THOMAS A. TWEED

CROSSING AND DWELLING

A Theory of Religion

Harvard University Press

Cf

Begi
Miar
tous
stan
men
of cr
life—
econ
a po
nam

A de
vivid
Ame
Cross
and
Twee
tees
the l
cosm
ploy
to m
scrib
those
and
cosm

ings negotiate power as well as meaning is to give up any notion of morally neutral or socially disinterested accounts, but it does not mean that self-consciously positioned theories cannot be useful. To say that a cloud of sand blows up as we traverse the path is not to say we are not on the move and cannot offer representations along the way. To say we cannot have a God's-eye view, and to acknowledge blind spots, is not to say we can see nothing at all. It's to say only what all theorists of religion should have said—that we are positioned.

In Chapter 3, I offer a positioned representation that proposes a route—and continues to move toward a dynamic and relational theory of religion. But as most theoretical itinerants do, I first pause to mark the boundaries of the terrain. In Chapter 2, I consider the arguments about whether and how to define religion.[30]

Religion cannot reasonably be taken to be a valid analytical category since it does not pick out any distinctive cross-cultural aspect of human life.

   Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*

When everyone around you is demonstrating that no one can walk, it's a good time to get up quickly and start running.

   Michel Serres to Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*

BOUNDARIES

Constitutive Terms, Orienting Tropes,
and Exegetical Fussiness

Despite warnings about the futility of efforts to define religion, many scholars still choose to "get up and start running."[1] In this chapter I warm up for the sprint by discussing constitutive terms and arguing for scholars' role-specific obligation to define them. Meeting that obligation, I suggest, means being clear about the type of definition offered and attending carefully to the choice of orienting trope, since definitions imply theories and employ tropes. Interpreters of religion have relied on a wide range of orienting metaphors, and I consider some of the most influential ones as I point to the implications of those choices.

For good reasons, nonspecialists start to doze when definitions come up; scholars of religion, who've heard it all before, exhale a knowing

sigh. Not another (doomed) attempt to characterize religion! And there is a long and lofty lineage of scholarly suspicion, even contempt, about definitional attempts. Consider this excerpt from a 1901 article by an influential American scholar of religion, James Leuba, who recorded a familiar complaint: there are lots of definitions and none of them seem to agree.

> It has been a favorite custom with [scholars] to put up the concentrated results of their toil with little formulae, commonly called *definitions* of religion. Although they evince most astonishing divergencies, extending even to hopeless contradiction, they will, when considered together and compared with each other, at least warn us away from certain false conceptions which have obscured the view of otherwise clear-sighted men. It must be confessed that the definitions of religion would afford a happy topic for a malicious person bent upon showing the quackery of the Doctors in religion.[2]

I don't think I'm driven by any "malicious" impulses—though readers can decide that for themselves—and I certainly don't think it's "quackery" for scholars to propose definitions, even "astonishingly divergent" and "hopelessly contradictory" ones. On the contrary, I suggest that scholars have a role-specific obligation to define constitutive disciplinary terms: *art* for art history, *music* for musicology, *literature* for literary studies, *culture* for anthropology, *space* for geography, and *language* for linguistics.[3]

"EXEGETICAL FUSSINESS" AS ROLE-SPECIFIC DUTY

Constitutive terms are those that constitute or mark the boundaries of a field of study. Practitioners—artists, musicians, poets, and the pious in the pews—do not have to define these constitutive terms. It is enough that they know how to produce a painting, play the flute, write a sonnet, or recite the Lord's Prayer. However, scholars who have been trained to participate in an academic conversation have a role-specific obligation

to reflect on their work—and the constitutive terms of their discipline. They have a professional duty to be self-conscious in their use of central categories—*art, religion, literature,* or *music.* So when poet and literature professor John Hollander composed the poems collected in *The Night Mirror* he was properly focused on his art, but when he wrote *Rhyme's Reason,* his brilliant guide to verse, he rightly also pondered poetry and its "formal structures." When ethnomusicologist John Blacking—who confided to readers that he's also a musician—played Chopin on his living room piano on a Saturday afternoon, he had no duty to ponder whether "humanly ordered sound" was an inclusive enough definition of music. Only when he stepped into his study to write about the *mankuntu* dance song of the Gwembe Tonga of Zambia did he have an obligation to reflect on his field's central category.[4]

But the problems of defining these categories can be so great that some scholars feel unable to meet their role-specific professional duties. In some instances, well-grounded worries about the adequacy of disciplinary idiom have led scholars to silence. The 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* which had plenty of room in its twenty hefty volumes, included no entry on *music;* the 2002 edition of *A Handbook to Literature* failed to define *literature;* and the editor of the 1997 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Art* didn't even take a stab at defining *art.*[5]

And even when scholars do reflect on these categories they often find themselves befuddled. Those struggling with their role-specific obligation encounter the disorienting diversity of previous definitions. As the author of the entry on *religion* in the *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion* noted, "Defining religion is often held to be difficult. Introductions to the study of religion routinely include long lists of definitions of religion as proof of this." Definers also confront other difficulties, including the constitutive term's alleged inability to include all instances in all times and places: this clan does not seem to have art; those people write no literature; that culture has no word for music.[6]

