"Of *And* and *Of* : The Politics of Grammar and the Study of Religion"

Thomas B. Ellis

Abstract

Grammatical constructions in course titles and research agendas reflect particular theoretical orientations in the study of religion. Privileging one construction over the others amounts to a politics of grammar. Two constructions are examined here—the conjunction and the genitive: "Religion *and…*" and "…*of* Religion." Whereas non-reductive methods such as theology/phenomenology and cultural anthropology endorse the conjunction, reductive methodologies such as biological anthropology invoke the genitive. With the evidence amassing in favor of natural, human universals (*pace* cultural anthropology) and against supernatural realities (*pace* theology/phenomenology), the essay argues that only the genitive construction has a place in the study of religion.

I'd like to begin with an anecdote. The academic year was 2001-2002 and I was laboring through my final two semesters as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Having had the opportunity to teach several courses over the many years spent in graduate school, I had by the fall semester 2001 a handful of different preparations, including such courses as "Introduction to Hinduism" and "Religion and Psychology." Sometime during that fall semester, I recognized that I had been—and continued to be—guilty of a certain inconsistency in the way I was conceptualizing, preparing, and executing these courses. For instance, my "Introduction to Hinduism," although listed as an upper-division offering in the Department, did little more than introduce students to a descriptive catalogue of Hindu religious and philosophical traditions: lectures were mostly nuanced paraphrases of the Hindu practitioner's point of view, the data writ large as it were (Smith 2004: 372). "Religion and Psychology," on the other hand, introduced students to the various sub-disciplines in the psychological study of religion, such as Freudian drive theory, object relations theory, attachment theory, and cognitive and evolutionary psychology. While such a course was—and is—a useful exercise at least at an intermediate level, on the whole the course seemed to deal with some abstract, ahistorical thing called "religion." The inconsistency was glaring. I either engaged in a thoroughly descriptive exercise of a particular tradition with no mention of method and

theory—though I believe there was an unrecognized phenomenology afoot—
or I engaged in a theoretical exercise that never found any practical application
to living religions.

Recognizing the inconsistency, I pitched a new course for my final semester
at Penn, a course that would introduce students first to a specific theory and
method followed by a direct application to a living, historical tradition. I proposed,
"Psychology of Hinduism." After researching several sophisticated, not
to mention thoroughly provocative, works dealing with the psychological elements
of Hindu belief and behavior, I drew up the syllabus.[1] The proposal
went before the faculty. For the most part, they approved the course, with but
one minor—or, perhaps, not-so-minor—recommendation for revision. I was
to rename the course. Instead of the "Psychology *of* Hinduism," it would be
"Hinduism *and* Psychology." I capitulated.

Over the past few years, I have wondered why I was encouraged to change
the name of the course. What was the difference? Why was a conjunction
preferable to a genitive? I now suspect that privileging the conjunction, or the
"and," was and is tantamount to censoring the genitive, that is, the "of." Such
censorship deserves some consideration.[2] Simply stated, I believe that opting
for either the conjunction or the genitive in conceptualizing, naming, and
executing our courses—not to mention research agendas—reflects specific
theoretical orientations in the study of religion such that opting for one over
the other—or, in this case, "insisting" on one over the other—is anything but
an innocuous grammatical preference.

I believe the conjunction announces two different yet relatable agendas.
Depending on the context, the conjunction implies either a theological or an
ethnographical approach to the study of religion, mistakenly assuming in both
instances the presence of *sui generis* phenomena. To be sure, the conjunction
suggests either that religious beliefs, behaviors and experiences reflect commerce
with a non-natural other—an irreducibly universal sacred—or that such
beliefs, behaviors and experiences are so culturally determined that any suggestion
of cross-cultural comparability appears erroneous at best and imperialistic
at worst. In both instances, we find what I refer to as an "excess." The excess,
whether theological or ethnographic, ultimately refuses reduction to *natural,
human universals* (Brown 1991; Sweek 2002). I suspect that these two excesses
have often been conflated in the recent call for a dialogical approach to the
study of religion.

Opposing excess, the genitive suggests that religion and culture are effects

---

[1] A few of the titles I used and continue to use for this course include Masson (1980), Kakar
(1981), Kurtz (1992), and Vaidyanathan and Kripal (1999).
[2] To be fair, I must allow for the possibility that some other concerns were being played out.
That being said, I have a hard time imagining what these could be and so I will proceed to outline
the case that this was in fact a censorship of the genitive and that we are in fact dealing with the
politics of grammar.

of and thus reducible to other naturally occurring processes and dynamics. Mistakenly associated with a certain intellectual naïveté (Eck 2001: 141), the genitive is, I argue, the grammar of the "one proper way to study religion . . . the modern, not the postmodern, way" (Segal 2006: 157). Accordingly, and due to the religious practitioner's penchant for indulging "non-naturalistic explanations" (Linden 2007: 230), the modern study of religion is an exercise in talking *about*—and precisely *not* talking *with*—the religious other (White 2001: 49; Segal 2006).

There are five parts to the discussion that follows. I begin by addressing the theoretical implications of the *conjunction* and the *genitive* in the study of religion. I argue that the conjunction ultimately operates as a locative preposition. When conjoining religion with a generally conceived topic from the humanities—such as "Religion and Literature"—the conjunction announces a descriptive exercise wherein religious motifs will be identified *in* the conjoined subject—i.e., there are religious motifs *in* literature. Alternatively, when conjoining religion with a generally conceived discipline from the natural or social sciences—such as "Religion and Psychology"—the conjunction announces that certain topics from the conjoined subject will be found in religion—i.e., there are psychological elements in religion. I propose that in this latter case, the conjunction operates as a *grammar of excess*. Though it may admit of certain psychological elements, religion allegedly escapes the disciplinary encompassment that the genitive announces (Lincoln 1996). Opposing the conjunction as a grammar of excess, the genitive is a *grammar of constraint*.

