those who are now engaged in critiquing his unique blend of morphology, comparativism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and intuitionism are advancing the discourse in the only way possible: through testing hypotheses regardless of their origins.

What is unclear, however, is just what Smart means by observing that scholars of religion have made little progress "in absorbing values from East and South to compliment the terminology of our profession, which is so largely drawn from Northern, that is to say Western cultures" (902). Like Sung-Hae and, as previously mentioned, Saler as well, Smart criticizes the fact that the categories of research in our field reflect not simply its European but also its Christian origins. As part of "absorbing values," Smart seems to be implying that our vocabulary—which is itself representative of our discourse, theories, and methods—must become more

international: "*bhakti* and *li* as well as *devotion* and *ritual*" ought to be useful scholarly tools.

It is true that the field has not rushed to rid itself of folk categories that are entrenched within a Christian and even European context. One need only think of the number of introductory religion textbooks that yet employ "sin," "savior," or "God" as if they were useful, cross-cultural, analytical categories. For example, the problems of employing the term "God," as opposed to "gods," "deities," "superhuman agents," or even Smart's own term "focus," as a cross-cultural comparative category should strike us all immediately, given the clearly English and Christian context in which the folk term "God" is most often imbued with patriarchal, monotheistic, and moralistic meanings. Although on one descriptive level, it may make sense to observe that "Muslims worship God," given the clear and important distinctions between a Muslim and Christian, not to mention a Jewish, conception of a monotheistic deity (e.g., for insiders, Allah has no son, and God the Father does), it would be more accurate to employ a multiplicity of such indigenous terms (ranging from "Allah" to "God the Father," as required by each individual context), at least at the descriptive level of our research. (On the relations between folk, religious categories and scholarly, analytical categories, see McCutcheon 1990).

The question to be pressed is whether such categories as "religion," "ritual," "myth," "institution," and the like, are themselves so entrenched in a particular worldview (to use Smart's own terminology) as to make them inadmissible when used in cross-cultural, comparative research. If they are and if, as Smart recommends, transnationalizing the field means ending our efforts to generate cross-culturally useful theoretical terminologies and comparative vocabularies in favor of using a multiplicity of local, indigenous, and emic terms (e.g., "using *marga* and *shari'ah* as well as *religion* and *law*"), then the goal of developing widely applicable explanatory theories, rather than detailed scholarly description, is all but ruled out, and along with it, we will lose the naturalistic discourse on religion.

I say that the naturalistic discourse will also be lost because the academic study of religion is not simply about accurate description and faithful understandings: it is also about developing scholarly generalizations about certain types of human behavior and beliefs—otherwise, the widely used generalizations "culture" and "human" would have no meaning and no use whatsoever for us. Although we may be able to purge our terminologies of their explicitly religious connotations (e.g., one no longer employs the centrality of Jesus in Christianity as the model for constructing Islam as "Muhammadanism"), I would suggest that we will not be able to purge them totally of their cultural contexts, for the very effort to develop cross-cultural understandings, generalizations, and explanations of human behavior is, in part at least, a specifically Western endeavor. So, because all discourses are sociohistorically entrenched, it should not be a matter of, as Saler has recommended, taming ethnocentrism but of distinguishing which types are part

of which discourses. If discourses are concerned with dividing up and managing what might otherwise be termed the continuum of human perceptions, the question should not be whether we can minimize or eliminate situatedness and discourses but which vocabularies and assumptions are appropriate to which discourses. Therefore, Sung-Hae, Smart, and Saler may all be misguided to talk of diminishing ethnocentrism by degrees; perhaps it is instead a question of which type of ethnocentrism we use.¹⁴

At this point, I need to introduce a clarification: when we talk of ethnocentrism, it is important that we make an explicit distinction. Although ethnocentrism involves not simply *describing* but also *judging* others in terms of one's own local categories, ethnocentrism does not denote the inevitable situatedness of scholarly work. Confusing these two aspects of scholarship is a grave mistake that leads to unnecessary critiques and defenses.

