

A Magic Still Dwells

Comparative Religion
in the Postmodern Age

EDITED BY
KIMBERLEY C. PATTON
AND BENJAMIN C. RAY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California
University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

@ 2000 by
The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A magic still dwells : comparative religion in the
postmodern age /
edited by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-520-21971-6 (hardcover : alk. paper).

ISBN 0-520-22105-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Religions. 2. Postmodernism. I. Patton, Kim-
berley C. (Kimberley Christine), 1958-

II. Ray, Benjamin C., 1940-

RL80.2.M278 2000

200'.71--dc21

99-31468

Printed in the United States of America
08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication is both acid-free
and totally chlorine-free (TCF). It meets the mini-
mum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

1997) (Permanence of Paper).

INTRODUCTION

KIMBERLEY C. PATTON AND BENJAMIN C. RAY

Whither comparative religion in the postmodern age? The essays in this volume seek to break through the seemingly intractable division between postmodern scholars who reject the comparative endeavor and those who affirm it. In various ways, this volume seeks to demonstrate that a broader vision of religion, involving different scales of comparison for different purposes, is both justifiable and necessary.

Drawing from as wide a range of fields of expertise and vantage points as possible, *A Magic Still Dwells* brings together historians of religions who are outstanding in their respective areas of scholarship. Their essays take up a common set of questions that are reflected in their papers. They take seriously the postmodern critique, explain its impact on their own work, uphold or reject various premises, and in several cases demonstrate new comparative approaches.¹ Despite the rich range of difference in their grounds for and use of comparative method, they are united in the claim for the continuing necessity—and relevance—of the comparative study of religion.

Postmodernism represents a variegated critique of the Enlightenment humanism that undergirds modernism with its totalizing, rationalist gaze. The substantial and often well-founded charges brought against the comparative method are many: intellectual imperialism, universalism, theological foundationalism, and anti-contextualism. In particular, the work of Mircea Eliade, the late doyen of the history of religions, is held to be unredeemable, based as it is on the vision of a universal,

transcendent "sacred" refracted in the ritual and mythic behavior of a cross-cultural human archetype called *Homo religiosus*.

The standpoint of the comparativist was once privileged as a vantage point of objective description, classification, and comparison of "other peoples" and their beliefs. The focus of deconstructive scrutiny "reveals" it instead, at worst, as a subjective mélange of culturally biased perceptions that cannot but distort or, at best, as an act of imaginative, associative "play." The application of postmodern thought to analytical reflection on religious narrative or worldview is problematic at best. Postmodernism denounces order and ordering principles in favor of "otherness, difference, and excess," and further wishes to "deconstruct the status quo in favor of the fluxus quo";² the religious worldview is nothing if not global, universal, systemic, unequivocal, and symmetrical in its claims, "totalizing" in its metaphysics or anti-metaphysics. If we are to take the philosophical claims of postmodernism seriously, the possibility of describing religious systems with integrity or comparing them to one another is thus permanently compromised.

Once confined to poststructuralist, neo-Marxist thought and literary studies, the impact on the field of religion—as on all other fields in the humanities and social science—of a postmodern critique such as Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism has been profound. Words appear no longer to be connected to the world but to be merely unrooted signifiers, shifting counters in the many language games we play. There is also the political charge implied by the work of a Lyotard or that of an Adorno: to compare is to abstract, and abstraction is construed as a political act aimed at domination and annihilation; cross-cultural comparison becomes intrinsically imperialistic, obliterating the cultural matrix from which it "lifts" the compared object.

Thus to compare religious traditions, particularly unhistorically related ones, or elements and phenomena within those traditions, is to attempt to control and ultimately to destroy them. Following this logic, scholarly integrity is only to be found in the self-reflexive study of the "other" that locates itself in the uniquely local and the particular. Whereas Enlightenment-nourished modernism confidently affirmed that "nothing human is foreign to me" and went about making the human intelligible, some postmodernists reverse the adage and affirm with equal confidence, "everything human is foreign to me," and go about denying the intelligibility of the "other" and promoting cultural criticism and intellectual relativism. "There is no way definitely, surgically, to separate the factual from the allegorical in cultural accounts," says anthropolo-

gist James Clifford; ethnography is only "a fantasy reality of a reality fantasy," says his colleague Stephen Tyler.³

Responding to these recent developments, the field of the study of religion has undergone a profound change. With a few outstanding exceptions, comparative studies have virtually disappeared in graduate programs in favor of increasingly narrow "area studies" research into specific religious texts and communities. This represents a trend identified by Jonathan Z. Smith in 1995:

In a wholly understandable over-reaction against the well-meaning, endlessly tolerant amateurs who often comprised religion programs prior to the 1960s, a new set of standards was forged: competence in a particular religious tradition measured largely by the acquisition of philological expertise accompanied by an emergent ethic of particularity which suggested that any attempt at generalization violated the personhood of those studied. Lip service might be paid to more general issues, but only in the most introductory courses, never to be studied again.⁴

Perhaps the most cogent and eloquent challenge to the very possibility of responsible comparison came from Smith himself in his seminal 1982 essay, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells." We reproduce his essay as the prologue to this collection because so many of our contributors acknowledge their indebtedness to it, especially its deconstructive attack upon previous comparative studies in anthropology and the history of religions. Smith's essay argues that comparison in the human sciences has been problematic and unscientific and lacking in any specific rules. It contains a kind of "magic," he asserts, like Frazer's idea of homeopathic magic, "for, as practiced by scholarship, *comparison has been chiefly an affair of the recollection of similarity*. . . . The procedure is homeopathic. . . . The issue of difference has been all but forgotten."⁵ For Smith, the unfortunate "magic" of previous comparative studies lies in their resemblance to Frazer's notion of primitive magic, the association of ideas by superficial similarity, thus confusing subjective relationships with objective ones. Smith finds wanting several types of comparison in the history of religions for their confused, impressionistic, and unscientific character.

Acknowledging the importance of this essay, we borrow Smith's linkage between magic and comparison for the title of the present volume, *A Magic Still Dwells*. Recognizing that Smith used the term "magic" derogatorily, we do so, not as an act of defiance nor even one of irony, but rather to highlight a reenvisioned potential for comparative study. We reclaim the term "magic" to endorse and to extend his claim that

comparison is an indeterminate scholarly procedure that is best undertaken as an intellectually creative enterprise, not as a science but as an art—an imaginative and critical act of mediation and redescription in the service of knowledge. In keeping with this view, these essays offer an illuminating discussion of the scholarly “manipulation of difference,” to use Smith’s words, a playing across the “gap” of differences, for the purpose of gaining intellectual insight.

The present volume is divided into three parts. The essays in Part 1, “Comparative Religion: The State of the Field,” offer an overview of the current status of the comparative enterprise, with particular reference to the methodological challenges posed by postmodernism.

Inaugurating the volume, David White argues that postmodernism’s lessons have been absorbed, and that the “self-indulgent pursuit . . . of talking about ourselves talking about other people is one whose time has passed.” “We would do better,” White continues, “to do what we do, which is to attempt to make sense of other people’s religions,” despite the ultimately provisional, non-final nature of the effort. Responding to Jacques Derrida’s criticism of Western metaphysics as a kind of “Indo-European mythology,” White defends the modern field of Indo-European studies as consistently responsive to cultural difference, religious specificity, and historical change. White ends by invoking Jonathan Smith’s idea of the comparative enterprise as an imaginative act of mediation and redescription, concluding that Smith has “artfully shown us how we may take issue with our modernist forebears without embracing the rhetoric of certain of our postmodernist contemporaries.”

In “Contested Identities: The Study of Buddhism in the Postmodern World,” David Eckel eloquently remarks upon the “implosion,” like many of the “rational” housing projects of the 1970s, of the “grand old” projects of classification that typified modern phenomenologies of religion. He meditates on Jonathan Smith’s dismissal of comparative similarities as a kind of Frazerian-style “magic,” but, resonating with David White’s observations, rescues out of Smith’s *Imagining Religion* a new kind of comparison—a style of “imaginative and ironical juxtaposition” (e.g., the Jonestown mass suicide, a cargo cult in the New Hebrides, the Dionysia of Euripides’ *Bacchae*) as a way of stripping away illusions of “uniqueness” for each religious situation. Buddhist studies, Eckel shows, provides a superb exemplar of the debates within a particular field of religious studies, with recent attacks on notions of Buddhism as a monolith, a kind of totalizing narrative philosophy rather than a religion, that is unique in its utterly experiential orientation. Yet

just as Eckel redeems “comparison,” he also argues for a lexical rehabilitation of the much-maligned idea of “essence” in the pragmatic sense of what is “necessary” to any Buddhist community’s self-understanding and therefore to the work of the scholars who study it.

