enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.... These stories... are to the natives a statement of primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.2

Since Malinowski is a well-known social anthropologist, often cited as the father of functionalism, which of the two statements by Eliade is true? Which statements are we to take seriously? Has Malinowski grasped the essence of The Sacred in this quotation, or is he describing the psychology of myth among primitives and explaining religion as a function of biological and social needs? If it is the latter, and I do not doubt that it is, then according to Eliade's first assertion, Malinowski's position is false. Yet, we are to take this false statement about myth as the best description of myth that Eliade can find. This kind of confusion, which is widespread, makes it difficult to evaluate just what is being asserted about the proper study of religion.

Malinowski's statement concerning myth simply does not make sense without knowledge of the theory it entails. It is embedded in a theory regarding social institutions and is consistent with his own functionalist position regarding religion. Thus, if we want to avoid confusion, it must be made clear whether we accept his theory or not. If we reject Malinowski's theory of religion and myth as "reductionistic," then it would seem that we would also want to reject his descriptions of the function of myth and religion. Given the decades of methodological confusion, I am not optimistic at all that pointing this out will change anything. Perhaps the best we can hope for is greater recognition that The Sacred and its theological ramifications cannot be disguised, at least not so easily, with the language of functionalism.

Functional explanations of religion have maintained a powerful hold on most of the human sciences. Over the decades, scholars who committed themselves to functional theories of religion have done so because the theory is empirically testable. Moreover, it is also claimed

that the theory is able to explain many of the problems older theories could not explain, as well as do more than older theories in terms of explaining social institutions. All these claims and aims are to be applauded as noteworthy examples of the development of a science.

The effects of this new theory were revolutionary. Instead of explaining a society by religious traits or units, functional theory reversed the procedure by explaining religion as a variable from within the structure or system of a particular society. The famous slogan became "religion is what it does." The task became one of showing why and how religion functions in a society. Anyone familiar with the development of the theory also knows that its complexity increased in proportion to the problems and criticisms it confronted.

The power of the theory bound together a variety of scholars in the human sciences, even though they disagreed on fundamental issues concerning religion. Three examples suffice to illustrate the point. The first is the lifelong feud between A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski concerning ritual and anxiety. For Malinowski, the methodological biologist, anxiety arises in circumstances which human beings cannot control, for example, fishing in the ocean. Although rituals are not technological means which actually control the threat of death on the ocean, they do function to reduce anxiety. For Radcliffe-Brown, the methodological sociologist, it is a society's expectations that produce anxiety, and the performance of rituals is an individual's response to those expectations and the anxiety they generate. Notice that although there is disagreement on what generates anxiety, both use functionalism as an explanation for the existence of rituals. The conflict was finally resolved by Homans in 1941. Homans solved the problem by showing that both are right, that it is not a question of either/or.3

The second example is the famous debate between Melford Spiro and Edmund Leach on the belief in virgin birth. Spiro argued that beliefs in the existence of water spirits, and the like, as the cause of pregnancy were to be taken as rational, although false, explanations for pregnancy. Leach argued that there is sufficient evidence to show that most, if not all, societies are well versed in the causes of physiological paternity. Such beliefs, therefore, were not to be taken as mistaken explanations, but as symbolic expressions that reinforce existing social institutions, the marriage bonds for example. The publications of both scholars, however, are excellent examples of functionalism at work in contemporary anthropology.4    My final example is the well-known debate between J. Beattie and R. Horton on the proper understanding of