For example, returning to Saler's work, he writes, "In pursuing their ethnographic research, anthropologists must also work out from their conventions, discourses, and language-games. What they do cannot be entirely 'open-textured,' and in significant measure it can be accounted 'ethnocentric'" (1993: 260). Having conventions, using theories as models, and operating from within discourses, much like having a culture and a sociohistorical context, are not in and of themselves conditions of culpability. However, mistaking such tactical, relative, and contingent contexts for necessary and normative centers and then moving from these centers to form judgments is indeed such a condition. To put it another way, failing to recognize the theoretical basis of one's efforts to describe, understand, or explain is in part at least what constitutes scholarly ethnocentrism. Like ideology, it is a matter of overlooking or possibly disguising one's trace, one's context and situatedness.

Demonstrating the culturally specific nature of our endeavors and tools and arguing that these tools and goals should not be taken as essentially normative (thereby, I would say, avoiding the traps of ideology and ethnocentrism) are indeed worthwhile contributions. But attempting to limit, correct, or compensate for that same culture-specificity on route to generating transcultural understandings that are transparent both to research and subject alike, by employing insider categories seems to me to miss the point that we are inextricably stuck with asking just our questions and using just our tools in posing those questions. As scholars of religion with a specific European intellectual and social heritage (which constitutes our own insider context), we have specific questions that make sense given our specific theoretical, political, and social contexts and histories. They are our's and *may very well be* no one else's. (Note the very significant difference between stating this and the normative statement that they *are* in fact no one else's.) Hence, the ethnographies we construct are, in the very least, specifically our creations (see Wagner 1981).

Simply put, and to return to Smart's specific recommendation, as soon as

"bhakti" and "puja" come from our mouths and pens, they become something entirely different than what they once might have been, for they have become part of an analytic, comparative vocabulary, whether used to understand or explain, rather than a way of life. Therefore, to presume that what for us becomes an analytical, comparative category used to understand the other was, for the other, such a category as well is perhaps the most problematic issue of all. It is based on the assumption that all humans are equally concerned with developing a convergence of transcultural understandings and generalizations about human behavior. As David Hoy has phrased it, "the difficulty with ethnocentrism is not so much that we see the world through our own self-understanding, but instead that we expect every other self-understanding to converge with ours" (1991: 175).¹⁵

As insightful as Sung-Hae's, Smart's, and Saler's analyses of the culture-bound nature of all human discourse are—and, indeed, I do not mean to diminish their contributions—I do not agree with their conception of the study of religion as a vehicle for increased cultural dialogue, convergence, and translation, and this point of disagreement demarcates the bounds between the naturalistic and sui generis discourses. To think that we can somehow truly understand the other and that they are equally interested in understanding us strikes me as itself a rather ethnocentric assumption. Why? Because it overlooks the many ways in which imperial powers are the ones most often interested in doing the understanding and, more important, in doing the conceptual and material appropriation that seems to come along with such efforts to understand. The appropriation and subsequent domestication of their means (in this case, intellectual categories) for our ends (in this case, increased cross-cultural understanding) bears disturbing resemblances to earlier instances of economic colonialism, where the colonies' natural resources became the colonizer's finished products, profits, and eventually, meanings. Although I most certainly do not mean to suggest that such proposals are part and parcel of these earlier instances of colonialism, I find the recommendation that "their" means will be useful in serving "our" ends problematic. Moreover, as Hoy suggests, it is troublesome to equate our specific ends with everyone's. Stated simply, ethnocentrism is not the fact of having a culture but the assumption that one's own culture—as well as the goals relevant to one's own culture—is by definition everyone's goal. We as European-based scholars have this particular goal; others may or may not share it. As Roy Wagner has noted, "the study of culture is in fact *our* culture" (1981: 16). However, having made this acknowledgment does not make it an illegitimate goal; it is simply to recognize that its legitimacy is to be found in its own theoretical context and practical implications. Although many of us eat apples, oranges, pears, and grapes, it may well be only a relatively small group of us who wish to develop and use the analytical category of fruit to compare them all.¹⁶ To recognize the relativity of such analytical interests means that we must ask, is the intellectual capital of the other worthwhile in its own theoretical and historical contexts, working toward its own goals, or must it continually find its

place and define its worth only in terms of being translated and domesticated by our own epistemological and sociocultural goals?