Noted mythographer Wendy Doniger’s essay vigorously reframes the recurrent issues of sameness and difference. She proposes that we salvage a broad comparativist agenda in the study of religion and myth, even when it means bringing into a single conversation “the genuinely different approaches that several cultures have made to similar (if not the same) human problems.” Acknowledging the reductionism of extreme universalism, she counters by outlining the ironic pitfalls of extreme nominalism: one can “essentialize” the contextualized “group” as one homogeneous mass, whose various individual members may view the same story quite differently. Doniger urges that, in order to sidestep these twin intractable dangers, we focus our vision on individual insight, or, as she puts it, “anchor our cross-cultural paradigms in an investigation of the unique insights of particular tellings of our cross-cultural themes, to focus on the individual and the human on both ends of the spectrum—one story, and then the human race—thus not so much ignoring the problematic cultural generalizations in the middle as leaping over them altogether.” Thus she avoids a “quasi-Jungian universalism” and posits a kind of “pointillism,” formed by the views of individual authors whose insights transcend their particular moment and “speak to us across space and time.” Doniger searches for these points “not merely in the bastions of the Western canon, but in the neglected byways of oral traditions and rejected heresies.” Thus we arrive at “a wider construction of cross-cultural inspiration.”

Part 2, “Case Studies: Critical Issues in the History of Religions,” offers in-depth case studies by different scholars working in various traditions within the history of religions. Each scholar demonstrates how her or his work has interacted with postmodernism, and how she or he has used a comparative approach as a valuable analytical tool in the development of specific cultural as well as cross-cultural categories.

Barbara Holdrege, known for her ambitious study, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture*, asks with her colleague Charles Long, “What’s beyond the post of the various intellectual movements that characterize themselves using this prefix?” Her emphatic answer is that there is a place “beyond the post” for the comparative study of religion, agreeing with Jonathan Smith that, in her words, comparison is itself a “constitutive aspect of human thought and

an inextricable component of our scholarly methods." In her essay, Holdrege attempts to "redress" the comparative method by highlighting the problems that emerge from the work of the phenomenologists and their inadequate attention to differences, the diachronic dimension, and context. Using her own work as an example, Holdrege outlines a method of comparison that gives "proper attention to differences as well as to similarities and to diachronic transformations as well as to structural continuities."

Building on the problematic of the illusion of "uniqueness" examined by Smith and underscored by Eckel, Holdrege argues that comparative analysis can claim a rightful place within the postmodern enterprise as "an important corrective to the strategies of domination through which we privilege certain categories and models over others in our academic discourse. . . . [It] can serve as a heuristic tool not only to establish taxonomies but also to critique and dismantle their tyrannies."

Jonathan Herman, a scholar of Chinese religious traditions, plunges into possible new directions for the comparative study of mysticism. In his essay, "The Contextual Illusion: Comparative Mysticism and Postmodernism," Herman chronicles a particular comparative project, namely, the unlikely juxtaposition of Martin Buber's *I and Thou* and the ancient Taoist classic *Chuang Tzu*. Herman's discussion of the ways in which *Chuang Tzu* influenced Buber's work, and conversely, the latter's dialogical principle, provides a valid lens through which one may creatively reapproach the original Chinese text. Herman suggests that the resonances between Chuang Tzu's model of mystical fulfillment and that of Buber—which Maurice Friedman called "a mysticism of the concrete and the particular"—are so strong as to provide a single typology of mystical experience.

Herman also notes that "the fact that comparativists are frequently accused before the fact of dilettantism, perennialism, or relativism . . . demonstrates that there is a widespread presupposition that phenomena belonging to observably different contexts are self-evidently unrelated to one another." Championing a comparative method that starts not with *a priori* assumptions about the nature of a category like mysticism, but instead grows organically out of a careful respect for particular contexts, Herman is willing to let such an investigation produce profound similarities as well as the differences so beloved of—and expected by—postmodern scholars.

Benjamin Ray takes up one of the popular claims of postmodern anthropology, cultural particularism, and examines its problems, and

recommends a solution. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), several anthropologists offer the postmodern argument of cultural particularism—the view that different societies are culturally unique and hence fundamentally unknowable by outsiders and incomparable. Ray argues that in rejecting older-style ethnographic realism, postmodern anthropologists have mistakenly advocated their own brand of philosophical antirealism and cultural solipsism. They have taken the moral and political failings of older-style colonial anthropology as evidence of epistemological incompatibility between cultures, arguing that each constitutes a conceptually unique domain of thought and reality. Thus they believe they can only "represent" other cultures and never engage in issues of meaning and truth. While the difficulties and responsibilities of describing and interpreting other cultures will always remain, Ray offers the work of Edith Turner and Paul Stoller as examples of ways in which anthropologists and historians of religion can open up the realities of other religious worlds, while still engaging questions of meaning and truth. Ray concludes that comparative religion should have both an intellectual and a moral purpose. Its aim should be to advance the conversation of humankind, while building religious bridges and political relationships.

Like other contributors, legal scholar and religious historian Winifred Sullivan takes as her starting point Jonathan Z. Smith's insistence in *Map Is Not Territory* that "[t]he process of comparison is a fundamental characteristic of human intelligence."⁷ She argues in "American Religion Is Naturally Comparative" that "the goal is to historicize morphology." Unlike other contributors, Sullivan is trained primarily in Christianity and American religion. Whereas once "American Religion" was studied as the history of the Protestant Church in America, it is now "about everyone": Native Americans, Spanish conquistadors, Franciscan missionaries, French trappers, and Jesuit priests. Implicitly acknowledging the postmodern charge that certain "metanarratives," most notably ones of European origin, are by nature hegemonic, Sullivan shows how the "starting point" of the story makes all the difference: a Navajo or Iroquois rather than a Puritan framework gives the scholar a view of "early" American religion that comprises symbol and myth, one that sanctifies space, time, birth, or violence, rather than one that is only about "baptism, conversion, and the work of the spirit." She remarks upon an issue related to the very problem that postmodernism has identified in the "history of religions school": the fact that "American religion has been studied by historians while other religions have been

studied as reified ahistorical systems." She lobbies for the inclusion of the religious traditions of America in the comparative study of religion, based, of course, on the richly variegated nature, the multicultural diaspora of American religious history. As Sullivan puts it, "American religion might be almost regarded . . . as a controlled experiment in comparative religion."

Emerging as the primary cartographer of the kaleidoscopic contemporary American religious landscape, Diana Eck writes out of her own scholarly history as a "boundary-crosser, even a trespasser," one who has repeatedly moved in her scholarly and religious life between the religious traditions of India to the field of Christian theology to the field of American religious history. Observing a "new geo-religious reality" in the United States and across the globe, wherein "there are mosques in the Bible Belt in Houston, just as there are churches in Muslim Pakistan," Eck notes the tremendous changes in the religious map of the world that have been brought about by migration, cultural assimilation, and most importantly vast new opportunities for dialogue and religious exchange (Jews practicing Buddhist meditation; Christians reading the *Gita*; interfaith monastic exchanges; and so forth).

These new realities simultaneously bring with them urgent imperatives in the comparative study of religion. Eck calls into question whether the "hybrid" or converging forms such as American Buddhism should be so easily dismissed by scholars who cling to purist notions of classical traditions; perhaps instead the new paradigms are more historically typical than atypical. Just as postmodern thought represents reality as a non-fixed, unreliable, and uncategorizable stream of events, so Eck urges us as scholars to consider the world's religious traditions, not as fixed systems, "boxes" of texts and commentaries transmitted between generations, but rather as rivers, converging, recombining, perpetually in motion. She charts both the hardening and softening of boundaries in the "worldwide backlash of colonialism." Recalling her own work in *Banaras: City of Light*,⁸ in which she acknowledges using interpretive methods and a voice that "no Hindu" would have used, she argues that she has nevertheless articulated "an understanding of Hindu religious life that Hindus themselves would recognize."

Herein, then, lies the paradox. As scholars, we do not have to be the "other" to speak to or even for the "other," but we must ourselves first change. Ultimately, Eck calls for "dialogue as method" in the comparative study of religion. This approach draws both from postmodernism and from its critics, requiring mutuality and critical awareness, and es-

pecially interaction with the "other," as she puts it, "in a way careful and sustained enough to be able to see, and even to articulate, the other's point of view—both the others who are before us and the others whose multiple voices speak within us. Gradually we become bilingual or multilingual . . ."