Following this consideration of the theoretical implications of conjunctions and genitives, I argue that two debates currently influence the choice between the grammars of excess and constraint. The first debate relates to the issue concerning the natural as opposed to non-natural universal. With the non-natural universal—that is, the sacred—I associate theology and phenomenology.[3] Because the genitive methodologically denies such non-natural universals, theology and phenomenology sanction the conjunction. The second debate concerns whether "religion" is a universal category that picks out a distinctive cross-cultural and trans-historical phenomenon or merely misidentifies and isolates that which is irreducibly cultural. With the latter position, I associate postmodern anthropology (Segal 2001: 344). Postmodern anthropology's fascination with the particular effectively transforms Departments of Religion into what I call "Confederacies of Area Studies Specialists." It is this transformation that facilitates, in part, the appeal to dialogical approaches to the study of religion. My suspicion is that dialogical studies actually reflect a curious

---

[3] Though I associate the sacred with the non-natural, I recognize that others see in nature a sacred quality (Goodenough 1998). The "natural sacred" notwithstanding, I believe that, on the whole, when religious persons speak of the sacred they have something non-natural in mind; in fact, some have even argued that even when nature is seen to be sacred it is in fact invested with non-natural elements (Goldenberg et al., 2000).

combination of both theological interests in a non-natural sacred and interests in the possibility that other cultures may enhance one's own culturally delimited appreciation of this sacred. Similar to its denial of non-natural universals, the genitive denies the irreducibly idiosyncratic elements of culture.

The genitive is the grammar of modern science, both social and natural. It announces a pursuit of natural universals and in this way constrains aspirations to non-natural realities and cultural irreducibilities. I conclude with the suggestion that the only viable position in the contemporary study of religion is what I call *strong* agnosticism, a position consonant with comparative religion and the pursuit of natural universals. Strong agnosticism sanctions the genitive.

I. The Politics of Grammar

When designing courses and research agendas using the conjunction, we more often than not place "Religion" (or some specific religious tradition like "Hinduism") in the first position and conjoin it to some other term. This other term falls into two general types. The first type reflects topics issuing from the humanities generally conceived, such as "film," "literature," and "art." This is a problem. As "film," "literature," and "art" are themselves objects of theoretical investigation, conjoining religion with any one of them merely juxtaposes two objects that are equally in need of theoretical interrogation. In such cases, the conjunction operates as a locative preposition, locating elements of the first term in the second.

> Insomuch as the religion and . . . rubric juxtaposes coherent, autonomous religious systems over against other equally coherent, identifiable phenomena as culture, ethics, literature, or politics, it perpetuates a rather naïve, and simply outdated, view that religions are socially autonomous, acontextual systems that make manifest an essential impulse or drive of deeply numinous value. In other words, from the outset this rubric presupposes that religion can hardly be *explained* as a result of social, political, or psychological processes and instead can only be *understood* to *manifest* in culture, in politics, in literature, and so on, essentially religious or transcendent values and feelings (McCutcheon 2001: 180) .

The conjunction, when used as a locative preposition, contests the comparative method. Contrary to William James's (1961: 37-38) sense that religious happiness, for example, is just a difference in degree from "ordinary" happiness, the conjunction suggests that religious values and feelings reflect transcendent and thus irreducible or incomparable religious sentiments. Such a position presupposes what is in need of demonstration. The function of this strategy is to place the irreducibly religious nature of these beliefs, behaviors and experiences beyond doubt. What is anything but beyond doubt, however, is that the ultimate nature of this belief, behavior and experience is not in fact psychological, sociological, anthropological, etc. (Segal 1983; 1992). Before any assumptions are made concerning irreducibility, alternative possibilities must be shown to be irrefutably inadequate (Stenger 1995: 273). Such inadequacies

have yet to be demonstrated.

While the conjunction operates as a "forward-acting" locative preposition when "religion" is conjoined with one of the topics issuing from the humanities, it also operates as a "backward-acting" locative preposition when the second term issues from the sciences (generally conceived). By "backward-acting," I mean that the conjunction suggests that elements of the *second* term are now found manifested in the first. To be sure, while "Religion and Film" suggests that religious motifs are found *in* film, "Religion and Psychology" suggests that psychological motifs are found *in* religion. This, too, is problematic. Psychology, like anthropology, sociology, biology, etc., is an explicitly theoretical and methodological enterprise that takes up a position within the matrix of modern science. Natural and social scientific disciplines typically represent these critical positions in opposition to such humanly constructed objects as film, literature, art and religion which stand in need of explanation. While one might make a similar claim regarding psychology, anthropology, sociology, and biology—namely, that these endeavors are all-too-human human productions—what is distinctive about the sciences is their openly reflexive and critical attention to the mechanisms whereby we generate film, literature, art, and religion. These disciplines are thus points of theoretical departure for the investigation and explanation of human self-expression. When placed in a conjunctive construction with religion, the theoretical agenda of these sciences is compromised. This compromise issues from the excess the conjunction implicitly announces.

The conjunction as a "backward-acting" locative preposition amounts to a *grammar of excess*. When conjoining "religion" or *a* religion with a social or natural scientific discipline (e.g., "Hinduism and Psychology"), the conjunction implies that, while we may find psychological motifs in Hinduism, there is good reason to believe that there may be something *more* to Hinduism. This in itself is not a problem. Even when pitching a course entitled "Psychology of Hinduism," my intentions were never to encompass *tout court* the complexity of Hindu religions and philosophies within the realm of the study of psychology. I share the concerns of those who see Hinduism and/or religion as having elements that are not, strictly speaking, psychological. The study of Hinduism is an opportunity to apply psychological, sociological, anthropological, and biological methods and theories. With such notions of *natural* excess, I have no problem. In this sense, religious studies is rightly interdisciplinary. There is, however, a second type of excess that worries me because it is this second excess that censors the genitive conjunction: "The . . . 'of ' . . . announces a proprietary claim and a relation of encompassment"(Lincoln 1996: 225). The genitive is a *grammar of constraint* and, I shall suggest below, such constraints offend the theologian and the phenomenologist.