In the final analysis, Smart's proposals, somewhat like Sung-Hae's, Saler's, and possibly even Asad's, appear to be rather problematic if we aim to continue practicing the naturalistic discourse on religion. After recommending that transnationalizing the field means employing a multiplicity of terminologies (a move that, I acknowledge, effectively challenges the hegemony of European theories and concepts but that also, ironically perhaps, may have ethnocentric implications), Smart calls for scholars of religion (a unifying concept that itself leaves a trace of this selfsame hegemony) to "blow our own trumpet more" when dealing with public issues and the media. The problem is that without such shared comparative and taxonomic—yet admittedly situated, partial, and limiting—categories as "religion," "ritual," and the like, there is no way to do any trumpet blowing. In other words, it must be determined how to constitute a we when, for all we know, we might not even be talking about the same thing.

Institutional Legitimacy and the Problem of Demarcation

True to form, Donald Wiebe's contribution to this panel (1994b) is concerned with how the *retrospect* (in not only the sense of the past but, one infers, possibly in the sense of the term "retrograde," or the present moving backward) influences the *prospect* of the field. As readers of his widely cited earlier essay on the failure of nerve in the academic study of religion (1984b)¹⁷ will recall, Wiebe's thesis is concerned with how the hard-won nineteenth-century intellectual and institutional demarcation of the naturalistic discourse on religion from confessional theology has slowly eroded to the point where contemporary scholars routinely exclude naturalistic theorizing from their studies based on an a priori "concern with the welfare of religion" and an undefended knowledge that religion "is essential to the continued welfare of humanity" (1994b: 909). Contrary to this modern trend, whose high point may well have been the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the academic study of religion actually arose, according to Wiebe, "as a result of a conscious and deliberate transcendence of theological assumptions and religious commitments that had informed the broader more traditional study of religions" (906). According to Wiebe's position, the institutional legitimacy the field now enjoys (which is currently a tentative status in many present-day North American institutions—a topic I return to in chapter 7) is directly proportional to the distance of the field from confessional agendas, interpretations, and vocabularies.

Wiebe finds it ironic, however, that in spite of this relationship between non-religious scholarship and slowly increasing institutional credibility, religious categories of research and seemingly sectarian agendas are yet rampant in the field. Citing Sharpe's history of comparative religion, Wiebe even suggests that, practi-

cally speaking, the field never really was dethologized, in spite of the overt efforts of such associations as the IAHR to avoid including confessional studies and even philosophic methodology in their organizations.¹⁸ Practically speaking, then, and if Wiebe is correct, in spite of what F. Max Müller's and C. P. Tiele's intentions may have been, the study of religion has turned into a twentieth-century effort to develop an inclusive world theology in which each religion is fairly and sympathetically represented, as opposed to a scholarly and theoretical pursuit to scrutinize religion, religious people, beliefs, and institutions, as empirical data in need of explanation. The finding of the previous survey of world religions textbooks suggests that indeed Wiebe's assessment, now over a decade old, is still correct. The central problem, then, of much of the modern study of religion is not the problem of religion itself but the problem of religious pluralism. It is for this reason that Wiebe ends his essay with his often-heard call for increased theorizing in the field as but one means for recovering its original academic agenda.

No doubt Wiebe would agree with Luther Martin (1993a) in citing the current closings of some North American religion departments as evidence that the future institutional security of the field may well depend on the ability of its practitioners to convince budget-conscious administrators that the nonconfessional, naturalistic study of religion ought to continue as part of the rational, public discourse of the academy.¹⁹ However, given the recent successes of research that question the utility of such harshly interpreted emic/etic divisions (specifically, see Karen McCarthy Brown 1991 and Rita Gross 1993), such demarcation within institutions may not only be difficult to maintain but continue to be an unpopular methodological option for individual scholars who continue to privilege purely descriptive accounts and intuitively based methodologies over theoretically defensible generalizations and explanations.

Surely, some scholars will criticize Wiebe's position (perhaps along with that of Waardenburg) inasmuch as it seems based on an outdated positivism. What many now see to be the limitations of rigid, dichotomous thinking may well be understood as the limitations of Wiebe's apparently harsh demarcation between insiders and outsiders, between religious accounts and naturalistic accounts. Concerning this demarcation thesis, Ursula King has already all but dismissed it by referring to it simply as Wiebe's "well-known hobby horse" (1991: 146). However, when viewed in the light of Sung-Hae's and even Smart's assessment of the field or, for that matter, in light of the Catholic historian Paul Gen Aoyama's contribution to the 1990 IAHR Congress, entitled "Religion Is the Work of God Shared in a Human Community," Wiebe's comments on the need for practitioners in the field continually to confront what it means to study religion naturalistically and nonconfessionally rather than what it means to practice and interpret religion ecumenically are entirely relevant and well worth repeating. He has drawn our attention not only to the very different rules of formation that have historically constituted two sociohistorically entrenched discourses but also to the fact that

only one—the rational, naturalistic—is suited to the conditions that operate within nonsectarian, public education and dialogue.