The third and final major section of the volume, "A Revised Comparison: New Justifications for Comparative Study," comprises synthetic essays. Resonating with and in some cases building on the previous essays, they argue for the possibility of a re-visioned comparative method. This "new comparative religion" grows out of cultural specificity and may or may not begin with the assumption of a shared ontology across the world's religious traditions. It is receptive to using cross-cultural categories as an imaginative tool to enable us to begin to know each tradition more profoundly, and paradoxically, more on its own terms. In "Juggling Torches: Why We Still Need Comparative Religion," Kimberley C. Patton challenges some of the underlying premises of postmodern thought as it is applied to the study of religion, and defends the comparative enterprise. She notes how a comparative approach was instrumental in her own research as she attempted to solve a "ritual paradox" in ancient Greek iconography. Patton rejects the postmodern concept that comparison by its nature abstracts and annihilates. In investigating its suspicion of organizing schemata, she points to its own reactive heritage in the aftermath of World War II, provoked as that conflict was by "grand plans" and "final solutions." Turning to issues of ontology, she questions postmodernist constructions of religion as invariably and primarily a matter of "local" or "political" concerns, with metaphysical or theological issues serving only as a pretext. "If we maintain a relentlessly closed mind toward the claims of religious traditions that what they describe is real or true," she asks, "how on earth can our descriptions of how they work, however 'thick,' be authentic?" Finally, using Robert Kiely's recent discussion of Hildegard of Bingen as a focus, she problematizes the postmodern obsession with "marginalization" when it is applied to the religious text. Patton argues against the "surrender of the whole comparative enterprise just because it is hard to do it right."

Like many postmodernists, but for utterly different reasons, Huston Smith deplores the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. Particularly damaging, he argues, has been the secular developmentalist model of history that "wipes out religion's key concepts, revelation and transcendence, with a stroke." Even if we agree with Enlightenment atheism,

how can we pretend to "give our students the impression that our Enlightenment-vectored courses show them what religion objectively is?" Smith identifies what he calls two "half-truths" on the part of the detractors of comparative religion that have become false "truths." First of all, "it is indeed the case that thinking is embedded in cultural-linguistic contexts and is affected by them, but to argue that those contexts are so insulated from one another that it is impossible to understand what goes on in them except from the inside is going too far." Secondly, Smith is in agreement with Kimberley Patton about the significance of Jean-François Lyotard's rejection of "the nostalgia for the whole and the one" on the grounds that, continuing to quote Lyotard, "the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take." While conceding that "wholes can be misused and have been, and differences do have their place," Smith reveals the absurdity of the postmodern notion that "wholes are bad because they produce terror" and that "differences, by contrast, are good and should be activated." The revolt against wholes, Smith concludes, namely, "metaphysics, metanarratives, and pejoratively, totalitarianism—has severely impacted the idea of Truth," caricatured in Foucault and elsewhere as little more than a power play. Smith rejects the charge that "belief in absolute Truth lands one in dogmatism" and, redeeming the millions of adherents of the religions we study over and against their learned detractors, defends "the spiritual wholeness that can come from the sense of certainty."

William Paden's essay emphasizes the inevitability of comparativism, renouncing the notion that knowledge in our field (or any field) can advance without transcontextual concepts; "[L]ike it or not," he writes, "we attend to the world not in terms of objects but in terms of categories. Wherever there is a theory, wherever there is a concept, there is a comparative program." Anticipating Jonathan Smith's notion in his "Epilogue" of the rectification of categories, Paden argues that we can always improve categories. Building on Nelson Goodman's notion of "world-making," Paden argues for the universality of the "forms" of world-making activities, including classifications, which render them comparable despite the uniqueness of culturally specific "contents." He thoroughly outlines how a "reconstructed sense of comparativism" might look through the discussion of five factors or functions: its bilateral function as a window onto both similarities and differences; its heuristic nature as a resource for further investigation and discovery; its expanded idea of patterns; its stress on controlled, aspectual focus rather

than *in toto*, wholesale analysis of traditions; and finally its careful (and respectful) distinction between meanings seen by the comparativist and the believers themselves.

In her piece, "The Magic in Miniature," Laurie Patton seeks to expose some of the assumptions that both comparative and postmodern (particularly deconstructionist) approaches unexpectedly share. In particular, she examines the uses of etymology in the work of Mircea Eliade, W. C. Smith, Jacques Derrida, and Mark Taylor. In all four works, etymology—the history of the use of particular words—remains a means by which these authors make their intellectual moves. Patton argues that this common intellectual engagement reveals an underlying, shared belief in the magical power of what a single word can "do" throughout time. After demonstrating these (for some, uncomfortable) continuities between comparative and postmodern approaches, she proposes that this common "faith" in the magical power of individual words in intellectual argument might be seen as parallel to faith in the magical power of the miniature in ritual, as recently discussed by Susan Stewart and Jonathan Smith.

A conversation with Lawrence Sullivan focuses on the implications for the field of recent neurophysiological research indicating that the intellectual act of comparison itself seems to be a kind of primeval ocular-cortical function. Sullivan suggests in this conversation that through the twin epistemological principles of pattern formation and the continual factoring of elements, human experience itself is inherently comparative. Hence, to exclude the study of religion from comparative method based on misguided, purist premises of cultural self-containment is to shut down methods that have been logically and uncontestedly available to disciplines as diverse as physiology and linguistics. Sullivan particularly emphasizes the contribution of perception itself: "It may be a mistake to think of inner consciousness and our world as entirely separate. . . . Notions of comparison can be drawn from aspects of the material universe such as the brain, where there is a promising possible convergence of the study of material structure, formation through time, and reflexive understanding of these processes of structure and development. Given what the comparative study of religious history can bring regarding human intention, imagination, and orientation, it can look forward to joining the effort."

And what, finally, of Jonathan Smith, so crucial a player in these discussions? A respondent to the 1996 AAR Panel (see note 1 on p. 18), he reflects in the epilogue presented here on the significance of his early

essay, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells." Smith softens his previously unequivocal assessment (and rejection) of the possibility of a valid comparative approach. Whereas in 1982 he wrote, "In no literature on comparison that I am familiar with has there been any presentation of rules for the production of comparisons; what few rules have been proposed pertain to their post facto evaluation," in 1999 he offers the groundwork for such a set of rules. Drawing from the few successful cases in comparative anatomy, in linguistics, folklore, and archaeology, Smith observes three such preconditions by which "genealogical comparisons" might be accomplished in the study of religion: (1) the relationship to strong theoretical interests; (2) the wealth of the data available and the level of "micro-distinctions" between those data; (3) the consequent ability of the comparison to provide "rules of difference" (as well, presumably, as those of similarities). He then highlights four "moments" in a successful comparative enterprise: description, comparison, redemption, and rectification. At the same time, Smith insists that "the end of comparison cannot be the act of comparison itself," but rather, "the aim . . . is the redescription of the exempla (each in light of the other) and a rectification of the academic categories in relation to which they have been imagined."

It is important to recognize that the authors of these essays, unlike most of their theological predecessors in the comparative study of religion, were trained as area studies specialists. They take for granted the linguistic and historical skills and the varied cultural experiences of the area studies scholar. Their work is shaped by immersion in primary texts, by interdisciplinary conversation with area studies specialists, and by collaboration with members of other religious communities. In reference to the comparative study of myths, Wendy Doniger describes the area studies perspective this way: "The way to study them is to *study* them, learning the languages in which they were composed, finding all the other myths in the constellation of which they are a part, setting them in the context of the culture in which they were spawned—in short, trying to find out what they mean to the people who have created and sustained them, not what they mean to us."⁹ This remains the area specialist's goal, even if it is imperfectly achieved. David Eckel emphasizes that the scholars of Buddhism have been trying to achieve this goal in recent years: "Buddhist scholars have been going through their own therapeutic struggle to shake off the remnants of the modernist dream—the totalizing narratives and the unified visions—to achieve a more ac-

curate understanding of the diversity and contradictions of their chosen object, the object that some, at least, still call by the name 'Buddhism.'"

Like Eckel, the comparativists in this volume are connoisseurs of difference; indeed, they are connoisseurs of the postmodern condition itself in which modernist thinking is also strong. Concerning this scholarly environment, Eckel expresses a certain optimism: "In the complexity, eclecticism, and irony of this situation I find much cause for hope." If the postmodern condition is marked by the process of decentering of the Eurocentric visions that were imposed upon the "other," this is the environment in which our contributors have pursued their work. All have traveled "out there" and conducted their work in collaboration with "others," and all have brought the "out there" into themselves and into their scholarship and reexamined their assumptions. Indeed, they recognize that in the late twentieth century, the "other" is no longer "out there" but also among us—we are all "other to one another," as Diana Eck has put it. We teach in increasingly diverse classrooms, and engage in dialogue with a range of "others," both jet-setting scholars and local believers.

As North American scholars trained after World War II, when area studies scholarship developed rapidly in the United States, our authors have long since abandoned the great modernist building in which they were schooled, to use David Eckel's apt metaphor, with its totalizing and essentializing architecture. Now, like postcolonial citizens with multiple passports, historians of religions dwell alternately in the polyglot villages of area studies programs and in established religion departments in the secular university. Many of us share Eckel's experience of finding that our old books containing the grand systems of comparative religion have gathered dust upon the shelves. Referring to one of the more important of these books, David White remarks that "a cursory re-reading of the 1959 *The History of Religions* leads . . . to the conclusion that the days of the history of religions metanarratives chronicled in that work are well behind us. Our thinking has changed, just as our world has changed since that time."