Some who confront these difficulties eschew definitions but self-

consciously reflect on the prior attempts and the conceptual problems. For example, a group of musicologists and philosophers of music who took on the task in an ambitiously titled volume, *What Is Music?*, noted that "the question 'what is music?' has no easy answer." The book's editor suggested, "'music' seems . . . to be a culturally unstable term, likely to remain a contested concept within our own civilization where the term covers a wide range of practices." In the same spirit, the latest edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* does include an entry on music (my friends in musicology tell me it's because of the "uproar" generated by its omission from the previous edition), but that standard reference work avoids defining it: "Imposing a single definition flies in the face of the broadly relativistic intercultural and historically conscious nature of this dictionary." The account ends by restating the definitional problem: "It ought to be possible to define music in an interculturally valid way, but the fact that definers inevitably speak with the language and from the cultural viewpoint of their own societies is a major obstacle. Only a few societies have a word whose meaning corresponds roughly to the English 'music'; and it is questionable whether the concept of music in the breadth it enjoys in Western cultures is present in the cognitive maps of all cultures." And other constitutive terms do not seem to be found on all cognitive maps either. After noting the difficulties in discerning whether all cultures have a term or concept for art, the entry in the *Dictionary of Art* makes a similar point: "the question of whether art is or is not . . . an integral part of human society remains undecided."[7]

While discussing attempts to define *geography*, David N. Livingstone explains why faces flush during vigorous disciplinary debates about (apparently) small differences in usage and meaning: "To have command of definition is to have control of discourse. For this reason it is not surprising that *exegetical fussiness* over the precise meaning of terms is characteristic of those apologetic works that aim to fix disciplinary identity." Scholars cannot—and should not—avoid reflecting on the terms that fix disciplinary identity, and it is the academics who use them that get to define them. As religion scholar Jonathan Z. Smith noted, "'Religion' is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon." So even if all interpreters do not have a duty to construct theories and propose definitions—for then what would anyone have to theorize?—our professional obligations nudge us to enter the debate about the meaning and usefulness of constitutive terms. Those of us who claim a lineage in the academic conversation about *religion* should be clear about how we use the term. In that sense, we are called to the task of defining—and to contesting definitions. We are called to offer self-conscious sightings from where we stand, reflexive surveys of the disciplinary horizon. We're called to "exegetical fussiness."[8]

TYPES OF DEFINITIONS: LEXICAL, EMPIRICAL, AND STIPULATIVE

As we get "fussy" about the meaning of terms, we might find that we're appealing to either cartographic or visual analogies: definition is "the setting of bounds or limits" or rendering "an object or image distinct to the eye." And however scholars have defined definition—and some linguists and philosophers have spent a good deal of energy doing precisely that—most note definitions' variety. Among scholars of religion, Robert Baird has presented a helpful typology of definitions. He distinguishes lexical, real, and functional (or stipulative) definitions. For Baird, a *lexical* definition mirrors ordinary usage. It explains "the actual way in which some actual word has been used by some actual person." We might think of this as the dictionary definition. An example might include the long entry from the *Oxford English Dictionary* that documents seven primary uses of *religion* and includes, with each, a chronologically arranged list of quotations from texts that use it that

way. So, for example, the fifth definition is: "Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship; the general mental and moral attitude resulting from this belief, with reference to its effect upon the individual or the community; personal or general acceptance of this feeling as a standard of spiritual and practical life." Below that definition are ten quotations and citations from texts published between 1535 and 1877, including passages from works by Thomas Hobbes (1651) and Adam Smith (1776).[9]

A *real* definition, which might be labeled an empirical or inductive definition, "is a true statement about things that are." Such definitions offer propositions about the nature of things, and they can be true or false. Truth in this approach often, though not always, means correspondence with objects that are independent of the mind. An example might be found in Rodney Stark and Roger Finke's *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Although the authors suggest that their sociological theory of religion is not a "*fully* deductive theoretical system," they offer ninety-nine "propositions" and thirty-six "definitions" throughout the book, from assertions that excavate the "micro foundations" of religion to those that help explain how religious institutions transform from sect to church. Consider, for example, proposition six: "In pursuit of rewards, humans will seek to utilize and manipulate the supernatural." Or definition five: "Religion consists of very general explanations of existence, including terms of exchange with a god or gods." In these and other propositions and definitions, Stark and Finke offer proposals about what religion is and how it functions. They offer an empirical definition.[10]

Finally, scholars can propose *stipulative* definitions, which somewhat arbitrarily stipulate "that a certain word means a certain thing." Stipulative definitions cannot be true or false; they can be only more or less useful. The psychologist and philosopher William James decided on this approach near the start of his influential Gifford Lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience:*

The field of religion being as wide as this, it is manifestly impossible that I should pretend to cover it. My lectures must be limited to a fraction of the subject. And, although it would indeed be foolish to set up an abstract definition of religion's essence, and then proceed to defend that definition against all comers, yet this need not prevent me from taking my own narrow view of what religion shall consist in *for the purposes of these lectures,* or out of the many meanings of the word, from choosing the one meaning in which I wish to interest you particularly, and proclaiming arbitrarily that when I say "religion" I mean *that.*[11]

In this self-consciously stipulative approach, James says that he offers the definition "for the purposes of these lectures," and italicizes the phrase for emphasis. He acknowledges, without remorse or apology, that his is an "arbitrary" account designed for a particular purpose. And he reminds readers of this a few pages later when he offers his famous definition of religion: ". . .the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." However, scholars usually omit—or at least de-emphasize—the introductory phrase of that sentence: "Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it shall mean for us . . ." Note the function of several words here: *I, now, arbitrarily, you, us.* James tried to make clear, then, that a particular scholar was stipulating an arbitrary definition for particular purposes and a particular audience.[12]