Holistic Methods and a God's-eye View

Unlike Wiebe, and very much related to Sung-Hae's analysis of the field, Giulia S. Gasparro's (1994) understanding of the task, and consequently the meanings, of the study of religion is very much in keeping with the discourse on *sui generis* religion: the field is a "historico-religious discipline" that employs diverse methodologies (notably the comparative method) to determine the "specific quality of the religious phenomenon" (915). Just what this "specific quality" is or how researchers know of it in advance of their study is, sadly, not an issue. In spite of the fact that she discourages the use of "intuitionist hermeneutics," Gasparro offers no systematic explanation concerning just what constitutes the rightful object of the scholar's gaze—nor does she suggest that this ought to occupy our attention, for, after all, she also advises against devoting ourselves to "abstract theories." All the reader is told is that the term "religion," in spite of its somewhat dubious Eurocentric origins, is a useful "reference parameter" or, I would presume, taxonomy, that can "characterize a certain kind of experience detectable—in various forms—in the most diverse civilizations" (917). That religion is itself a scholarly tool is beyond debate of course, but Gasparro appears to suggest that the real objects it refers to, the assorted culturally diverse experiences, are in fact unified with one another, in spite of the fact that they change forms.

This, of course, constitutes one of the classic problems of the discourse on *sui generis* religion already identified in Eliade's refusal to offer an explicit definition of religion. In attempting to get at the real thing in a manner unavailable to those who employ naturalistic theories and methodologies, some scholars fail to acknowledge or possibly fail to recognize their own theoretical commitments. Simply put, if the specifically religious aspect of a datum (a story, some form of behavior, or a piece of art) changes forms across cultures, then how is one to recognize it without already having predetermined just what it is? In other words, how do we know we are not supposed to be studying cultural aspect X rather than Y, for example, behaviors termed rituals rather than habits, myths rather than short stories? To phrase it another way, the problem for this approach is that, in attempting to gain much-needed academic legitimacy and an institutional place by stating that its methods are historically grounded (though the methods are never simply that but are always historico-religious, socioreligious, etc.), scholars of religion often undermine the hard-won methodological and institutional legitimacy by failing to acknowledge their own preobservational theories and beliefs. Gasparro, like so many others, is interested in studying the facts of religion, its "specific quality," and its "complexity," eventually to determine "correct" observations and, one would imagine, proper interpretations. But at no time does she suggest the

criteria by which researchers are able, first, to distinguish just what properly separates these specifically religious facts and qualities from nonreligious ones, and she fails to identify on what basis one is able to separate the better from the worse interpretations.

Like many scholars before her, and on the basis of the a priori belief that there in fact is a whole picture that transcends all of the social sciences' limited perspectives, Gasparro advocates combining the findings of the other sciences (although, admittedly, the social sciences are held in a somewhat higher regard than in the case of some of her colleagues) to understand what can only be termed the "big picture":

[W]ith the contribution of the methods and achievements of the other sciences that legitimately investigate the phenomenon in question from their respective spheres of study (anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology), it should be possible to give shape to a *sui generis* historical discipline capable of confronting the manifold problems posed by the object of its investigation and then solving them in compliance with all the rules of positive-inductive research. (916)

The problem is that nowhere in the discourse on *sui generis* religion do we find a legitimate defense of its conception of the whole picture or what it means to be a *sui generis* discipline. Without a predetermined recipe, how does one know how much anthropology or theology ought to go into the final mix, let alone *which* anthropology or *why* theology? As members of a historically grounded discipline, how can scholars of religion credibly talk about defining their study as *sui generis* and somehow synthesizing and thereby surpassing the other historically constrained sciences (theology notwithstanding)?