Much of the postmodern critique, then, has long resonated within the discipline of the history of religions and led to a revisioned comparativism, but without undermining its old Enlightenment purpose of enlarging our understanding and commitment to a wider embrace of humanity. "I am unwilling to close the comparativist shop," Doniger asserts, "just because it is being picketed by people whose views I

happen, by and large, to share." Laurie Patton argues that in rejecting the static, generic comparisons of the past, postmodernism also urges moral engagement with the world, like the previous generation of comparative religionists. Having listened to the cultural particularists, Jonathan Herman proposes that "the best hope for rigorous comparative study is to work within the prevailing—and I believe, well-placed—concern for context, but to do so with the renewed methodological self-consciousness and a receptivity to the types of resonances that may indicate connections buried beneath the surface." Thus our contributors show their indebtedness to the postmodern critique while retaining the older humanist goals.

While today's historians of religions are not necessarily secular humanists, the contributors to this volume are all humanists in the general sense of their commitment to understanding the moral and spiritual condition of humanity in all its variety. They are also committed to the pragmatic, contested, and negotiated nature of the comparative enterprise. Unlike their predecessors, they do not see themselves as taking a God's-eye point of view—making totalizing claims and "finding" universal sacred realities. Nor do they believe that positivistic forms of postmodernism are the only alternative. "It is possible," argues White, "for comparative studies . . . to steer a middle course—between the universalism of our modernist forebears and the nihilism of certain of our postmodern contemporaries—through the opening afforded by the cognitive activity of reading and interpretation."

No one in this volume is willing to follow the postmodernist strategy of today's reductionisms—the turning of religion's perceived truths into merely exploitive systems of power, the fantasies of the weak, or the sociobiological strategies of the human species. Nor do our authors practice theological apologetics. Nevertheless, as Kimberley Patton points out, the similarities that comparativists perceive between different religious traditions are often realities for the believers themselves: "If human religious thought did not function in equivalencies, much missionary thought would have fallen on deaf ears, rather than, in many cases, relying so heavily on the translation of new concepts or divine figures into indigenous ones."

To those who would deny the possibility of any universal understanding across cultures or the possibility of shared concepts of virtue, as Alisdair MacIntyre does in *Whose Justice?* *Whose Rationality?*¹⁰ Huston Smith responds by referring to the simple fact that Maasai warriors with whom he had absolutely nothing in common and with whom he

could not communicate saved his life in East Africa. MacIntyre's naive assumption that there might exist entirely self-contained cultures in today's polyglot, multicultural, postcolonial world is, of course, a philosopher's fantasy. MacIntyre intends this concept to support the culturalist's claims about the hyper-particularized character of human existence. Such a view, Doniger points out, "seems to deny any shared base to members of the same culture, much less to humanity as a whole."

As globally oriented historians of religion, we can affirm with Doniger that there is no periphery to humanity, but only, of course, if we use the term "humanity" as with its inclusive Enlightenment meaning.

Nevertheless, as Jonathan Z. Smith rightly maintains in a more recent work, *Drudgery Divine*, "[T]here is nothing 'natural' about the enterprise of comparison."¹¹ This means that the comparativist must be acutely self-conscious of her task, not ignoring differences, despite the "oneness" of humanity. "A newer comparative frame," writes William Paden, "will neither ignore resemblances nor simplistically collapse them into superficial sameness; and it will neither ignore differences nor magnify them." The newer comparativism, he continues, "unavoidably involves the factor of reflexivity: self-awareness of the role of the comparativist as enculturated, classifying, and purposive subject, a cleaner sense of the process and practice of selectivity, and an exploratory rather than hegemonic sense of the pursuit of knowledge." For Diana Eck, scholarly reflexivity involves a self-consciousness about the scholar's situatedness and voice: "[W]henver I write or speak, I must be clear about which argument I am currently participating in. . . . We are, as my colleague Michael Sandel has put it, 'multiply situated selves.' We speak and write in multiple contexts—religious, academic, civic, familial. Recognizing this is what being aware of 'voice' means. As teachers and writers, we must work to discern clearly the distinctive voices we ourselves speak, and when we shift lanes, we are obliged to use a turn signal."

Just where do our comparativists stand on the question of religious truth claims and the existence of religious universals? None assumes the scholar must automatically endorse or deny them. Certainly, as Huston Smith and Benjamin Ray emphasize, the pursuit of meaning and understanding requires judgments about truths that are commonly perceived. But no one wishes to turn today's universities into theological seminaries of perennial religion. The scholar's first aim is intelligibility, and she must make up her mind about the reality claims and moral principles she can accept, and whether she has discovered shared religious truths.

All of our contributors recognize that it is only by identifying our common as well as separate cultural and religious beliefs that we gain greater understanding of ourselves and others. All implicitly accept Huston Smith's recognition that as members of secular universities they are engaged in "Enlightenment-vectored" teaching and research that is value-centered and morally engaged. This involves investigating religious meanings for their full moral and spiritual significance in peoples' lives and their role in shaping cultural systems.

For the historian of religion whose work concerns the ancient world, of course there can be no "historical" or dialogical interaction with the peoples and traditions of the past. There can, however, be moral, analytical, and even spiritual engagement with them—and in turn they can and will affect the historian. As Kimberley Patton writes, "[I]n the study of religion we are not playing a game that is purely intellectual, one that will leave us unaffected as we go about our business." Emboldened by J. Z. Smith's vision of the scholarly challenge involved in comparative study, she emphasizes both its risks and its rewards: "I know it now to be a bit more like the juggling of torches; either we will mishandle them and they will burn and wither us, or else our faces will begin to glow." The very concepts and terms of the scholar's analysis, whether it be of the past or the present, are enmeshed in contemporary social, religious, and academic arguments which the engaged scholar must confront if she is to examine their value. Winnifred Sullivan emphasizes, for example, that "a comparative perspective would give needed perspective" to the study of American religion which "occurs in the context of a highly politicized and polemical local debate concerning the interpretation of the First Amendment . . . and the appropriate location of religion in contemporary American life."

Finally, as this latter statement implies, our contributors' principled aim of increasing understanding is implicitly linked to wider intellectual, moral, and ideological norms, indeed, to the metanarratives of Western political liberalism: respecting cultural differences, recognizing the rights of others, listening to multiple voices, discovering shared truths, achieving mutual understanding, and developing what Martha Nussbaum calls "normative skepticism."¹² In postmodernist language, these goals belong to the West's totalizing vision of free society, equal rights, and distributive justice, to which our comparativists are committed. For them, universal moral principles may change, but they cannot be abandoned for the sake of solipsistic relativism. The goals of mutual under-

standing and self-critical scholarship are, as these essays demonstrate, the foundation of any situated scholar's work.

Our authors do not, then, adopt the modernist pose of "value-free" scholarship. Laurie Patton observes that "comparison reinforces ethical relations between scholars and the objects of their study" and asserts that "the comparative move and the ethical move can be one and the same." For Benjamin Ray, moral engagement ought to be one of the goals of comparative study—the tearing down of hideous stereotypes of the "other" and the encounter with moral and political issues that affect the communities we study.

The contributors would agree that postmodernism in its extreme form goes too far in rejecting all metanarratives and all essentializing and totalizing claims. As the critical theorist Terry Eagleton has pointed out, postmodern scholars committed to equal rights and distributive justice can reject the totalizing concepts of anti-racism and political emancipation, which comparative scholarship exposes, only on pain of contradiction.¹³ The global story of imperialism and colonialism is, in fact, one of the metanarratives which the postmodernist critic takes as a basic premise. Finally, Eagleton reminds us that "it was by virtue of our shared human nature that we had ethical and political claims upon one another, not for any more parochial, paternalist, or sheerly cultural reason."¹⁴ The authors of these essays reassert the old humanistic view that it is only by coming to understand our shared cultural and religious beliefs and practices that we gain greater understanding of ourselves and others.

In sum, our contributors argue that scholars can risk posing a comparative framework not to reach closure in service of a particular theory, nor to achieve moral judgment or to gain intellectual control over the "other," but to empower mutual dialogue and the quest for understanding. Although no author presents a simple formula or definitive method—an inadvisable strategy—each offers the vision of a renewed comparative enterprise. It is a vision that attends as strongly to difference as to similarity, while recognizing that both depend upon the scholar's choices and assumptions. This renewed and self-conscious comparativeism is eclectic and circumscribed, dialogical in style and heuristic in nature; and it is self-confidently situated within interdisciplinary area studies programs and religion departments of the secular academy. Its ultimate purpose is not to create more generic patterns of the sacred in support of grand theories but to enlarge our understanding of religion

in all its variety and, in the process, to gain renewed insight into ourselves and others.