One way to clarify the differences between stipulative and empirical approaches to defining constitutive terms is to consider a recent contribution to the ongoing debate over the term *culture* in the field of anthropology. In an imaginative article in *American Anthropologist* four scholars coauthored a piece juxtaposing four positions that, taken together, created a published "conversation about culture." Most important, they reframe the issue of definition in a very helpful way by shifting the question from "what *form* of the concept one might apply" to "*when* to apply the concept." They ask, "Does one lean more toward in-

duction or deduction in applying the cultural concept?" Two of the authors suggest that we introduce the constitutive term only at the end of a study (an empirical or deductive definition); the other two favor proposing a definition at the start of the work (a stipulative or inductive definition). Nomi Maya Stolzenberg, who defends the stipulative approach, acknowledges the "lack of precision" in the term *culture*: "No one could seriously deny that 'culture' is an exceedingly vague and ambiguous term." But, she suggests, "it is precisely because of its lack of precision that culture remains a useful concept, for both anthropologists and those outside the field." Stolzenberg, a legal scholar, suggests that we reimagine *culture* and other constitutive terms and "cease to think of [them] as the name for a thing and come to view [them] instead as a *placeholder* for a set of inquiries—inquiries which may be destined never to be resolved."[13]

CONSIDERING OBJECTIONS TO DEFINITIONS

Whether interpreters have offered lexical, empirical, or stipulative definitions—and empirical definitions have predominated—some religion scholars have challenged any attempt to define the field's constitutive term. Still, as Leuba noted in his 1901 article, there have been many attempts at definition. Eleven years later, in *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function, and Future,* Leuba reprinted a revised version of his essay and listed more than four dozen definitions of religion in an appendix to that volume. Using Leuba's list, and other evidence of the diversity of definitions, some academics have rejected definition altogether on the grounds that scholars have been unable to agree on the meaning and use of the term. This lexical objection, which focuses on linguistic use, is only one of several. A second sort of objection, which focuses on the term's historical origins, suggests that we should abandon the term—and attempts at definition—because *religion* is a Western (and Christian) category that arose (or gained wider usage) in a colonial context. Even if the term has a much longer history, Western

missionaries, traders, soldiers, and civil servants advanced its use in a discourse that still informs the academic study of religion. A third objection, closely related to the second, assesses the category using pragmatic criteria and highlights its moral implications. As one interpreter has suggested, the Western term has "mediated the value-charged and deeply inequitable encounters between 'us' and 'them,' the 'West' and the 'Orient,' the present and the past." A fourth objection to defining religion repeats concerns about defining other constitutive terms, like *music:* critics point to its lack of cross-cultural breadth or universal applicability. They note either that the term *religion* is not found in all languages and cultures, or that the announced features of religion are not found in all cultures. This position assumes that all definitions are empirical, and thereby entail true or false claims that can be assessed by considering whether they correspond with a mind-independent state of affairs. It also assumes that "universality" is a reasonable criterion for definitions. Finally, as with art historians who propose that *visual culture* replace *art* in academic conversations, some religion scholars do not object to the view I have supported here—that disciplines employ constitutive terms and we should define them. Instead, they chronicle the limitations of the category *religion* while advocating an alternative(s). So *politics, ritual, soteriology, faith, tradition,* and *cosmographic formations* are nominated as better interpretive categories. Or, in a related approach, religious studies is reimagined as cultural studies, and scholars suggest that *culture* should be taken as the central analytical term.[14]

To consider the final objection first, even if we were to seek alternate categories, none of the proposed alternatives overcomes the other four objections or dissolves definitional problems. *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions,* the classic 1952 work by anthropologists A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, and many other contributions to the anthropological conversation about that field's constitutive term, shows that *culture* is at least as contested as *religion.* And Timothy Fitzgerald's proposed alternatives—*soteriology, politics,* and *ritual*—are not

much better. In *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Fitzgerald suggests that "religion cannot be reasonably taken to be a valid analytical category since it does not pick out any distinctive cross-cultural aspect of human life." Drawing on several of the standard objections to definition, Fitzgerald argues "for deleting the word 'religion' from the list of analytical categories entirely," and not only because it does not identify a cross-cultural practice and so has no analytical use for those who study, for example, Japan and India, where no term parallels *religion*. The term also deserves to be discarded, Fitzgerald argues, because it is "ideologically charged" since it arose in the context of nineteenth-century European colonization. He proposes that religious studies be reimagined as cultural studies and that we turn to other, less problematic analytical categories.[15]

But those three categories and all constitutive disciplinary terms (including *religion*) have their limits. Consider a few observations about the proposed terms that might at least suggest that they are not self-evidently more adequate, without even highlighting a primary objection—that *religion* has been the primary category used by scholars in this professional conversation since the mid-nineteenth century and cannot be easily replaced. Like the term religion, *soteriology, politics,* and *ritual* also arose in particular social contexts for particular purposes, and they do not seem to have cross-cultural equivalents in all societies. *Politics,* meaning "the science and art of government," comes from a Greek root pertaining to citizens, and it was connected with ancient Greek conversations about citizenship, the state, and (more broadly) the social good. This term is no less idiosyncratic or situated for having had wide influence, and to pencil it in at the top of the religion scholar's lexicon is to evoke certain notions about what religion is and how it functions. The term implies, for example, that to talk about religion is to foreground the collectivity more than the individual and to highlight power more than meaning. Such an approach might be useful. Collectivity and power are important. But it does not mean that this strategy would be free of definitional—or ideological—difficulties.[16]