Important questions lie behind such issues: are naturalistic accounts aimed at generating final or ultimate explanations? and if so, how might one decide which explanation counts as final? As it is for Cantwell Smith, is the devotee's point of view somehow authoritative in determining the ultimate adequacy of interpretations and explanations perhaps? Because the devotee fails to acknowledge the adequacy of, for example, the role played by guilt and aggression in a particular sacrificial act, is this a sufficient ground to begin talking about the partial and *therefore* inadequate nature of the psychological theory? Surely not, for if this were the case then many supposedly nonreductionistic scholars would likewise label their own research reductive, partial, and inadequate, for few devotees report that they are communing with, or experiencing, the sacred, the holy, power, or even religion itself. Perhaps, then, talk of synthesizing methods in the service of interpreting the whole picture, or religion's essence, are themselves instances of totalizing, religious discourses and therefore deserve the critical attention—rather than the advocacy—of naturalistic scholars of religion. If one accepts even a portion of Clifford Geertz's complex definition of religion, then religions—among other sym-

bol systems, to be sure—are systems that effectively enable human communities to make the ideological slippage from descriptive *is* to prescriptive *ought*; thereby normativizing current practices associated with one gender, class, ethnic group, nation, and so on. As already quoted in the introduction of this book, the religious perspective “is the conviction that . . . between the way one ought to live and the way things really are there is an unbreakable inner connection” (1968: 97). Possibly, then, the ultimate synthesis of methods and theories characteristic of the work of some of our colleagues might itself be understood as part of the social scientist’s data. On this matter we would be well advised to heed Richard Rorty’s sound advice concerning such totalizing, final theories: “we must be content . . . not to seek a God’s-eye view” (1991: 7).²⁰

What should be clear is that, as a retrospective, Gasparro’s paper succinctly embodies many of the unaddressed theoretical problems that plague the discourse on sui generis religion. In spite of her warnings to the contrary, her paper offers no alternative to the ever-present intuitionism that constitutes the very core of this discourse. Some of these same problems also arise in Bianchi’s brief closing remarks, where he advocates a “holistic treatment of the object” (1994: 920).²¹ And despite Bianchi’s closing words concerning the need for the field to be characterized by “an evaluation open to hypothesis but opposite to *a priori*, unfalsifiable selection,” in the end, the discourse remains normative and nonfalsifiable. Otherwise, participants in the discourse on sui generis religion would have to entertain seriously the fact that there may be no whole picture, that their “holistic” methods were as partial and limiting as those of their academic associates in the university’s other departments, and that not only religion but the sacred and religious experience as well are all taxonomic categories some human beings use to talk not about otherworldly experiences but about other human beings.

The Problem of Method and the Scope of Theory

In the end, and contrary to Bianchi’s suggestions, there is only one way out of the apparent impasse (that definitions and concepts require prior theories which themselves presume certain definitions and concepts): it is for scholars of religion to discard the conception of their discourse as the synthetic Queen of the Human Sciences and to dispel the assumptions that it is sensible to talk about studying “total man” or the big picture. Like all the human exercises, the discourse on sui generis religion is inextricably entrenched in a sociohistorical and theoretical framework and, therefore, answers only the questions it poses, having little recourse to defending only its questions as normative. To overlook the gap between its particular methods and theories and representations of them as normative is not to study but to dabble in what C. Geertz has termed the religious perspective.

When viewed from the naturalistic perspective, the impasse is hardly a problem to be overcome but is an accurate assessment of what it is to be a historically entrenched human investigator.

In the opening lines to his 1990 IAHR paper, Armin Geertz aptly summarizes the issue: the “problem of the definition [or, the very construct] of religion is nothing less than the problem of method and the scope of theory in the study of religion” (1994a: 661). Indeed, differences and clashes over discourses on religion are most evident in the differing discursive rules: the theoretical, institutional, and political parameters and the methods to which they lead, many of which pass undefended. That many scholars fail to understand this suggests that Robert D. Baird’s somewhat harsh words from twenty years ago still ring true: when scholars of religions “do discuss the matter [of defining religion] they show an almost complete lack of philosophic [and, I might add, theoretical] sophistication regarding the meaning or significance of a definition” (1971: 10).²² The fundamental discursive differences—detectable in terms of theoretical and methodological disputes—examined in this chapter carry the message that debates on the adequacy of the category “religion” and just how one constructs it will be productive only when scholars become self-critically aware of the theoretical assumptions and tactical agendas that they carry within their studies. As identified recently by Michael Pye (1994), and as seen in the ongoing debates over the future place (and in some budget-conscious universities, the debates are on the very existence) of the institutionalized discourse on religion, our continued reflection on definitions and theories of religion, far from being abstract obsessions and examples of navel gazing, have concrete implications for the future of the institutionalized status of the study of religion. Indeed, Waardenburg is correct: “the current debate about the concept of religion is not as innocent as it may seem.”