II. Theology and Phenomenology
The relation of phenomenology to theology continues to generate debate. For some (Segal 1983 and 1992; Wiebe 1999; Fitzgerald 2000), theology and

phenomenology endorse an "ontologically queer substance" (Flanagan 2007: 86)—that is, the "sacred," the "power," the "mystery," or the "Focus" (Cox 2006). For others (Rennie 1996), phenomenology merely documents an autonomous structure of human consciousness intending such queer substances. Phenomenology's peculiar relationship to theology is seldom clarified by the rather equivocating rhetoric of the phenomenologists. I have no intention of, nor interest in adjudicating this debate here—although my sympathies rest with Segal, Fitzgerald and Wiebe on this score. Rather, my concern is simply to point out that both theology and phenomenology tend to endorse an empirically unsubstantiated excess and in so doing underwrite appeals to the conjunction and its intention to exceed disciplinary encompassment. Far more often than not, the conjunction amounts to a grammar of *non-natural* excess.

Philosophical naturalism clearly opposes non-natural excess (De Caro and Macarthur 2004; Flanagan 2006). Of course, imputing non-naturalism to any particular position—as I intend to do here—deserves some caution. Th is is the case particularly when dealing with theology and phenomenology, two positions that critics often charge with obfuscating prevarication (Wilson 1998: 263). All the same, the issue concerning the legitimacy of non-naturalism is, I believe, the *sine qua non* of a religious position that countenances social intercourse with nonhuman and/or disembodied agency (Guthrie 1993; Stark and Finke 2000; Boyer 2001; Atran 2002; Kirkpatrick 2005). It is here that distinctions may be drawn between religious naturalism (Goodenough 1998) and religious non-naturalism.

The religious naturalist finds herself in awe of the overwhelming complexity and beauty of the cosmos in which she lives. Her appreciation of such complexity notwithstanding, the religious naturalist never attributes conscious will and agency to the cosmos as such. From a naturalistic perspective, conscious agency emerges only from higher orders of organized material such as we find in the human animal (Dennett 1991; McGinn 1991; Flanagan 1992; Koch 2004). For the religious non-naturalist, a divine "something" exists, exceeding the natural world and enjoying consciousness and will. The prominent theologian John Haught confesses: "By using the term 'theological' …I mean to Indicate… that my reflections arise out of my belonging to a theistic religious Tradition…that professes belief in a personal God…of infinite power and love…the divine mystery…approached only by way of faith, trust, and hope" (2008: xii). Even though Haught makes reference to a "personal God," we need not think that naturalism's principled reluctance to endorse such a position does not include a similar reluctance to endorse theologies pertaining to an "impersonal" absolute (e.g., Advaita Vedanta Hinduism). For the non-natural personalism and impersonalism, consciousness is not limited to highly organized, biophysical material. For mainline naturalism, however, it clearly is.

Because this "mystery" both precedes and exceeds human construction and/ or representation, the theologian suggests that the human must allow him- or

herself to be gripped by this other power. In his tellingly titled book *Is Nature Enough?* (to which he answers with a definitive "no"), Haught writes: "Religions are convinced that there is more, indeed infinitely more …The infinitely 'more' cannot be known in the same way that ordinary objects are known… It is a state of being grasped rather than grasping …They profess to having been carried away, as it were, by something 'more' than nature" (2006: 21). Elsewhere he notes: "This mysterious presence…enlivens nature without being reducible to nature" (2006: 22). There is simply no need to hedge on this issue. For theologians, as it is for religious practitioners more generally, there is an ontologically viable, non-natural *more*.

I believe this non-natural, ontologically queer "more" is often insinuated in the conjunctive rubric "Religion and . . ." when the second term hails from the sciences generally conceived. Haught would, no doubt, find my notion that the genitive is a "grammar of constraint" quite appropriate. It is clearly naturalism's constraint that causes him trouble: "Religion . . . looks for pathways *beyond* the *boundaries* that nature places on life . . . [R]eligious people look upon the claim that 'nature is enough' as itself an *arbitrary confinement* that *they must get beyond*" (2006: 22-23, emphases mine). I will return to Haught's notion that naturalism is an *arbitrary* confinement in a moment. For now, I can be a bit more precise about naturalism's offense: "to those who *hope* for final transcendence of death and suffering, naturalism is the most dreary and suffocating of dogmas" (Haught 2006: 23, emphasis mine). Th is is the rub. The grammatical-*cum*-ontological constraints of the genitive provoke a sort of existential crisis, a philosophical threat that underwrites the censorship of the genitive in the study of religion.

The conceptual need and hope for the "more" found in Haught's theology similarly informs Mircea Eliade's phenomenology. While many theologians make claims—either directly or indirectly—for the *sui generis* nature of the non-natural mystery that grasps the religious consciousness and ostensibly exceeds disciplinary reduction, there is a similar argument for the *sui generis* in the classically articulated phenomenology of religion. Clearly, Eliade saw in religion something that could not be accounted for in any non-religious (i.e., "natural") way. In a now-classic statement, Eliade observes:

> A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level . . . if it is studied *as* something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it—the element of the sacred (1958: xiii).

What Eliade means by "the sacred" is less than obvious. Whether Eliade's "sacred" reflects a "transcendental ontology" (Fitzgerald 2000: 41) or merely "*the intentional object of human experience which is apprehended as real*" (Rennie 1996: 21, emphasis in the original), the motivation appears to be the same.

Theology and phenomenology reflect the human animal's existential interests in the more, the excess. While Haught suggests that the religious consciousness searches for the "*fullness* of being" (2006: 41), Eliade notes that "Religious man thirsts for *being*" (1959: 64).

While Haught's endorsement of non-natural realities is peculiar, Eliade's is simply confused. The "ontological thirst" motivating the intention has everything to do with a particular portrait of human psychology. Indeed, the existential condition and its impact on human behavior is the centerpiece of a highly successful, social psychological research program known as terror management theory, or TMT (Greenberg et al. 1986; Solomon et al. 1991; Greenberg et al. 1992; Greenberg et al. 1992; Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Goldenberg et al. 2000; Pyszczynski et al. 2003; Pyszczynski et al. 2004; Jonas and Fischer 2006).