Ritual, a term of Latin origin that refers to "a prescribed order of performing religious or other devotional service," is a slightly better alternate category, since it seems to make sense of a wider range of practices across cultures and periods. Yet it too arose in a particular cultural context, and, like *politics,* it is not as inclusive as the maligned term *religion.* Anthropologist Roy Rappaport and others who have argued that "ritual is taken to be the ground from which religious conceptions spring" can offer a compelling account of practices. Yet they still confront the difficulties of identifying "religion's most general and universal elements" (for Rappaport, "the Holy") as they also try to find creative ways to illumine traditional religious features that *ritual* ("the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely coded by the performers") seems to obscure—for example, artifacts, narratives, and institutions.[17]

And Fitzgerald's third proposed category, *soteriology,* seems even more problematic. It is a Greek term that has been used primarily in Western Christian theology to describe "Christ's saving work" or the "doctrine of salvation." But the Baktaman of New Guinea don't talk much about *soteriology.* Neither do Theravada Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka (Figure 4). And even if some interpreters might respond by suggesting that theoretical terms need not follow vernacular use or that the Buddhists and the Baktaman do share some notion of salvation or, more broadly, some concept of an ultimate goal, we have only returned to the sort of fundamental definitional problems that drove many to befuddlement—or silence. For now we must ask if *salvation* is inclusive enough to make sense of both the Buddhist monk's striving for *nirvāṇa,* the cessation of suffering and release from rebirth, and the Baktaman's hope that their *finik,* spirit, can be transformed through a nonviolent death into a *sabkār,* deceased spirit, that is transported to the land of the dead. We are not far from where we began as we started to ponder the difficulties of the term *religion.*[18]

And this shouldn't surprise us. No constitutive disciplinary term is elastic enough to perform all the work that scholars demand of it. But
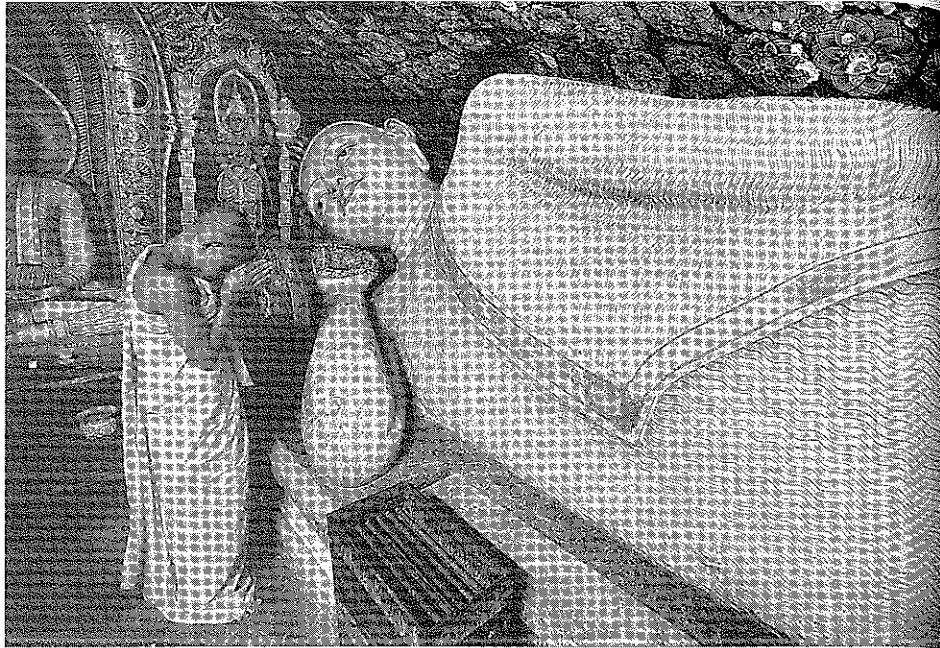
4. A Theravadin Buddhist monk bows in homage to an image of the Buddha, who reclines before his entrance into final nirvana. Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.

that means we should continually refine and revise our understanding of the term for different purposes and contexts, not abandon it. As sociologist Max Weber noted, broad categories—he called them "ideal types"—are theoretical constructs that function as more or less useful interpretive tools. We should not be surprised that they fail to conform to the full range of historical or contemporary cases. And their effectiveness is not challenged when we find some instances that do not seem to "fit"—whether analyzing Shintō in Japan, Hinduism in India, or any other particular cluster of spiritual practices. As the anthropologist Melford E. Spiro has argued, interpretive terms need not be "universal" to be useful: "From what methodological principle does it follow that religion—or, for that matter, anything else—must be universal if it

is to be studied comparatively?" The term *religion* has not failed us when we decide it obscures some features we want to highlight. It has directed our attention to practices that we might otherwise have missed. It has prompted further conversation, more contestation. It has done its work. We know something we did not know. We have been reminded—and we always need reminding—that there are other sites that offer other sightings.[19]

If we should not be surprised—or disappointed—by the "discovery" that constitutive terms, while elastic, still do not stretch to cover all we can see from where we stand, we also should not abandon them because our scholarly idiom arose in particular social contexts. All constitutive disciplinary terms—including *music, art, literature, culture,* and *religion*—are located and contested. All arose, and have been used, in particular social sites for particular purposes.