While comparative religion must come to terms with its past, the contributors to this volume argue that it can be contextualized and refashioned so as to yield significant insight into particular aspects of religious ideas and practices, while still recognizing that comparison is the scholar's own *inventio*—the “magic” of creative insight and mutual understanding.

In titling this volume—which seeks to rehabilitate the comparative approach—*A Magic Still Dwells*, we note that the term “magic” has undergone its own rehabilitation. Particularly in studies of Mediterranean antiquity through the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, and in Indo-European thought,¹⁵ the term “magic” emerges as a concept describing religious practices and sciences that involve internally consistent, tightly logical relationships between a wide variety of physical elements and metaphysical principles of power. As Bruce Lincoln writes, “‘Magic’ . . . is not idle superstition . . . it is a system of non-Aristotelian, homologic causality, whereby items are considered capable of acting on one another.”¹⁶

The argument that in the case of comparative religion the items compared really don't “act” on one other except in the scholar's mind can hardly be defended, as Diana Eck shows: on-the-ground interaction between traditions has never been more prevalent than today. But even in scholarly discourse, it is time to recognize that our discipline is more than a scholarly language-game with no relationship to its purported field of inquiry. Like magic, comparative religion can be an efficacious act of conjuring, of delineating and evoking homologous relationships while simultaneously holding in view, and thus in fruitful tension, undisputed differentials. In the act of comparison, the two original components juxtaposed in scholarly discourse have the potential to produce a third thing, a magical thing, that is different from its parents. Not only is it “different,” but it can illumine truths about both of them in ways that would have been impossible through the exclusive contemplation of either of them alone.

Notes

1. This volume grows out of two panels presented under the title “The Comparative Study of Religion: Contemporary Challenges and Re-

sponses” at the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion in 1995 and 1996.

2. David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 16.

3. James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” in *Writing Culture*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 119; Stephen A. Tyler, “Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document,” *ibid.*, p. 139.

4. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Afterword: Religious Studies: Whither (with) and Why?” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7–4 (1995): 407–414.

5. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 21; 25–26.

6. Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

7. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map: Is Not Territory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), p. 240.

8. Diana Eck, *Banaras, City of Light* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

9. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 16.

10. Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

11. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 51.

12. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of the Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 136 ff.

13. Cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

15. See, among many others, the works of Christopher Faraone, Dirk Obbink, Hans Dieter Betz, Fritz Graf, John Gager, Albert Henrichs, Sarah Iles Johnson, Alan Segal, Henry McGuire, Roy Kotansky, Rebecca Lesses, Bruce Lincoln, Susan Stewart, and Jonathan Z. Smith himself.

16. Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 110.

IN COMPARISON A MAGIC DWELLS

JONATHAN Z. SMITH

If I read a myth, select certain elements from it, and arrange them in a pattern, that "structure" is bound to be in the material unless I have misread the text or demonstrably misread it. The fact of its being there does not, however, indicate that my arrangement is anything more than my personal whim. . . . A myth is therefore bound to have a number of possible "structures" that are both in the material and in the eye of the beholder. The problem is to decide between them and to determine the significance of any of them.

David Maybury-Lewis

We stand at a quite self-conscious moment in the history of the study of Judaism. There are a variety of ways of articulating this self-consciousness, perhaps the most relevant formulation being our awareness that our scholarly inquiries find their setting (indeed, their legitimacy) within the academy. This provides not only the context for our endeavors, but their *raison d'être*. This is to say, no matter how intrinsically interesting and worthwhile the study of the complex histories and varieties of the several Judaisms may be, they gain academic significance primarily by their capacity to illuminate the work of other scholars of other religious traditions, and by the concomitant desire of students of Judaism to be illuminated by the labors of these other scholars. Judaism, for the academy, serves as *exempli gratia*. In the words of Jacob Neusner:

I believe that section meetings in the history of Judaism [at the American Academy of Religion] should be so planned as to interest scholars in diverse areas of religious studies. If these [section] meetings do not win the attention and participation of a fair cross section of scholars in the field as a whole, then they will not materially contribute to the study of religion in this country. There is no reason for the study of Judaism to be treated as a set of special cases and of matters so technical that only initiates can follow discussions—or would even want to.

This, I would submit, is a new voice and a new confidence. It is that of the study of Judaism come of age!

To accomplish such an agendum, it is axiomatic that careful attention must be given to matters of description and comparison—even more, that description be framed in light of comparative interests in such a way as to further comparison.

I

For a student of religion such as myself to accept willingly the designation “historian of religion” is to submit to a lifelong sentence of ambiguity. I cannot think of two more difficult terms than “history” and “religion.” Their conjunction, as may be witnessed by every programmatic statement from this putative discipline that I am familiar with, serves only to further the confusion. It is necessary to stress this at the outset. If Judaism may assert no special privilege, neither can the historian of religion. The reflections embodied in this essay make no claim to be the result of clear vision from the “head of Pisgah.” It is not the case that there is a model “out there” that needs only to be applied to the study of Judaism. There is no consensual format into which the scholar of Judaism needs only to feed his data. To the contrary, I intend this essay to be an exercise in collaboration. We need to think together about the issues presented to us by the assignment to be attentive to description and comparison. For me, this implies some attempt to map out the options in order to clarify what is at issue. The issues might as well be discussed in terms of Judaism.

I take my point of departure from the observation that each scholar of religion, in his way, is concerned with phenomena that are historical in the simple, grammatical sense of the term, that is to say, with events and expressions from the past, reconceived vividly. The scholar of religion is, therefore, concerned with dimensions of memory and remem-

brance—whether they be the collective labor of society or the work of the individual historian’s craft.

The earliest full theory of memory (setting aside the Platonic notion of *anamnesis*) is in Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscencia* 451b, which describes memory as an experience of “something either similar or contrary to what we seek or else from that which is contiguous to it.” Within discourse on memory, this triad remains more or less intact through a succession of writers as distinct in character but as similar in excellence as Augustine (*Confessions* 10.19) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*, chaps. 5–7). In the complex literature on mnemotechnics, it led to the elaborate Late Antique through Renaissance handbooks on visualization and *topoi*,¹ while, shorn of its specific context in memory, it was developed into the notion of the Laws of Association which so preoccupied the philosophical generations of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Hartley, and Mill, receiving its definitive history in the famous appendix, “Note D**,” in William Hamilton’s edition of the *Works* of Thomas Reid.

As many will recognize, the formulation of the Laws of Association has played a seminal role in the development of theory in the study of religion. E. B. Tylor, in his first comparative work, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (first edition, 1865), postulated that a “principle of association” supplied the underlying logic for magical praxis: “any association of ideas in a man’s mind, the vaguest similarity of form or position, even a mere coincidence in time, is sufficient to enable the magician to work from association in his own mind, to association in the material world.”² J. G. Frazer, building explicitly on Tylor, developed a typology of magic:

If my analysis of the magician’s logic is correct, its two great principles turn out to be merely two different misapplications of the association of ideas. Homoeopathic magic is founded on the association of ideas by similarity; contagious magic is founded on the association of ideas by contiguity.

And Frazer repeats Tylor’s charge that magic is a confusion of a subjective relationship with an objective one. Where this confusion is not present, the Laws of Association “yield science; illegitimately applied they yield magic.”³

It requires but a small leap to relate these considerations of the Laws of Association in memory and magic to the enterprise of comparison in the human sciences.⁴ For, as practiced by scholarship, *comparison has been chiefly an affair of the recollection of similarity. The chief explanation for the significance of comparison has been contiguity.* The pro-

cedure is homeopathic. The theory is built on contagion. The issue of difference has been all but forgotten.

Regardless of the individual scholar's theoretical framework, regardless of the necessary fiction of the scientific mode of presentation, most comparison has not been the result of discovery. Borrowing Edmundo O'Gorman's historiographic distinction between discovery as the finding of something one has set out to look for and invention as the subsequent realization of novelty one has not intended to find, we must label comparison an invention.⁵ In no literature on comparison that I am familiar with has there been any presentation of rules for the production of comparisons; what few rules have been proposed pertain to their post facto evaluation.