> TMT posits that the juxtaposition of a biological predisposition toward self-preservation that human beings share with all forms of life with the uniquely human awareness of the inevitability of death gives rise to potentially overwhelming terror. This potential for terror is managed by the construction and maintenance of cultural worldviews: humanly constructed beliefs about the nature of reality that infuse individuals with a sense that they are persons of value in a world of meaning, different from and superior to corporeal and mortal nature, and thus *capable of transcending the natural boundaries* of time and space and, in so doing, *eluding death*. (Pyszczynski et al. 2003: 27, emphases mine)

At the heart of terror management theory is the psychological predisposition to fantasize about the escape from natural constraints primarily through religious and cultural worldviews. It is the terror of annihilation that motivates the interest in the excess. If this is the case, then there *is* most certainly a viable social psychology *of* the sacred. Of course, while Eliade's "thirst" and Haught's "hope" reflect and potentially mitigate existential anxiety, they do not provide compelling evidence that the realities hoped for are ontologically viable (Wiebe 1999: 147). Haught, of course, realizes that "if there *is* a 'more-than-nature,' it could never be grasped cognitionally in the same way that things in nature are mastered by science" (2006: 54). This simply will not do. As Dennett notes, "The discipline of submitting your claims to the judgment of peer review, where you have to respond to your critics or withdraw or revise your assertions, is the chief antidote to wishful thinking" (2006: 45). For Haught and Eliade—and, I believe, those who favor the *conjunction* over the *genitive* in the study of religion—naturalism places unnecessary and unworkable limitations on human possibilities. E. O. Wilson perhaps said it best: "The essence of humanity's spiritual dilemma is that we evolved genetically to accept one truth and discovered another" (1998: 288).

III. Anthropology and the Problem of Human Universals

While theology and phenomenology contest the *natural* universal in the name

of the *non-natural* universal, and thus sanction the conjunction and censor the genitive, there is a tradition of anthropological thinking which contests the natural *universal,* thus endorsing, for its own reasons, the same grammatical preferences. I make a point to note that this is only one theoretical tradition because anthropology—like most academic disciplines—is internally divided. On the most general level, anthropology follows either the biological sciences or the "cultural sciences": "biological anthropologists attempt to explain culture as ultimately a product of the genetic history of humanity . . . In sharp contrast, the cultural anthropologists . . . see culture as a higher-order phenomenon largely free of genetic history and diverging from one society to the next virtually *without limit*" (Wilson 1998: 202, emphasis mine). In much the same way that Haught despairs over naturalism's constraints, so too do cultural anthropologists discount the *limitations* of natural universals in favor of a limitless explosion of cultural meanings (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Natural universals contest both the theological *and* anthropological appeal to the *sui generis*. Commenting upon the work of anthropologist Donald Brown, for example, L. H. Martin writes:

> Donald Brown concluded that American anthropology, at least, has been dominated by a view of culture as an arbitrary, locally constructed *sui generis* phenomenon that is irreducible to other *determinants of human behavior* such as *biology and psychology* and that this view has precluded much research on "human universals" as a basis for comparative theorizing. By contrast, a "comparative religion" has traditionally been constructed precisely on the assumption that "religion" *is* an irreducible, *sui generis* phenomenon. The difference is that "comparative religion" has been based on theologizing suppositions about a universal sacrality whereas anthropology has been based on historistic assumptions concerning the unique character of every human society (2001: 292, emphases mine; see also L. Rue 2005: 5).

While theology rejects the genitive's naturalism, anthropology rejects the genitive's universalism. Concerning my particular pedagogical experience, and contesting what the "Psychology of Hinduism" presumably implies, the rubric of "Hinduism and Psychology" allows for some irreducibly "Hindu" element embedded within Hinduism; of course, this irreducible element need not be seen as nonnatural, just irreducibly and culturally idiosyncratic.

Employing the Standard Social Science Model or SSSM (Tooby and Cosmides 1992) to argue that human nature provides a blank slate upon which cultures inscribe their idiosyncratic idiom—an obviously contestable thesis (Pinker 2002)—cultural anthropology facilitates the transformation of Departments of Religion into "Confederacies of Area Studies Specialists."[4]

---

[4] The central tenet of the SSSM is: "The features of a particular culture are the result of emergent group-level processes, whose determinants arise at the group level and whose outcome is not given specific shape or content by human biology, human nature, or any inherited psychological design…In discussing culture, one can safely neglect consideration of psychology as anything other than the nondescript 'black box' of learning, which provides the capacity for culture" (Tooby and Cosmides 1992: 32). Associating particularism with the late American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Tooby and

Indeed, the overwhelming impression that I have received over the past several years is that Departments of Religion in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries are often loose confederations of scholars specializing in "their" particular religious traditions without a further commitment to a theoretical agenda capable of crossing geo-political boundaries. The absence of theory (and genitives!) in the study of religion, and perhaps contemporary anthropology as well, ultimately engenders what J. Z. Smith calls an "ethos of particularism" (2004: 368). This ethos encourages microscopic investigation of any one particular culture—and usually a particular period of time and a particular text—at the expense of cross-cultural comparison. The thickest of historical descriptions—which many see as a reflection of "the myopia of single-culture analysis" (Paden 2000: 189) or "interpretive myopia" (Patton 2000: 156)—is accomplished primarily through linguistic competence and fieldwork, and thus exhausts the task of the scholar of religion; or so the particularist's argument goes. In the absence of theory—or what potentially amounts to the same thing—once we have censored the genitive, all we are left with are either the potentially uninteresting, substantive domains of particularist ethnography—a "game of 'Trivial Pursuit'" (Girard 1987b: 250)—or thoroughly theological and metaphysical speculation. I believe the self-description of the program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill confirms my suspicions: "Today the History of Religions seriously questions the search for universals . . . especially …at the expense of particularity. The field now generally assumes that universal patterns do not exist" (Patton 2000: 156). Patton goes on to comment that "as a curious exception, the department *can* and is willing to support comparative work on mystical traditions, as though mysticism alone were able to liberate itself from historical context" (2000: 156). It appears as though one must choose between cultural particulars or non-natural universals.