So to return to the five objections to defining religion, only the last—that another term would be better—seems to be without much merit, although the other four objections are not significant enough to abandon the definitional task. First, as critics have pointed out, *religion* has been defined in a variety of ways. Yet definitional variety indicates the term *can* be defined, not that it cannot, since agreement is not necessary, possible, or useful. "It was once a tactic of students of religion," Jonathan Z. Smith argued in challenging Winston King's dismissive claim, "to cite the appendix of James H. Leuba's *Psychological Study of Religion* (1912), which lists more than fifty definitions of religion, to demonstrate that 'the effort clearly to define religion in short compass is a hopeless task.'" But the task is not hopeless, just demanding. Note that the widely consulted religious studies reference work that acknowledged the diversity of definitions still went on to offer one: religion is "a system of beliefs and practices that are relative to superhuman beings." And the entry's author justified the attempt: "the lists [of definitions] fail to demonstrate that the task of defining religion is so difficult that one might as well give up on the task. What the lists show is that there is little *agreement* on an adequate definition."[20]

The second and third objections to definition also seem right, al-

though they too do not preclude attempts to set out the meaning of the term: even if the term has an earlier origin, *scholarly* discourse about religion did emerge in a colonial context, and it has been employed unjustly to marginalize some groups. Many studies, including those by Talal Asad, David Chidester, Donald Lopez, and Richard King, have shown this. But as Chidester notes, that history is not grounds to abandon the term. "After reviewing the history of colonial productions and reproduction on contested frontiers, we might happily abandon *religion* and *religions* as terms of analysis if we were not, as the result of that very history, stuck with them." If, as even Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Timothy Fitzgerald acknowledge, constitutive terms establish disciplinary horizons, religion scholars need such terms. We are "stuck" with them. The disorienting variety, ambivalent history, and inequitable function of definitions only make scholars' obligations to assess previous accounts and to self-consciously redefine the category more complicated—and more morally urgent. Definitions matter.[21]

DEFINITIONS, TROPES, AND THEORIES

Definitions matter, in part, because they offer hints about theories. The widely read reference book I quoted earlier, the *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion,* notes that "a specific definition of religion usually comes from a particular discipline or theory of religion." I agree that definitions and theories are linked, although I would challenge the misleading causal claim implied in the phrase "comes from," since that phrasing obscures the complex ways that definitions also shape theories. And I would go further. Definitions and theories also intertwine with *tropes.* Definitions, in my view, imply theories and employ tropes. This reciprocal triadic relation involves constant crisscrossing of influences among definition, theory, and trope.[22]

Consider Sigmund Freud's famous definition of religion in *The Future of an Illusion,* which appeared in 1927. Freud had begun his analysis of religion in 1907, with the publication of "Obsessive Actions and Reli-

gious Practices," and he continued it in other writings until he died in 1939 at the age of eighty-three. Although his theories have been vigorously and widely challenged, inside and outside the field of religious studies, his lexicon and interpretations have remained influential. For this reason one prominent interpreter said of the psychoanalyst, "Freud is inescapable." I suppose we could try to avoid him, but that would be unwise here since his *Future of an Illusion* usefully illustrates the reciprocal interactivity among definition, trope, and theory. As with most theoretical works on religion, Freud actually employed several tropes in that volume. For example, in a passage that recalls Karl Marx's famous definition of religion as an "opiate," the Viennese therapist suggested that "the effects of religious consolations may be *likened to that of a narcotic.*" But more central to the book's argument than this simile is a metaphor that compares religion to illness, or individual psychological dysfunction. Religion is "the universal obsessional *neurosis* of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father." As with all definitions to some extent, and especially those for complex cultural practices, Freud reaches for figurative language to establish some contiguity, if not identity, between the *definiendum* (the unknown that is defined) and the *definiens* (the known that is used to define the term). Although I would not agree with much of Freud's explanations of religion's nature and function, I am not criticizing him here for turning to figures. All of religion's scholarly interpreters have done that, and Freud is actually much more self-conscious than many. He ends the paragraph, after going on to suggest that religion, in this approach, becomes "a system of wishful illusions" comparable to amentia (a state of acute hallucinatory confusion), by acknowledging the function and limits of his metaphor: "But these are only *analogies,* by the help of which we endeavour to understand a social phenomenon; the pathology of the individual does not supply us with a fully valid counterpart."[23]

So if Freud self-consciously employed figurative language in his definition of religion, in turn, the definition he fashioned from this primary

trope (children's psychological pathology) evokes the outlines of a theory of religion. Even without recourse to the rest of the book—which I think would support this reading—we can tentatively identify several implicit claims in this brief definition. First, since Freud compares religion to a psychological dysfunction, religion's origin is psychic, rather than social, cultural, political, or economic. Second, since it is a "universal" pathology of "humanity," religion seems to be a transcultural form that crosses chronological and spatial boundaries. Third, religion is "like the neurosis of children," so in this simile religious adherents are analogous to children. Fourth, since Freud juxtaposes religion and children, who are not developmentally advanced, it seems to follow that religion represents a lower stage of cultural development. (Freud confirms this in the next sentence: "If this view is right, it is to be supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of a process of *growth*, and that we find ourselves at this very juncture in the middle of that phase of *development*.") Fifth, since religion arises from "the relation to the father," it must reproduce in some ways that dependent relation (at least as that relation is imagined in a particular model of the family). Sixth, although Freud insists earlier in the book that "to assess the truth-value of religious doctrines does not lie within the scope of the present enquiry," religion seems to be a bad thing. Either, at best, humanity is just going through a stage it will outgrow, or we need to plop humanity on the couch for what promises to be a very long series of therapeutic interventions.[24]