Having identified the discursive lines that constitute the clash now so apparent in a number of sites within the study of religion, chapter 6 returns to scrutinize more closely the sociopolitical implications of the essentialist discourse on sui generis religion. Although I have often asserted that this discourse, like all others, is firmly entrenched in local and global issues of power and history, so far I have offered few concrete examples to persuade the reader of the geopolitical relevance of this discourse. Accordingly, chapter 6 examines the politics of nostalgia not simply as a scholarly disposition that acts locally within intellectual and institutional settings but as a material and geopolitical force in modern society. Only after firmly establishing this can we complete the study by returning to the very issues that occupied the close of this chapter. Given the critique made throughout this book, I conclude with the question, if scholarly theories, methods, categories, and the institutional locale in which they are deployed are representative and constitutive of this highly problematic discourse, then what will be one possible shape of a more successful discourse on religion?

versity from Religion Department to Department of Comparative Religion. Whereas other programs and academic organizations are considering changing their designation to Study of Religion as opposed to Religious Studies (two useful examples are the University of Toronto's cross-disciplinary Centre for the Study of Religion and the ongoing debate on a similar change of name for the International Association of History of Religions itself), Western Michigan has reverted to an older designation that makes explicit that the comparative, rather than the theological, enterprise is fundamental to our work within the academy.

5. For a more detailed critique of Armstrong's work, see McCutcheon forthcoming b.
6. Kitagawa 1990, although apparently written for a nonacademic, general audience, is indebted to a long tradition of scholarship on religious pluralism and repeats Armstrong's theological conjectures on the religious unity of the world.
7. A recent example is Lawrence Sullivan (1996) who notes that FBI agents involved in the Branch Davidian stand-off failed to take "the role of religion seriously" and failed to take into account the purely "religious motives" of the participants. That "taking of religion seriously" is simply a code for nonreductionism is apparent when Sullivan later observes that reducing religion to "nonreligious terms—economic or psychological terms, for instance . . . trivializes religion by recasting religious motivations as essentially nonreligious ones, translating religious claims into languages of self-interest which are only political, economic, or psychological in nature. Waco and incidents like it indicate that this view may be misjudged" (230, 231).

Chapter 5

1. "Ethnohermeneutics" as a term was introduced into the literature by A. Geertz at the Sydney meeting of the IAHR, in 1985.
2. For a fair but critical assessment of this renewed effort to study religion "in its own terms," see E. Thomas Lawson's review of Cumpsty's book (Lawson 1994).
3. I am reminded here of Clifford Geertz's related comment on "the pigeonholing disease" that has overtaken the comparative study of religion (1968: 23–24; see also A. Geertz 1994a: 661). However, unlike Sharpe, Geertz is not critical of this exercise per se but of how comparative religionists organize their taxonomies not on the basis of clearly articulated and defensible analytical systems but on the basis of some other form of insight. In other words, such groupings as totemism, shamanism, mycicism, fetishism, worship, and so on, do not seem to be theoretically based and do not lead to the development of organized and systematic taxonomies. Clifford Geertz concludes that "it suggests relationships among things categorized together which have not in fact actually been discovered and asserted but only sensed and insinuated." As will become evident in this chapter, such theoretically undefended taxonomic insights and intuitions are constitutive of the discourse on sui generis religion.
4. My analysis here derives in part from McCutcheon 1995c.
5. For a useful example of a critique that is based on Asad's method—and one that is closely related to the critical position I argue throughout this book—see Robert J. Braid's (1995) critical reading of David Hume's *Natural History of Religion*.
6. For a detailed, critical assessment of Asad's critique of Geertz, see Saler (1993: 95–102).
7. See Gustavo Benavides's (1995) accurate critique of how Tony Edwards's contribution to this volume on reductionism (1994) aestheticizes and protects religion. Edwards

likens religion to music (i.e., historians of music engage in music appreciation and, by analogy, scholars of religion "guard what is sacred against displacement"), thereby sidestepping the issue of reductionism. Benavides' reply is succinct: "musical forms do not make truth claims, even in the semi-propositional manner in which mythologies do" (5).