A recent edition of *Religious studies News* (2008, 23:2) further reflects this state of affairs. This particular issue reports the outcomes of a census recently taken on the methods that scholars of religion employ in their work. The participants (7,415 total) were asked to rank their top three methods. The top five methods identified were "Theology (Christian)" [14%], "History" [8.67%], "Historical" [8.28%], "Philosophy" [6.99%], and "Cultural Studies" [5.56%] (11). Other possibilities included: theory of religion [3.59%], anthropology [3.32%], sociology [2.97%], and psychology [1.46%]. This is most telling. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of scholars of religion today distance themselves from what Segal (2006) considers the disciplines most appropriate to the modern study of religion. From where I stand, this neglect is most likely the result of a philosophically suspect theological agenda (Flanagan 2002) or a quasi-dogmatic postmodern anxiety about natural generalizations.

Cosmides bemoan, "The most scientifically damaging aspect of this value system has been that it leads anthropologists to actively reject conceptual frameworks that identify meaningful dimensions of cross-cultural uniformity in favor of alternative vantage points from which cultures appear maximally differentiated" (1992: 44).

IV. Postcolonial Politics and The Turn to "Dialogue"

While a theologically-motivated politics censors the genitive from one direction, I believe a thoroughly postcolonial politics censors the genitive from another direction. For some corner of the academy, the notion that we can somehow speak both generally and intelligibly about disparate cultural practices apparently is an expression of neo-colonial ambition. Guilt-ridden, theoretical hesitance and its "ethos of particularism … rubs up hard against … [the] presumption of generality, a presumption that some perceive as a sort of Imperialism…The new ethos eschews classification, comparison, and explanation" (Smith 2004: 173-174). In lieu of such ostensibly imperial classification, comparison, and explanation, some scholars of religion now endorse "dialogue." Dialogue, it is claimed, is the antidote to imperialism.

> There seems to be a widely operating consensus that recent moves toward empathetic or reflexive scholarship are… capable of righting the imperialist wrongs of the past by allowing the people whom we study to 'speak for themselves.' For some…the postcolonial study of religion is a concerted effort to recover indigenous meanings that have been distorted and subverted by a century of Euro-American exploitation; it is an attempt to drop 'our' preconceived classifications and definitions in an effort to allow 'their' voices to be heard (McCutcheon 2000: 275-276).

But the postcolonial redress does not end here. According to some, not only should we listen to the other, we should also encourage seeing the other's position as a viable possibility for one's own. For instance, in her 1991 presidential address to the American Academy of Religion, Judith Berling explicitly states, "As religionists, we are facilitators who enable parties representing different positions, traditions, or cultures to move in the direction of becoming 'possibilities' to one another" (cited in Wiebe 2000: 269). Presuming that cultural others are in fact irreducibly different, scholars of religion must then remain open to claims of other traditions as potential truth-claims for themselves. But is this how we should be thinking of ourselves? Are we, as scholars of religion, here to nurture an ecumenical dialogue? Are we here to foster an understanding of the other's *religious* position to the point that it becomes a viable possibility for ourselves and our audience? Are the non-religious to be open to the religious? Should naturalism be open to non-naturalism?

A recent proponent of dialogical studies in religion, Gavin Flood (1999; 2006) argues that religious studies needs to recognize the voices of religious participants as they engage in critical re-examinations of their own traditions *from within the parameters of the traditions themselves*. He clearly states, "We need to promote Religious Studies as a field of inquiry that gives hospitality to traditions and their self-representations, allows for discussion across subdisciplines such as Anthropology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Philology, and so on, and interfaces with public discourse" (2006: 48). Regarding the three

components Flood adumbrates here, I have no doubt that the disciplinary boundaries between Anthropology, Sociology, and Philology should be, can be, and in fact have been crossed in discussions concerning religion. Th e interdisciplinary nature of religious studies, in this sense, is relatively clear. Likewise, I believe the scholar of religion can interface with public discourses in unproblematic ways. We can also articulate an identifiable role for the scholar of religion as public intellectual and critic without much effort (McCutcheon 2001). It is, however, the first component of Flood's perspective that troubles me. What does it mean for religious studies to be hospitable to traditions and self-representations? Does a relationship obtain between hospitality and dialogue?

Unlike Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1997) notion of a fusion of horizons, dialogue, according to Flood, may entail clarifying the differences between positions: "Dialogue is not agreement or consensus, but can be the clarification of difference; a clarification that will necessarily entail reflexivity in delineating the boundaries of a discourse against another's, *which is also critique*" (1999: 35, emphasis added). Diana Eck similarly notes that "a dialogical approach requires one important thing: our presence, our crucially self-conscious presence in our work, interrogating our own viewpoint lest we become merely political or polemical" (2000: 142). Th e religious other's position ostensibly affords us the opportunity to reflect on, and even critique, our own. I believe this argument rests on the generally postmodernist recognition that all positions are circumscribed within certain discursive boundaries (Rosenau 1991). For Flood, such a condition ultimately entails "the non-closure of explanation" (1999: 40). Dialogical methods are apparently in the service of highlighting and contesting the *constraints* of one's position. Much like theology's hope, post-colonial dialogue is liberating. Flood appeals to the excess to justify dialogism: "After any reductionist account of religion *there is always a remainder*, a residue which is part of the believer's perspective, perhaps a 'sense of God' to use Bowker's phrase, and which is as open to a theological understanding as to a naturalist account of origin and function" (1999: 72, emphasis mine). Clearly, the issue is what we are to make of the believer's perspective. Although Flood has designs on taking us *Beyond Phenomenology*, as the title of his book suggests, all this sounds rather close to classical phenomenology (Rennie 1996).