I could go on. I could say more about the outlines of a theory of religion embedded in the tropes found in this one passage, or in many other classic formulations of religion's meaning. You might want to quarrel with this or that in my reading of Freud's definition, but I hope that I have at least established that definition, theory, and trope seem to reciprocally shape each other. I will allude to the relation between definition and theory more below, but so far I have talked about tropes without considering what they are or how they function—or how tropic analysis can be useful in the humanities and the social sciences, especially the study of religion.[25]

As I hinted in my reading of Freud's definition of religion as psychological pathology, tropes are figures of speech that depart from the ordinary form, use, or arrangement of words. They involve figurative, or nonliteral, language. As James W. Fernandez noted in his introduction to *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*, cultural interpreters who have taken figurative language seriously often have highlighted one trope, metaphor. There have been several approaches to the understanding of metaphor. First, some have turned to "the Aristotelian-derived strain of metaphor theory," which "focuses upon the transfer of features of meaning from one domain of understanding to another." A second interpretive tradition is "much influenced by the American critic and philosopher Kenneth Burke . . . [and] concentrates on how experience in culture and position in society are constructed through metaphoric predication." A third approach, which highlights metaphors' effects or uses and challenges the notion that they contain hidden or nonliteral meaning that needs to be decoded, emerges from the philosopher Donald Davidson's 1978 essay "What Metaphors Mean" and has been endorsed and revised by, among others, Richard Rorty and Nancy K. Frankenberry.[26]

As Fernandez and his colleagues suggested, the first two approaches have been most influential, and since the 1980s metaphor theory in the social sciences has focused more on the variety of tropes and their "foundations" in culture. Rhetoricians have identified more than two hundred figures of speech, including simile, symbol, allegory, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, and metonymy. So Paul Friedrich, one of the contributors to Fernandez's volume, was right to emphasize "polytropy" and to urge scholars to recall the full range of figurative language at play in cultural practices. Yet of the five "macrotropes" that Friedrich identifies—image tropes, modal tropes, formal tropes, contiguity tropes, and analogical tropes—it is analogical language, especially metaphor, that can be especially useful in cultural analysis.[27]

The metaphors that cultural analysts interpret can be direct or indirect. Consider examples from the well-known poem by T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." "And I have seen the *eternal Footman*

hold my coat, and snicker," is a direct metaphor that identifies the divine with an attendant or servant. An indirect metaphor, in which the comparison is implied but not stated, appears in an earlier line: "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes." This image implies, but does not declare, that the fog is a cat. Or, to use examples from Freud's definition, neurosis is the direct metaphor. He says religion is "the universal obsessional *neurosis* of humanity." And because the next sentence proposes that it is a "neurosis of *children*," the passage also includes an indirect evolutionary or developmental metaphor, as suggested above, that portrays religion as childish, a lower stage of cultural development.[28]

To demarcate religion's boundaries, interpreters of religion have employed many different kinds of tropes. Some have used symbols: Hegel's "consciousness of *God*"; Müller's "perception of the *Infinite*"; and Otto's "experience of the *Holy*." Metaphor, however, is a widely used trope. Although one philosopher has suggested that "a definition must not be expressed in metaphor or figurative language"—one of his thirteen rules for constructing definitions—this seems to be a principle that no scholar who risks a definition can follow. Many contemporary theorists would acknowledge that most language is figurative in some sense, and metaphor is an important figure.[29]

Using metaphor to define metaphor—and, unrepentant, breaking that rule of definition—I suggest that metaphor is a lens and a vehicle. It directs language users' attention to this and not that, and it transports them from one domain of language, experience, and practice to another. In my terms, it prompts new sightings and crossings. As Davidson proposed, it can be helpful to think about "the effects metaphors have on us" and talk about what metaphors do. What do they do? They redirect our attention. Drawing on analogy for their power, metaphors illumine some features of the terrain and obscure others. To use an example from my study of Cuban American devotion at the shrine of Our Lady of Charity, Bishop Agustín Román, the shrine's director, turned to metaphor to address race relations in Miami, a city that had

been unsettled by ethnic and racial tension for years. Consider my earlier account of the event:

> In 1994 Román arranged for a bus filled with white Cubans from the shrine to visit the Haitian Catholic Center, where they would participate in a mass and procession on the feast of Corpus Christi. During the ride to Little Haiti the shrine director tried to prepare the Cubans for what they soon would experience: the only white faces in a crowd of several hundred, all eyes on them. And he tried to promote tolerance. Noting the differences in skin color, he turned to an analogy from Cuban foodways to persuade. He reminded the white Cubans—no one needed reminding—of their traditional love for black beans and white rice. Extending that analogy to Cuban history and identity, the shrine director suggested that "*Cuba is beans and rice, black and white.*"