8. For another sampling of some current work taking place in Canada, see the collection of twenty-seven essays celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Department of Religion, University of Manitoba (Klostermaier and Hurtado 1991)—although not all the contributors are currently working in Canada (Ivan Strenski and Michael Pye are two examples). Sadly, a number of the Canadian contributions implicitly seem to agree with the editors' preface in which they write, "The obsession with methodological questions . . . is slowly but surely giving way to the twentieth-century global perception that disciplines today are judged by the quality of their research programs and their ability to carry them through. The appropriate theory has to grow out from thorough familiarity with the field, and the methods must be specific to the issues, so as to become heuristically fruitful" (ix). I say sadly because, in the editors' criticism of what they pejoratively label as methodological obsessions, they fail to recognize that scholars' theories and methods actually *construct* the field.

9. This review is on the series of encyclopedia article collections that were subsequently published in book form on various themes.

10. Strenski's critique at times takes on a considerable edge, as when he concludes that the "*Encyclopedia* gives the field the kind of immortality which embalming fluid gives a corpse" (1988: 259).

11. At this point, I must mention a dramatically different resource, the new *Dictionary of Religion* (J. Z. Smith 1995a). Unlike the *ER*, this reference tool openly addresses the equally important roles to be played by description, interpretation, comparison, and explanation in the modern study of religion. Take, for example, the entry on "sui generis," which goes so far as to historicize—and thereby deauthorize—such a claim by noting that it is "often made as a defense tactic in the early stages of an academic discipline in order to assert the autonomy of that discipline's subject matter" (1033). Furthermore, the entry on reductionism closes with the following astute observation: "Concern about reductionism in the study of religion is often part of an apologetic strategy designed to show that there is a religious dimension of human experience that cannot fully be accounted for in naturalistic terms" (884).

12. The very existence of this genre of retrospective essays provides sufficient evidence for the ever-present institutional insecurity of the field. Although this is not to suggest that retrospective analysis is unnecessary, the virtual preoccupation with writing essays that understand the present, not to mention the future, in light of the past successes of the field (often limited to the late-nineteenth century) suggests that the contemporary field has little confidence in its current theoretical scope and institutional place.

13. As yet another instance of the discursive clash, I refer the interested reader to any of a number of the often-lively debates that have taken place over Ninian Smart's proposal, a debate that occupied the attention of a panel at the 1995 Mexico City meeting of the IAHR, involving Smart, Ursula King, Jacob Olupona, and Armin Geertz. For earlier instances of this debate, see the various exchanges between Ninian Smart (1993) and Ursula King (1993), on the one hand, and Luther Martin and Donald Wiebe (1993), on the other.

14. Portions of my analysis of ethnocentrism arise from a paper I delivered at the seventeenth Congress of the IAHR, in Mexico City, August 1995 (1995c).

15. See also Hoy 1978. My thanks to Tim Murphy for bringing Hoy's insightful work to my attention.

16. I owe thanks to William Paden for this useful way of putting the issue.
17. This essay implicitly elaborates on earlier themes (Wiebe 1983) and explicitly rebuts a number of issues raised by Charles Davis in his own essay, "The Reconvergence of Theology and Religious Studies" (1974). Regarding what soon became the spirited Davis-Wiebe debate, in the Canadian periodical *Studies in Religion*, see also Davis 1984, 1986; and Wiebe 1986.
18. Among the many replies to Wiebe's "failure of nerve" article, Hans Penner's is most relevant at this point, for he observes that there never really was any naturalistic nerve to begin with. For Penner, Wiebe, in his earlier article, "has not gone far enough in his critique of historians and phenomenologists of religion" (1986: 165), for the theological enterprise in the study of religion "has always been with us disguised in the cloak of the *epoché*" (172). Therefore, "there never was a line or 'benchmark' from which historians and phenomenologists of religion allowed a 'retreat to theology'. Theology was always there (174). (For other replies and rejoinders in the Davis-Wiebe debate, see *Studies in Religion* 15 [1986].)
19. Martin writes, "In light of the apparent conflation of the two [i.e., religious and theological studies, on the one hand, and social scientific studies, on the other] by the AAR, one might well imagine a fiscally hard-pressed administrator at a public university eliminating its department of religion, not because it is considered to be an 'expendable luxury,' but because it is a relatively new field that might, in any case, be better served by more traditional and established schools of theology or church related private colleges and universities" (1993a: 11).
20. I must again thank Tim Murphy, this time for bringing Rorty's rather useful quotation to my attention.
21. Bianchi's further comments on "the struggle against *a priori* reductionism, whether theoretical, ideological, or programmatic" can be found in Bianchi 1993.
22. For a similar assessment of the continued relevance of Baird's critical comments, see Snoek 1994: 741.