My uncertainty concerns the relationship of "a theological understanding" to "a naturalist account of origin and function." What constitutes a theological understanding, according to Flood? Does theological understanding issue its own account of the origin and function of the "sense of God"? Flood notes that the religious individual's perspective often addresses metaphysical concerns rather than natural realities: "naturalist explanations do not take meaning and self-representation of social actors seriously enough, in not recognizing emic accounts as having, at one level, equal validity to etic ones. While emic accounts which make empirical claims about the world are certainly open to scientific critique, non-

empirical, metaphysical claims are not" (1999: 72). Conceding some epistemic authority to philosophical naturalism's ability to issue claims about the natural world, Flood allows for a non-empirical, non-natural, metaphysical realm about which both theology—and the attending perspectives of believers—and naturalism may make claims. The implication is that this metaphysical world is beyond empirical verification or falsification, in which case all claims concerning its character apparently should be entertained.

The enduring trouble with this proposal is that we have no means by which to determine a "truthful" metaphysical claim from wishful thinking, assuming of course that the metaphysical claim is an assertion and not merely an expression (Flanagan 2007).[5] As Robert Pennock observes, "Supernatural theories can give us no guidance about what follows or does not follow from their supernatural components" (1999: 191). If non-naturalists are simply telling stories that they believe in believing in, then perhaps all is well; of course, one might object, storytelling is no way to develop syllabi or outline research agendas. That being said, I am under the impression that when "believers" talk about the sacred/god/mystery/power they are far more often than not making assertions about the world; that is, that non-natural realities are truly mind-independent, ontologically viable realities. The catch here is that those who censor the genitive by sanctioning the conjunction do so, I believe, by appealing precisely to the dubious non-natural.

> Rather than the tension in the study of religion being between reductionist and non-reductionist approaches, a more accurate framing of the debate would be in terms of a tension between naturalism and non-naturalism, in which naturalism performs very radical kinds of reductionism absent from non-naturalist research programmes. Naturalism can be taken in the general sense that potentially there is nothing that cannot be explained by the natural and human sciences, a generally materialist view that entails a radical reductionism (Flood 1999: 66).

Here is precisely where I locate dialogism's combination of an interest in the Non-natural with an interest in the irreducibly cultural. Flood's appeal to dialogical studies is an appeal to entertaining the cultural other's non-natural perspective. Although there seems to be an ontological consideration at hand, the issue apparently concerns epistemology, and Flood obviously finds the naturalist guilty of premature, explanatory closure: "Naturalist explanations tend to contain materialist *assumptions* about the nature of the world and about the mythic (i.e., false) nature of religious claims to transcendence" (1999: 69, emphasis mine). Flood's strategy here directly mirrors that found in Haught's

---

[5] Flanagan suggests that expressive theism is tantamount to telling stories in which you believe in believing. Assertive theism, on the other hand, makes statements concerning non-natural realities as if such statements actually correspond with mind-independent realities. He writes, "Theism of the sort that takes certain texts as authoritative, that asserts that certain facts that cannot possibly be known by humans to be true are uncontrovertibly true, is a problem. *Assertive theism*, but not what I will call *expressive theism*, is epistemically irresponsible and dangerous to boot…[Expressive theism is] whatever you wish that feels compelling, satisfying, rich and deep. We are only talking about stories" (2007: 190-191).

theological approach (2006, 2008).

Unlike their non-naturalist counterparts who continually seek to prove their position by faulting the opposite—what Pennock describes as the "legal model" (1999: 182)—naturalists continue to amass public evidence that compellingly reveals the superfluity of non-naturalist explanations. The particle physicist V. Stenger notes: "The empirical data and theories based on that data are now sufficient to make a scientific judgment: In high probability, a nonmaterial element of the universe exerting powerful control over events does not exist" (2003: 19). Flanagan similarly argues, "Naturalism is the best philosophical view, based on the evidence" (2007: 219), noting elsewhere that "Supernatural concepts have no philosophical warrant . . . There simply are no good arguments—theological, philosophical, humanistic, or scientific—for beliefs in divine beings, miracles, or heavenly afterlives" (2002: xiii). Flood's position notwithstanding, there are no good reasons to countenance believers' perspectives concerning such non-natural realities as god. Moreover, it would appear that we are amassing all the right reasons to warrant adoption of a tightly constrained materialist or physicalist worldview (Silver 2006: 47-48). Thus, when Flood enjoins scholars of religion to be hospitable to the claims of the religious practitioner, I am reminded of Pennock's pointed question: "Must we really be seriously 'open-minded' about supernatural explanations generally?"(1999: 282) In short, I answer 'No'.

V. Th e Virtues of Strong Agnosticism

Naturalism and non-naturalism, I contend, are simply incompatible. There is an excluded middle, an ineluctable disjunction that cannot be overcome. I believe the choice of grammatical constructions in the study of religion betrays the side one adopts in this "controversy." This choice similarly reflects one's position on the complementary theoretical issue regarding universalism and particularism. I argue that the genitive—the "…of Religion"—rubric announces a commitment to natural universals. Alternatively, the conjunctive— the "Religion and …"—rubric announces commitments to either non-natural universals or ethnographic particulars. In both instances, the conjunction opposes reduction and as such is unscientific: "Scientific inquiry is reductive or it is nothing at all" (Girard 1987a: 39). Of course, we all recognize that committing oneself to naturalism opens one to the charge of being closed-minded, prejudiced, or constrained by one's assumptions. This need not be such a bad thing: "Naturalism …places restrictions on what can be asserted legitimately, with epistemic warrant" (Flanagan 2007: 195). Furthermore, "Agreeing to *constraints* of this sort of epistemological approach…is just what it is to be a methodological naturalist" (Pennock 1999: 303).