Perhaps this is the case because, for the most part, the scholar has not set out to make comparisons. Indeed, he has been most frequently attracted to a particular datum by a sense of its uniqueness. But often, at some point along the way, as if unbidden, as a sort of *déjà vu*, the scholar remembers that he has seen "it" or "something like it" before; he experiences what Coleridge described in an early essay in *The Friend* as the result of "the hooks-and-eyes of the memory."⁶ This experience, this unintended consequence of research, must then be accorded significance and provided with an explanation. In the vast majority of instances in the history of comparison, this subjective experience is projected as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like. It is a process of working from a psychological association to an historical one; it is to assert that similarity and continuity have causal effect. But this, to revert to the language of Victorian anthropology, is not science but magic. To quote from a masterful study of this issue from a representative of one of the more lively and unbarrased of the comparative disciplines, comparative literature:

When we say that *A* has influenced *B*, we mean that after . . . analysis we can discern a number of significant similarities between the works of *A* and *B*. . . . So far we have established no influence; we have only documented what I call affinity. For influence presupposes some manner of causality.⁷

We are left with a dilemma that can be stated in stark form: *Is comparison an enterprise of magic or science?* Thus far, comparison appears to be more a matter of memory than a project for inquiry; it is more impressionistic than methodical. It depends on what Henri Bergson, in his study of memory, termed

an intermediate knowledge, [derived] from a confused sense of the *striking quality* or resemblance: this sense [is] equally remote from generality fully conceived and from individuality clearly perceived.⁸

This may be tested against a review of the major modes of comparison.

In an essay written some years ago (and rather sarcastically entitled, to translate the tag from Horace, "When you add a little to a little, the result will be a great heap"), I tried to map out a paradigm for comparison, based on a survey of some 2500 years of the literature of anthropological comparison.⁹ Four basic modes or styles of comparison were isolated: the ethnographic, the encyclopaedic, the morphological, and the evolutionary.

The *ethnographic* is based essentially on travelers' impressions. Something "other" has been encountered and perceived as surprising either in its similarity or dissimilarity to what is familiar "back home." Features are compared which strike the eye of the traveler; comparison functions primarily as a means for overcoming strangeness. As such, ethnographic comparisons are frequently idiosyncratic, depending on intuition, a chance association, or the knowledge one happens to have. There is nothing systematic in such comparisons, they lack any basis, and so, in the end, they strike us as uninteresting, petty, and unrevealing. In Lévi-Strauss's critique of Malinowski, such comparison loses "the means of distinguishing between the general truths to which it aspires and the trivialities with which it must be satisfied."¹⁰

The *encyclopaedic* tradition was not limited by the external circumstances of travel or contact. Rather than presenting items from a single culture that had been encountered by the author, as the ethnographic mode characteristically did, the encyclopaedic style offered a topical arrangement of cross-cultural material culled, most usually, from reading. The data are seldom either explicitly compared or explained. They simply cohabit within some category, inviting comparison by their coexistence, but providing no clues as to how this comparison might be undertaken. The encyclopaedic mode consists of contextless lists held together by mere surface associations in which the overwhelming sense is that of the exotic. Malinowski's description remains apt when he wrote of "the piecemeal items of information, of customs, beliefs and rules of conduct floating in the air" joined together in "lengthy litanies of threaded statement which make us anthropologists feel silly and the savage look ridiculous."¹¹

The *morphological* approach is more complex with regard to the theoretical assumptions that are entailed (largely derived from Romantic *Naturphilosophie*). For the purposes of this essay, we can largely abstain from a consideration of these matters. Fundamentally, morphology allows the arrangement of individual items in a hierarchical series of increased organization and complexity. It is a logical, formal progression which ignores categories of space (*habitat*) and time. It has as its necessary presupposition an *a priori* notion of economy in which there are relatively few "original elements" from which complex systems are generated: the "all-in-all" and the "all-in-every-part." Both internal and external forces operate on these "original elements" to produce variety and differentiation in a manner which allows the morphologist to compare individuals in a morphological series using rubrics such as "representative/aberrant," "progressive/degraded," "synthetic/isolated," "persistent/prophetic," and to compare the individual with the generative "original element" (the archetype), either through direct comparison or as "recapitulation" or "repetition." The discovery of the archetype, as represented in the literature, has a visionary quality; it appears to be the result of a sudden, intuitive leap to simplicity. Characteristic of morphological presentations will be a dated account of the vision—Goethe gazing at a palmetto while strolling in an Italian botanical garden on 17 April 1787; Lorenz Oken accidentally stumbling over a deer's skull while walking in the Harz Forest in the spring of 1806. Nevertheless, in both the biological and the human sciences, morphology has produced major comparisons that have stood the test of time.

The *evolutionary* approach, which factors in the dynamics of change and persistence over time in response to adaptation to a given environment, has produced useful theory and comparisons in the biological sciences. I know of nothing in principle that would prevent fruitful application to the human sciences as well.¹² However, what is usually known as the evolutionary approach within the human sciences, related inextricably to what the late nineteenth century termed "The Comparative Method," is not fruitful, nor does it represent a responsible use of evolutionary theory. Evolution, as represented by the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century practitioners of anthropology and comparative religions, was an illegitimate combination of the morphological, ahistorical approach to comparison and the new temporal framework of the evolutionists. This impossible and contradictory combination allowed the comparativist to draw his data without regard to time or place and,

then, locate them in a series from the simplest to the more complex, adding the assumption that the former was chronologically as well as logically prior. While such approaches to cultural materials are still practiced, albeit on a more modest scale, such attempts came quickly under the sort of criticisms leveled by F. Boas:

Historical inquiry must be considered the critical test that science must require before admitting facts as evidence. By means of it, the comparability of the collected material must be tested and uniformity of processes must be demanded as proof of comparability . . . comparisons [must] be restricted to those phenomena which have been proven to be the effects of the same cause.¹³

I suspect that the majority of my readers would agree with this statement as well as with its concomitant stricture that comparison be limited to cultural artifacts contiguous in space and time—the method of "limited" or "controlled" comparison.¹⁴ Unfortunately, these statements and strictures have also been used as the smug excuse for jettisoning the comparative enterprise and for purging scholarship of all but the most limited comparisons. As the Stranger from Elea reminds us, "A cautious man should above all be on his guard against resemblances; they are a very slippery sort of thing" (*Sophist* 231a).

We stand before a considerable embarrassment. Of the four chief modes of comparison in the human sciences, two, the ethnographic and the encyclopaedic, are in principle inadequate as comparative activities, although both have other important and legitimate functions. The evolutionary would be capable in principle of being formulated in a satisfactory manner, but I know of no instances of its thorough application to cultural phenomena. What is often understood to be the evolutionary method of comparison embodies a deep contradiction which necessitates its abandonment. This leaves only the morphological, carried over with marked success from the biological to the cultural by O. Spengler, and which has a massive exemplar in religious studies in the work of M. Eliade, whose endeavor is thoroughly morphological in both presuppositions and technical vocabulary, even though, in specific instances, its principles of comparison remain unnecessarily obscure. Yet, few students of religion would be attracted by this alternative. Because of the Romantic, Neoplatonic Idealism of its philosophical presuppositions, because for methodologically rigorous and internally defensible reasons, it is designed to exclude the historical. The only option appears to be no option at all.

In the past two decades, three other proposals have been made: the

statistical (especially as embodied in the Human Relations Area Files [HRAF] model), the structural, and "systematic description and comparison."

The statistical methods proposed are, without doubt, essential for evaluating comparisons in any mode, but they provide little, in themselves, by way of rules for the generation of comparisons. The only programmatic proposition, the HRAF project, is essentially a refinement of the encyclopaedic mode and is subject, with appropriate qualifications, to the strictures recited above.¹⁵ However, the various discussions generated by this approach have yielded, as an urgent item on any comparativist's agenda, the question of the isolation of a unit for comparison with an invariant frame of reference. At present, the answers are too easily divided into those that resemble the ethnographic and those that resemble the encyclopaedic.

Structuralist comparison is more complex, and I shall be exceedingly brusque lest I distract from my theme. In terms of the descriptions presented above, I would classify structuralism as a subset of morphology, although with Marxist rather than Idealist presuppositions. The formal, comparative procedures of structural analysis appear to me to be identical with those in morphology. While I welcome the shift to Marx, who seems to me to be the necessary base for any responsible anthropological approach to culture, I do not find, as yet, that the structuralist program has come to clarity on the historical. To the degree that it is comparative, it falls prey to the strictures on morphology already presented; to the degree that it has been interestingly historical (e.g., M. Foucault), the comparative has been largely eschewed.

This leaves the proposal for systematic description and comparison which will be the subject of the third portion of this essay. To anticipate, although this is the least developed of the recent proposals, it is my suspicion that this may be but an elegant form of the ethnographic to the degree that the descriptive is emphasized, and the comparisons thus far proposed remain contiguous.

The new proposals have not allowed us to escape our dilemma. Each appears to be but a variant of one of the four modes of comparison. The embarrassment remains. The only mode to survive scrutiny, the morphological, is the one which is most offensive to us by its refusal to support a thoroughly historical method and a set of theoretical presuppositions which grant sufficient gravity to the historical encapsulation of culture. Therefore, I turn briefly to a consideration of a historical proposal from within the morphological mode.