The Cuban leader's metaphor redirected the attention of the white devotees to food, a beloved traditional dish. Cuba is a plate on which black beans and white rice have been mixed. The metaphoric utterance associated language, experience, and practice about food with language, experience, and practice concerning race. As some cognitive scientists have proposed, the metaphor made a "class-inclusion assertion." In other words, the analogy established a grouping or relation between two categories—food and race—and, I would add, between two domains of practice. It highlighted the ways that racial comminglings, like culinary combinations, have been part of Cuban history. Or, to return to the passage from Freud again, the direct metaphor of psychological pathology and the indirect metaphor of evolutionary stages prompt readers to highlight dysfunction and immaturity and obscure the ways that religion might arise from or cultivate mental or physical health and might inspire or reflect a mature engagement with the world.[30]

Metaphor can redirect attention because it functions as a mode of transport. It prompts a linguistic crossing that can create associations, stir affect, and prompt action. The shrine director induced nostalgia, even triggered sense memory, as he used the culinary metaphor to pre-

scribe and transform the white Cubans' behavior when they entered the Haitian church—and after they left. He transferred memories, values, and emotions from the realm of food to the realm of social relations as he talked about black beans. So in this metaphor and in others, more than a single term (*beans, neurosis,* or *children*) is transferred from one use to another, transported from one cultural domain to another. Metaphors propel language—and language users—between frames of reference, to borrow a phrase from physics. Or in Nelson Goodman's terms, there is a "migration of concepts." But metaphor is a reciprocal interactive process. It is not a matter of transferring one static and bounded "scheme" to another. As some interpreters of metaphor have noted, it is the reciprocal and relational *dynamics* of metaphor that characterizes this trope. Victor Turner, for example, suggested that "the two thoughts are active together, they 'engender' thought in their *coactivity.*" So when Freud appealed to the metaphor of children and, indirectly, to the evolutionary model that posits progressive linear "stages" of nature and culture, he put that organic image in dynamic reciprocal relation with the scholarly discourse about religion. In the same way, in that brief passage in Freud's *Future of an Illusion,* a confluence of concepts from depth psychology (obsession, neurosis, Oedipal complex) "migrated" back and forth between a discourse about religious life and a discourse about psychic life.[31]

Analogical language, and this sort of figurative process, is inscribed in many other scholarly definitions of religion. Freud was not the only interpreter of religion to employ tropes. "Key metaphors" (Ortner), "root metaphors" (Turner), "organizing metaphors" (Fernandez), or what I call *orienting metaphors* appear in many other definitions.[32]

ORIENTING METAPHORS: TROPES IN DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

At least a dozen orienting metaphors have had some influence in the history of scholarly definitions of religion. Most definitions employ more than one of these, so there is no pure type, only hybrid forms that approximate the categories in this taxonomy. And some orienting metaphors have had much more influence than others. Religion has been analogized as: capacity, organism, system, worldview, illness, narcotic, picture, form of life, society, institution, projection, and space.

The first approach—to define religion by identifying it with one or more *psychic capacities*—has been especially popular. In fact, this has been the favorite method of classifying religion's definitions. In some premodern philosophical approaches, interpreters talked about psychological *faculties,* and some (even into the late nineteenth century) posited a distinctive *religious* faculty. Even if the idiom has changed over time, many interpreters have defined religion by emphasizing one or another psychic capacity: believing, feeling, or willing. In other words, there are—as Friedrich Schleiermacher, James Leuba, and many others have proposed—intellectualist, affective, and volitional definitions. For example, religion is *belief* for many scholars, as in the anthropologist E. B. Tylor's famous definition: "the belief in spiritual beings." But the object of belief varies to some extent: religion has been imagined as belief in an ever-living God (Martineau), the superhuman (Tiele), God and spiritual beings (Crawford), humanlike beings (Guthrie), or a world of counterintuitive supernatural agents (Atran). In a related intellectualist approach, not only Guthrie and Atran but several other scholars have applied the findings of cognitive science and have taken *cognition,* and computer processing, as the central metaphor. Volitional definitions, which have exerted less influence, emphasize either moral action (Kant) or ritual action (Rappaport). In a similar way, although sociologist Christian Smith acknowledges the significance of "beliefs, symbols, and practices," the core of his definition emphasizes the ways in which religions are "superempirically referenced wellsprings of moral order." Affective definitions associate religion with a feeling: for example, absolute dependence (Schleiermacher), *mysterium tremendum* (Otto), or hopes and fears (Hume).[33]

Another capacity metaphor is closely aligned with affective definitions: religion is about *experiencing.* Part of the confusion derives from

the multiple terms that Schleiermacher employed: he did use feeling *(gefühl)* to mark off religion's distinctive terrain, but also used related terms as well, including intuition *(anschauung)* and experience *(emfindung)*. And the latter has been a central analogy for many definitions. Religion is noncognitive; it does not, as in the Tylorian tradition, make claims about the nature of things. In this view, religion is an experience of the Holy (Otto), the sacred (Eliade), the Infinite (Müller), or invisible things (Jevons).[34]