We have heard a great deal about methodological atheism and methodological agnosticism over the past several decades. Because methodological atheism harbors a certain metaphysical position exceeding the limits of our

knowledge (McCutcheon 2001: x; Flanagan 2006: 437), I want to conclude here with a brief consideration of agnosticism. Although Dawkins (2006) seems to be a bit nonplussed by agnostics, even he admits that his atheism is built on a consideration of probabilities and as such he must allow for the almost-nil probability that the non-natural exists. Despite his protestation, Dawkins is a *certain* agnostic. I qualify Dawkins's agnosticism because I believe "agnosticism" is worth disaggregating into two forms. Where one form sanctions, the other form censures the theo-dialogical approaches of Haught, Eliade, Flood and Eck.

Agnostics generally appeal to "epistemological humility" (Flanagan 2006: 437). The difference between the two forms of agnosticism I wish to make reflects the extent of this humility. Though counterintuitive, I believe those committed to natural universals and, by extension, modern science are, in fact, the ones who adopt the strongest form of epistemological humility. Clearly, many impute arrogance to the individual who denies the other's "perspective of god." That is to say, it seems to require a great deal of epistemological presumption to suggest that the other's "perspective of god" has nothing to do with what the other undoubtedly believes. Theists and atheists aside, those who oppose such ostensible hubris are what I call *weak* agnostics.

Weak agnosticism enables theo-dialogical approaches to religion. It suggests that one's position cannot exhaust all possibilities and that, as such, one must be open to the other's claims. As an agnostic position, such epistemic fallibility presumably applies to the naturalism/non-naturalism debate. Indeed, weak agnosticism proposes that while one may be a naturalist, one must always hold open the possibility that the other's "perspective of god" may prove correct. For instance, I may not know the answer to such queries concerning the reality of the sacred, but another person may; or, perhaps my tradition is locked into a particular perspective such that the other tradition's perspective could play the role of corrective. Weak agnosticism holds out the possibility that *someone's* non-naturalism may prove correct.

Strong agnosticism denies such possibilities. Strong agnosticism's epistemological humility concerns a species-wide, epistemological *constraint* at the heart of naturalism. Indeed, while naturalists strategically play dumb regarding non-natural realities, they simultaneously insist that others must play dumb as well. To borrow a turn of phrase from C. McGinn (1991), non-natural realities are "cognitively closed" to us. Flanagan expresses the point this way:

> *Qua* finite, historically embedded animals, humans are in no position to make positive or negative assertions about 'everything that there is, and is not, in the widest possible sense' …The epistemological humility called for is not so humble that it tolerates agnosticism. Theological claims do not work and for that reason they are something akin to nonsense (Flanagan 2006: 437).

Though he is speaking about agnosticism generally conceived, I believe Flanagan's position may be usefully extended to describe weak agnosticism. Strong agnosticism, to paraphrase Jacques Derrida (1993: 155), quite rightly passes for atheism. Flanagan notes elsewhere:

> The state of discussion about whether one is a theist, an atheist, or an agnostic is (sadly) informative about the state of religious epistemology. Everyone is an atheist when is (*sic*) comes to most conceptions of divinity. Christians are atheists with respect to Greek and Hindu gods. Hindus are atheists with respect to the Abrahamic God (or Gods). The question of theistic belief makes sense only in relation to a conception of God that is…on the table for discussion …The dialectic commonly goes this way… agnosticism is respectable but atheism is not. This is insane. There is, let us suppose, a denumerable, but potentially infinite number of conceptions of "a creator" …Assuming one does not believe in revelation, because that would be stupid, one ought to be an atheist for each conception of God I have ever been asked, or thought of entertaining (2007: 257).

The point is well-taken. The strong agnostic maintains that for any *human* claim concerning the non-natural, of *that* "object's" non-existence we can be certain. If one substitutes my strong agnosticism for his quietism, Flanagan comes very close to articulating my position for me:

> The failure of the arguments that there is a God warrants quietism… Some people will see this quietist as tantamount to an atheist, and that may be a reasonable way to understand her. But she is not an atheist who disbelieves a certain conception of God. She sees no basis to coherently believe to be true or false any claim for any God (2002: 207-208).

Non-naturalism no longer deserves consideration, and naturalists need not be encouraged to do so. According to my version of strong agnosticism, non-naturalists—with whom I associate all theologians and religious practitioners of the supernaturalist variety—are the people *about whom* and not *with whom* scholars of religion talk. To confuse this issue—the very issue at the heart of appeals to dialogical studies and their conjunctive constructions—is to confuse the subject of explanation with the means of explanation. The politics of grammar that censor the genitive and enjoin the conjunction do little more than perpetuate the confusion. In the study of religion at least, grammatical preferences betray theoretical commitments.

References
Focus on The Work of the Academy: Independent Annual Meeting Survey. 2008. *Religious Studies News* 23 (2):10-13.

Atran, Scott (2002). *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Boyer, Pascal (2001) *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. New York: Basic Books.

Brown, Donald E. (1991). *Human Universals*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Clifford, James and George E. Marcus (eds.) (1986). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

Cox, James L. (2006). *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates*. London: Continuum.

Dawkins, Richard (2006). *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

De Caro, Mario and David Macarthur (eds.) (2004). *Naturalism in Question*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Dennett, Daniel C. (1991). *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co

——— (1995). *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

——— (2006). *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. New York: Viking.

Derrida, Jacques (1993). *Circumfession: Fifty-nine Periods and Periphrases*. In G. Bennington and J. Derrida (eds.), *Jacques Derrida*, 3-315. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Eck, Diana L. (2000). Dialogue and method: Reconstructing the study of religion. In K. C. Patton and B. C. Ray (eds.), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, 131-149. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Eliade, Mircea (1958). *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co.

——— (1959). *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Fitzgerald, Timothy (2000). *The Ideology of Religious studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Flanagan, Owen (1992). *Consciousness Reconsidered*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

——— (2002). *The Problem of the Soul: Two Visions of Mind and How to Reconcile Them*. New
York: Basic Books.

——— (2006). Varieties of Naturalism. In P. Clayton and Z. Simpson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, 430-452. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

——— (2007). *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Flood, Gavin (1999). *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*. London: Cassell.