II

Perhaps the most difficult literature from the past history of the human sciences for the modern reader to appreciate is the vast library that might be assembled on the hoary question of diffusion versus parallel or independent invention. It is a matter which has preoccupied comparativists from Herodotus to the present, and it is one of the few places where the validity of comparative evidence has been explicitly and continuously debated. From the perspective of our endeavor, this debate becomes of interest to the degree that it can be seen as a tension between a concession to the centrality of historical processes over against ahistorical constructs such as the "psychic unity of mankind."

It is to be regretted that much of this debate is so arid. Where there has been color and interest, it is usually the product of a long line of distinguished monomaniacs from G. Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry through Thor Heyerdahl. But there is one group among this number that I would want to argue deserves further attention, not so much for accomplishment as for endeavor. I refer to the Pan-Babylonian school, whose name is sufficient to drive usually calm scholars to a frenzy of vituperation. "Pan-babylonianism!—the word awakens the idea of an extreme generalization . . . of fantastic audacities."¹⁶ From our perspective, their prime "audacity" was the daring attempt to historicize morphology from within.

To put the matter as succinctly as possible, what the Pan-Babylonian school introduced was the notion of a total system, to use their favorite word, a *Weltschauung*. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Culture was removed from the biological to the realm of human artifact. It is man's intellectual and spiritual creation.¹⁷ Concomitantly, the object of religion, for them the most total expression of "world view," is man's cultural and intellectual world, not the world of nature.¹⁸ It is the inner relationships of the "elements," their system, their internal logic and coherence, that validates a "world view," not conformity to nature. Therefore, the "world view" may be articulated in a rigorously systematic manner. Hence the "audacity" of the founder of the school, Hugo Winckler:

I claim to have established a formula which explains every conception of Babylonian theology. In mathematics, a formula is a general expression for the reciprocal connection of isolated facts, which, when it has been stated once for all, explains the phenomenon and settles the question. One may prove the truth of a formula by countless examples, illustrate it and show its

practical utility, but when once the root principle has been found, there is nothing further to discover.¹⁹

The school—and in what follows I will summarize the work of Alfred Jeremias as a typical and eloquent example—takes its departure from the fact that, while anthropology brings ever new evidence for the contemporary “Stone Age” man (the “savage”), the then newly recovered and deciphered literature of ancient Near Eastern civilizations reveals a cultured, urban, rational, and spiritual man. Jeremias argued that we find, “not hordes of barbarians, but an established government under priestly control” in which “the whole thought and conduct of the people were governed by a uniform intellectual conception . . . a scientific and, at the same time, a religious system.” This “system” had, as its chief aim, “to discover and explain the first causes of visible things,” these being discerned as a “microcosmic image of the celestial world.”²⁰

Jeremias concludes that the evolutionists are factually wrong, for there is no sign of nature worship and the like in the Near Eastern materials, no sign of slow development. Of more gravity, the evolutionary approach failed to account for the “inner unity of the cults”²¹ or, when it did, turned to notions of independent or parallel development based on a presupposition, which lacks all basis in fact, of the “psychological unity” of mankind.

Common to both these critiques, is the Pan-Babylonian notion of a complex, well-integrated, primordial system at the base of culture. The incremental hypothesis of evolution can be rejected because it cannot yield this whole, but rather only a series of parts; the thesis of independent or parallel development can be rejected because it cannot account for systematic similarity (i.e., it can point only to highly general resemblances or parallel single motifs, not to their similar formal combination). Hence the school’s preoccupation with diffusion.

The ancient Oriental conception of the universe entirely precludes the possibility of independent origin in different places by the exact repetition of certain distinctly marked features that only migration and diffusion can satisfactorily explain.²²

In his argument, Jeremias breaks with a set of explanations which have hitherto characterized most comparative endeavors: single-trait comparisons which fail to show how they are integrated into similar systems; “mental unity” which yields general similarities but cannot account for agreement of details or structures; borrowing, which will not allow the “specific character” of a nation to be expressed. He does so

by postulating a rich model of cultural tradition that has three levels: (1) that of “world view,” which is characterized by “imposing uniformity”; (2) that of “culture complex,” the particular *Weltbild* or *Gestalt* of a given people; and (3) the linguistic manifestation of the interaction of these two. It is the “world view” which is diffused, modified by a particular “culture complex” and linguistically particularized in a text with its own quite specific context.

To put this model in a more contemporary translation. The “world view” is expressed by the unconscious syntactics of intellectual thought when applied to first principles. The “culture complex” provides the semantics—in Jeremias’s view, a lexicon self-consciously transmitted by elites. The particular text is pragmatics, an individual expression reflecting, both consciously and unconsciously, the conjunction of syntax and semantics within a personal and historical environment. Or, to translate into yet more recent terminology, the “world view” is the unconscious deep structure, the “culture complex” is *langue*, the text is *parole*.

While the details of the various interpretations and patterns generated by this approach are fascinating, especially as many of them have been taken over in wholesale fashion, without acknowledgment, in the works of subsequent historians of religion, I give only one concrete example of their most imitated pattern.

Given the basic law of correspondence between the celestial world and the terrestrial, Jeremias postulates two ideal types which he designates the “Babylonian” and the “Canaanite” (he insists that the names be written with sanitary pips). The “Babylonian” is “original,” it is a “purely astronomical theory,” a cosmological pattern, which maintains the general correspondence of microcosm/macrocsm and traces world history as a cycle leading from chaos to creation to redemption by a savior sent by the creative deity to overcome the forces of chaos. The “Canaanite” is a secondary, “corrupt” system. (Corruption is a technical term in morphology.) Here a seasonal, naturalistic interpretation has been given to the “Babylonian” cosmic cycle: the god of sun and spring who, after his victory over winter, built (or rebuilt) the world and took charge of its destiny. These two patterns, representing dual aspects of a “single, intellectual system,” “spread throughout the world and, exerting a different intellectual influence over every civilization according to the peculiar character of each, developed many new forms.” But each remains based on “die gleichen Grundlagen des Geisteslebens.”²³

Of course, the Pan-Babylonian school was wrong. At the factual level, its exponents placed too great a reliance on the high antiquity of Near

Eastern astrological texts, dating them almost two thousand years too early. On the theoretical level, they placed too great a reliance on diffusion. Yet, in many ways they were right. They saw clearly the need to ground comparison and patterns in a historical process, saw clearly the need to develop a complex model of tradition and the mechanisms for its transmission, saw clearly the need to balance generalities and particularities in a structure which integrated both, saw clearly the priority of comparative systematics over the continued cataloging of isolated comparative exempla, saw clearly the power of pattern (and hence, of comparison) as a device for interpretation. They bequeathed to us this rich heritage of possibilities—and they bequeathed to us the problems as well. The two chief options followed by students of religion since then have been either to continue its diffusionist program shorn of its systematic and theoretical depth (e.g., the Myth-Ritual school) or to cut loose the pattern and the systematics from history (e.g., Eliade). We have yet to develop the responsible alternative: the integration of a complex notion of pattern and system with an equally complex notion of history.

As will be detected, with my evocation of the ghost of the Pan-Babylonian school, I have been slowly moving closer to the matter of systematics and to the particularized portion of this essay, that of describing and comparison in the history of Judaism. Not that the preceding has been remote. For example, I know of no idea so influential on biblical scholars, students of Judaism and of religion than the groundless distinction, first generated by the Pan-Babylonian school, between cyclical and linear time, the former associated by them with the Near East and myth, the latter, with Israel and history.²⁴

III

It is most likely an accident, but it is also a fact, that three of the most distinguished, creative, native-born American historians of religion should have devoted substantial portions of their academic careers to undertaking systematic descriptions and comparisons of early Judaism: George F. Moore, Erwin R. Goodenough, and Jacob Neusner.

It is the task of the third part of this essay to review their work from the limited perspective of the considerations on comparison already advanced.