Some definitions frame religion as desiring or, better, as a *concern.* The philosopher David Hume claimed religion was "an anxious concern for happiness," but in a more influential formulation theologian Paul Tillich suggested that religion was one's "ultimate concern." Other scholars before him anticipated Tillich's approach: religion is a "bearing toward what seems to him the Best, or Greatest" (Stratton) or "the objects, habits, and convictions he would die for" (Bosanquet). And many who have followed Tillich have found "ultimate concern" a compelling analogy, including Robert Baird and John Wilson. As Jonathan Z. Smith notes, Tillich's definition is one of two—the other is Spiro's, which I introduced earlier and will return to later—that "command widespread scholarly assent."[35]

Many influential accounts define religion by pointing to *several* psychic capacities: religion as belief and feeling (Jastrow) or as emotions, conceptions, and sentiments (Tiele). Some definitions that combine intellectualist, affective, and volitional approaches imagine religion not only as *believing* or *feeling* but also as *doing*—by trading on the notion of religion as *will.* Consider James's definition of religion as "feelings, *acts,* and experiences" or Durkheim's account of religion as "beliefs and *practices.*"[36]

Other definitions appeal to other orienting metaphors, even if they also might simultaneously appeal to one or another capacity metaphor. Some have appealed to organic tropes, even imaging religion as an *organism.* In a direct metaphor, entomologist E. O. Wilson has talked about "religion as superorganism." In somewhat less direct ways, like

Freud, many scholars since the late nineteenth century have implied an analogy to the development of the individual or the evolution of the natural world (or both). To mention only two famous examples, Tylor spoke of "the natural evolution of religious ideas" and Müller claimed to trace "the origin and growth of religion." Several definitions turn to a term from the natural sciences, *system,* to understand religion. This analogy highlights that religion includes parts that form a whole. It is often interpreted more statically than the meaning of the term in physics, which understands systems as groups of bodies moving in space according to some dynamic law. Applied to the task of definition, religion becomes "a system of willful illusions" (Freud), "a unified system of beliefs and practices" (Durkheim), "a cultural system of symbols" (Geertz), or "a complete system of human communication" (Larson).[37]

And there are other orienting metaphors that have had varying influence. In one formulation that has been affirmed (or assumed) by many scholars in recent decades, religion is *worldview* (Berger and Smart) or *form of life* (Wittgenstein and Larson). Emphasizing the ways that religious language differs from other language, some interpreters have emphasized that religions use *pictures* (Wittgenstein) or, as in Hegel's view, that religions appeal to *vorstellung* or pictorial thought. Emphasizing religion's negative individual or social effects, some have compared religion to an *illness* (Freud) or a *narcotic* (Marx). Some theorists who have been hostile to religion also have, as Van A. Harvey persuasively argued, imagined religion as *projection.* Using the indirect metaphor of a projected beam, Harvey suggests, a number of theorists from Hume and Feuerbach to Horton and Guthrie have turned to this trope. Many beam projection theorists focus on the individual, but other definers of religion have emphasized religion's social or cultural origins and functions. Religion is *society,* in one way or another, for a range of social scientific accounts that began at least as early as Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* where the French sociologist claimed that religion was "an eminently *collective* thing." Others who have followed in that broad and varied interpretive tradition have defined religion as one

or another cultural form, as with anthropologist Melford E. Spiro's influential definition of religion as "an *institution* consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings." Finally, just as those who have embraced organic images about "evolution" or "growth" have (wittingly or unwittingly) highlighted change over *time*, there is another tradition of definition that directly or indirectly draws on *spatial* metaphors. Spatial figures are implied in some psychological accounts that focus on the individual and posit "*levels* of consciousness" (for instance, Freud, James, and Jung). Some interpreters (Long and Kaufman) have appealed to indirect spatial images as they talk about religion as "orientation." Spatial metaphors are more explicit, and even more influential, in a tradition of interpretation that goes back to Durkheim and circulated widely in Gerardus Van der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* and Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane.* This approach begins with a distinction between sacred and profane space—or, in Durkheim's phrase, "things set apart."[38]

If these varied tropes intertwine with definitions, the orienting metaphors that authors select also inscribe theoretical commitments, as I tried to show in my analysis of Freud's definition. Metaphors, as I indicated with my analogy of the lens, illumine some things and obscure others. Definitions that highlight a single human capacity (for example, Tylor's religion as *belief*) tend to obscure other components of religion and other aspects of embodied human life. Definitions that foreground the individual—Whitehead's "religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness"—obscure the social, just as collectivist metaphors—Spiro's religion as *institution*—illumine religion's social character but deemphasize its function for individuals. And metaphors have implications. Consider one of the most obvious examples. As other scholars have noted, organic metaphors about the "origin and growth" of religion have been associated with evolutionary models that propose a taxonomy of religions that privileges one tradition and dismisses others as lower "stages" on the cultural ladder. Those taxono-

mies—primitive and civilized, ethnic and universal, and lower and higher religions—have had negative, sometimes disastrous, moral and social implications. It is much easier to colonize and displace peoples who are aligned with children and imagined as "lower." For this and other reasons, as Turner suggested, "one must pick one's root metaphor carefully."[39]

Scholars, I have argued, have role-specific obligations not only to consider root metaphors—and their implications—but also to enter the debates about how to define the field's constitutive term. We are stuck with the category *religion,* since it fixes the disciplinary horizon, and our use of it can be either more or less lucid, more or less self-conscious. So we are obliged to be as clear as possible about the kind of definition we are offering and the orienting tropes that inform it. Whether we imagine theory as our primary professional work or not, we are called to exegetical fussiness. All of us.