——— (2006). Reflections on tradition and inquiry in the study of religion. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (1): 47-58.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1997). *Truth and Method*. Second, Revised ed. Translated by J. Weinsheimer, D. G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Girard, René (1987a). Generative scapegoating. In R. Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Violent Origins*, 73-105. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

——— (1987b). *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goldenberg, Jamie, Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg, and Sheldon Solomon (2000). Fleeing the body: A terror management perspective on the problem of human corporeality. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4 (3): 200-218.

Goodenough, Uursula (1998). *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenberg, Jeff, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon (1986). The causes and consequences of a need for self-esteem: A terror management theory. In R. F. Baumeister (ed.), *Public Self and Private Self*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Greenberg, Jeff, Linda Simon, Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Dan Chatel (1992). Terror management and tolerance: Does mortality salience always intensify negative reactions to others who threaten one's worldview. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63 (2): 212-220.

Greenberg, Jeff, Sheldon Solomon, Tom Pyszczynski, Abram Rosenblatt, John Burling, Deborah Lyon, Linda Simon, and Emile Pinel (1992). Why do people need self-esteem? Converging evidence that self-esteem serves an anxiety-buffering function. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63 (6): 913-922.

Gross, Paul R. and Norman Levitt (eds.) (1994). *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Guthrie, Stewart E. (1993). *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Haught, John (2006). *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press..

——— (2008). *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

James, William (1961). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan.

Jonas, Eva and Peter Fischer (2006). Terror management and religion: Evidence that intrinsic religiousness mitigates worldview defense following mortality salience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (3): 553-567.

Kakar, Sudhir (1981). *The Inner world: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kirkpatrick, Lee A. (2005). *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*. New York: Guilford Press.

Koch, Christof (2004). *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach*. Englewood: Roberts and Company Publishers.

Kurtz, Stanley N. (1992). *All the Mothers are One: Hindu India and the Cultural Reshaping of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lincoln, Bruce (1996). Theses on method. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8: 225-227.

Linden, David J. (2007). *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press.

Martin, L. H. (2001). Comparativism and Sociobiological Theory. *Numen* 48: 290-308.

Masson, Jeffrey M. (1980). *The Oceanic Feeling: The Origins of Religious Sentiment in Ancient India*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co.

McCutcheon, Russell T. (ed.) (1999). *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. London Cassell.

McCutcheon, Russell T. (2000). The imperial dynamic in the study of religion. In C. R. King (ed.), *Postcolonial America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

——— (2001). *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

——— (2003). The ideology of closure and the problem with the insider/outsider problem in the study of religion. *Studies in Religion* 32 (3): 337-352.

McGinn, Colin (1991). *The Problem of Consciousness: Essays Towards a Resolution*. Oxford: B. Blackwell.

Paden, William E. (2000). Elements of a new comparativism. In K. C. Patton and B. C. Ray (eds.), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, 182-192. Berkeley: University of California Press.

——— (2001). Universals revisited: Human behaviors and cultural variations. *Numen* 48: 276-289.

Patton, Kimberley C. (2000). Juggling torches: Why we still need comparative religion. In K. C. Patton and B. C. Ray (eds.), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, 153-171. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Patton, Kimberley C. and Benjamin C. Ray (eds.) (2000). *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pennock, Robert T. (1999). *Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationism*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Pinker, Steven (2002). *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Viking.

Proudfoot, Wayne (1985). *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pyszczynski, Tom, Jeff Greenberg, and Sheldon Solomon (1997). Why do we need what we need? A terror management perspective on the roots of human social motivation. *Psychological Inquiry* 8 (1): 1-20.

——— (2003). *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Pyszczynski, Tom, Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, Jamie Arndt, and Jeff Schimel (2004). Why do people need self-esteem? A theoretical and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin* 130 (3): 435-468.

Rennie, Bryan S. (1996). *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Rosenau, Pauline M. (1991). *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rue, Loyal D. (2005). *Religion is not about God: How Spiritual Traditions Nurture our Biological Nature and What to Expect When They Fail*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Segal, Robert A. (1983). In defense of reduction. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1): 97-124.

——— (1989). *Religion and the Social Sciences: Essays on the Confrontion*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

——— (1992). *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*. New York: Peter Lang.

——— (2001). In defense of the comparative method. *Numen* 48: 339-373.

——— (2006). All generalizations are bad: Postmodernism on theories. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (1): 157-171.

Silver, Lee M. (2006). *Challenging Nature: The Clash of Science and Spirituality at the New Frontiers of Life*. New York: HarperCollins.

Smith, Jonathan Z. (2004). *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Stenger, Victor J. (1995). *The Unconscious Quantum: Metaphysics in Modern Physics and Cosmology*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

——— (2003). *Has Science Found God? The Latest Results in the Search for Purpose in the Universe*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

——— (2007). *God, The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

Susskind, Leonard (2006). The good fight. In J. Brockman (ed.), *Intelligent Thought: Science Versus the Intelligent Design Movement*, 24-32. New York: Vintage Books.

Sweek, Joel (2002). Biology *of* religion. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 14: 196-218.

Tooby, John and Leda Comsides (1992). The psychological foundations of culture. In J. H. Barkow, L. Cosmides and J. Tooby (eds.), *The Adapted Mind*, 19-136. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vaidyanathan, T. G., and Jeffrey J. Kripal, (eds.) (2001). *Vishnu on Freud's Desk: A Reader in Psychoanalysis and Hinduism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Wiebe, Donald (1999) Does understanding religion require religious understanding? In R. T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, 260-273. London: Cassell.

——— (2000). *The Politics of Religious studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy*. New York: Palgrave.

——— (2006). An eternal return all over again: The religious conversation endures. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (3): 674-696.

White, David G. (2000). The scholar as mythographer: Comparative Indo-European myth and postmodern concerns. In K. C. Patton and B. C. Ray (ed.) *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, 47-54. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wilson, Edward O. (1998). *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. New York: Knopf.