Chapter 6

1. The often occluded relations between scholarship on religion and colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is increasingly attracting the attention of critics in the field. Most recently, see the essays collected in *Curators of the Buddha* (Lopez 1995) and David Chidester's on-going work on the conditions and history of imperial comparative religion in southern Africa (1996a, 1996b, 1996c).
2. For an account of how "Quang Duc's suicide symbolized the last year of the Diem regime," see Wyatt 1993, especially chap. 5. "Let Them Burn: The Buddhist Crisis of 1963."
3. One of the first such American deaths was that of Roger Laporte who, in 1965, burned himself in front of the United Nations (see Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh 1975: 59).
4. See Kraft (1992: 17-23) for a brief biography and commentary on Thich Naht Hanh and his teachings.
5. See Bowker (1970: 266-268) for a commentary on this alternative interpretation of Quang Duc's death.
6. Kohl's essay systematically examines a number of points where the historical record and the textbook representation differ significantly. He closes by offering what he considers to be a more accurate and nuanced portrait of the complex nature of Rosa Parks's protest and arrest and the ensuing bus boycott that can be communicated to children.

7. *Rage Against the Machine*, self-titled compact disk (Epic Records, a division of Sony Music, 1992). See the lyrics to the first song, *Bombtrack*, for an explicit example of the revolutionary tone of the group's message, perhaps making some sense of their choice of image for the CD cover:

Instead I warm my hands on the
flames of the flag
As I recall our downfall
And the business' [sic] that burned us all
See through the news and views that
twist reality
Enough
I call the bluff
Manifest Destiny

8. "[P]atterns [in tribal societies] simply take shape over centuries, during which generations fumble their way toward satisfying mores and away from destructive ones. Once the patterns becomes [sic] established . . . they are transmitted from generation to generation unthinkingly. As the Romans would say, they are passed on to the young *cum lacte*, 'with the mother's milk'" (1991: 161).
9. I am grateful to Bruce Alton of the University of Toronto for bringing this earlier version of the passage to my attention.
10. In the 1991 revised edition of his text, Smith offers this edited version of his earlier comments:
- The motives that impel us toward world understanding are varied. I was once taxed by bomber to an air force base to lecture to officers on other people's faiths. Why? Obviously, because those officers might some day have to deal with those peoples as allies or antagonists. This is one reason for coming to know them. It may be a necessary reason, but one hopes that there are others. (7).
- Gone is the explicit nature of the comment: the air base and its location are not named in great detail, but rather it has become one generic base among all the others. Nonetheless, the imperial rhetoric is still present, simply deemphasized; language of inevitable and unavoidable conquest and control has been removed. However, the necessity of military confrontation and domination remains unquestioned, as is the role comparative religions can play in facilitating such conquests.
11. As Wiebe convincingly demonstrates (forthcoming b), the view of the scholar of religion as sympathetic caretaker for religion and translator of religious meaning is found throughout the vast majority of AAR presidential addresses.
12. Berling's remarks were made as part of a panel entitled "Neutrality and Responsibility in the Comparative Study of Religion," organized by Dale Cannon. Her fellow panelists were Karen McCarthy Brown, Paul Griffiths, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Ninian Smart. Although Smart was clear in stating that "we should distinguish between historical or descriptive enterprises and theories about religion"—referring to Popper's criterion of testability to distinguish explicit theories from those that are smuggled into scholarship by being imbedded in our descriptions (his excellent example: describing lingam simply as a phallus)—the other participants generally presumed that both scholar and informant were uniformly religious. Accordingly, the only question for them was how to, or whether to, suspend this in one's scholarship. The study of religion, it would seem, is in some form an act of religious pluralism, as when Griffiths makes clear in his contribution to the panel that his