Considering its date of publication (1927) in the midst of the controversies over the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and his own considerable

comparative labors as the holder of one of the first endowed chairs in history of religions in this country, George Foot Moore's *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* is remarkably, in fact deliberately, free from explicit comparisons. Indeed, one of Moore's central theses (against Bousset and other members of the school)²⁵ is that Judaism is incomparable as a religious system. An examination of his work with an eye toward comparison reveals a consistent pattern. (1) "Normative Judaism" is autochthonous. Any comparisons which imply significant borrowing are to be denied.²⁶ (2) Therefore, the largest class of comparisons to normative Judaism are negative. They are used to assert the difference, the incomparability of the tradition.²⁷ (3) The second largest group of comparisons are internal, to other forms of Judaism: the biblical, the Alexandrian or hellenistic, the Samaritan. These comparisons are occasionally used to measure the distance from the normative, but are more usually employed to assert the overall unity of the system.²⁸ (4) Where non-Jewish parallels can be adduced, where borrowing may be proposed, is always in the area of "nonnormative" Judaism, in those materials "ignored" or rejected by the normative tradition. Hence, the greatest concentration of comparisons will be found in the seventh part of Moore's work, devoted to "the hereafter," which focused on apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic literature.²⁹ In other rare instances, when borrowing or imitation is postulated, Moore emphasizes that it occurs in "late" post-Tannaitic texts, materials presumably "leaking" out from under control.³⁰ (5) A final class of comparisons may be called pedagogic. These result from Moore's presumption that he is writing for a largely Christian audience. Thus, while he is usually at pains to deny Jewish precedents for Christian doctrine (especially those associated with elements in Roman Catholic dogma),³¹ he is prepared to offer analogies to Protestant religious doctrines, presumably to help his reader understand.³²

I can find only two interesting theoretical statements on comparison within the three volumes of *Judaism*. Both raise the question of the systematic, although in quite different ways. The first is the last paragraph of the work, the conclusion of the section on the nonnormative "hereafter":

Borrowings in religion, however, at least in the field of ideas [in a note Moore writes, "the adoption of foreign rites and the adaptation of myths are another matter"] are usually in the nature of the appropriation of things in the possession of another which the borrower recognizes in all good faith as belonging to himself, ideas which, when once they become known to him, are

seen to be the necessary implications or compliments of his own . . . [for example] the Persian scheme must have been most strongly commended by the fact that it seemed to be the logical culmination of conceptions of retribution which were deeply rooted in Judaism itself.³³

While I do not quarrel necessarily with the notion in this passage (it reminds me of the exciting work of scholars such as Robin Horton),³⁴ Moore nowhere clarifies the meaning of terms such as "necessary implication" or "logical culmination," which hint at a generative, systematic logic. Rather, one feels when reading this paragraph as if one is in the presence of that remarkable figure in Borges's narrative, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote," who labored for years to produce a manuscript which repeated, word-for-word, Cervantes's masterpiece.³⁵ Jews did not borrow, for what they "borrowed" turned out to be already their own.

The second passage is the closest Moore comes to the articulation of an indigenous system—alas, it concerns the Levitical Code and not Tannaitic materials:

They were ancient customs, the origin and reason of which had long since been forgotten. Some of them are found among other Semites, or more widely; some were, so far as we know, peculiar to Israel; but as a whole, or, we may say as a system, they were distinctive customs which the Jews had inherited from their ancestors with a religious sanction in the two categories of holy and polluted. Other peoples had their own [systems] . . . and these systems also were distinctive.³⁶

But the thought remains undeveloped. We are left with only the atomism: each religion has one or more systems; they are each distinctive; they are each incomparable.

Neither of these statements is developed further in Moore. They remain as hints of the possibility of describing systems with generative logics of their own.

What Moore did accomplish in *Judaism* in an explicit fashion requires no rehearsal. Despite his statement that he has "avoided imposing on the matter a systematic disposition which is foreign to it and to the Jewish thought of the times,"³⁷ Moore applied to the Tannaitic documents a traditional Christian dogmatic outline ("Revealed Religion," "Idea of God," and the like), arranging his materials in a synthetic sketch in which the discrete items, despite his historical introduction and his catalog of sources, are treated ahistorically without individuality. Moore's *Judaism*, although confined to a single tradition, is clearly in the encyclopaedic mode. What he produced, in a most elegant and

thoughtful form, was, essentially, an expanded chapter on Judaism from his two-volume textbook, *History of Religions*.³⁸ The suppressed member of the comparison throughout Moore's work is Protestant Christianity; it is this comparison that provides the categories for description and the occasions for exegesis. But, as it is suppressed, we are left with a dogmatic formulation of incomparability and an equally dogmatic description. Moore's work is unfortunately typical of most Jewish and Christian handbooks on Judaism. It is the supreme achievement of this genre, but it provides no model for our inquiry.

The work of Erwin R. Goodenough richly deserves a monograph that has yet to be written. From our limited perspective, he presents himself as, perhaps, the most interesting single author. For, unlike Moore, from whom he self-consciously distances himself, comparisons abound, between Judaism and other Mediterranean cults, between "hellenistic" and "normative" Judaism, between iconographic and literary materials. The comparisons are in the service of both a complex (and largely psychological) general theory of religion and of an equally complex historical reconstruction of Judaism. "I have not spent thirty years as a mere collector; I was trying to make a point."³⁹

Fortunately for the reader's patience, it is not necessary to produce such a monograph at this time. From the various methodological statements Goodenough issued in the course of his long career, a consistent set of assumptions may be gleaned. He was successful in making his "point":⁴⁰ Baldly stated, Goodenough sought to establish several points: (1) Any given symbol (and it was crucial to Goodenough that one was dealing with an exceedingly economical group of symbols) had wide currency in the Mediterranean world; that is to say, it was part of a Mediterranean "lingua franca." The fact of currency could be established by the enumeration of examples drawn from the ancient Near East, Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Iranian empire, and the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity. (2) The same symbol possessed a "common meaning," and this meaning was singular. He insisted that this meaning could be recovered by the (usually cultic) setting of the iconic symbol, as well as by its occurrence in texts (especially ritual materials). On occasion, a meaning may be explicitly given a symbol in literary materials (here, "theological" statements were given priority). Goodenough also held that symbols were effective primarily through "emotional impact," that they retained this capacity for the modern interpreter as well as for the ancient religionist, and thus could directly "give" their meaning to the modern student "attuned" to their "lan-

guage." The contemporary scholar "must let the *lingua franca* speak to him . . . directly. . . . If this be subjectivism, let my critics make the most of it."⁴¹ And so we should! (3) The symbols have been taken over in "living form" from the general milieu by Judaism. (4) They have retained the same "value" in Judaism when borrowed. (5) Although they retain this common "value," they have been subjected to a specifically Jewish "interpretation" (here, Philo and the rabbinic materials have priority). (6) In addition, there are a few specifically Jewish symbols, but these participate in the same general system of value and the same framework of meaning as those symbols which are part of the *lingua franca*. Around this skeleton, the vast exegetical and comparative labors of Goodenough on text and symbol are articulated.

I would hope that, in this summary, the reader would have anticipated my judgment. Shorn of his idiosyncratic psychologism (itself a powerful ahistorical presupposition), Goodenough's work is a variant of what has been previously described as the attempt to historicize morphology as exemplified by the Pan-Babylonian school. The system of "life" and "mysticism" at the level of the *lingua franca* functions as an analogue to "world view." Judaism and other national and religious systems which stamp their own peculiar understanding on this "common language" function as analogues to "culture complexes." The particular expressions, be they the writings of Philo or the murals at Dura Europos, function as analogues to the "linguistic" formulations.

I intend no criticism of Goodenough by labeling him a morphologist or by comparing him to the Pan-Babylonian school. He has opted for the most promising, but most unattractive, of the modes of comparison. In the same way that the structuralists have attempted to modernize the presuppositions of morphology by turning to Marx, Goodenough turned to his own understanding of Freud and Jung. This allowed him to affirm a generally ahistoric point of view, while asserting a modified diffusionism in specific instances (as when he described "syncretism" or the "Orphic reform"). However, he stands under the same strictures already articulated for both classical morphology and the Pan-Babylonian variant.

The last proposal to be passed under review is that by Jacob Neusner. While much that he has written is of direct relevance, he has summarized his program in an important essay, "Comparing Judaism," which is also a review of E. P. Sanders's massive work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*.⁴²

Neusner takes as his start point Sanders's introduction, where, after

criticizing the frequent comparativist tactic of reducing the various world religions to "essences" which are then compared and the alternative comparativist device of comparing single, isolated motifs between religions, Sanders ventures a proposal for what he terms the "holistic comparison of patterns of religion."⁴³ This is to be the comparison of

an entire religion, parts and all, with an entire religion, parts and all; to use the analogy of a building, to compare two buildings, not leaving out of account their individual bricks. The problem is how to discover two wholes, both of which are considered and defined on their own merits and in their own terms, to be compared with one another. I believe that the concept of a "pattern of religion" makes this possible.⁴⁴

Allowing, for the moment, the language of "entire" and "wholes" to stand unquestioned, and setting aside the difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of comparing two different objects, each "considered" and "defined in their own terms"—a statement which he cannot mean literally, but which he gives no indication as to how he would modify—Sanders compounds confusion by further defining the notion of pattern. It is not a total, historical entity (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam), but "only a given more or less homogenous entity." How much "more," how much "less" is needed to posit homogeneity and, hence, a pattern is left unclear. It is a matter of seeing "how one moves from the logical starting point to the logical conclusion of the religion." But the notion of "logic" is nowhere clarified. Indeed, it seems thrown aside by Sanders's exclusion of what he terms "speculative matters" of methodology and by his strange insistence that the logic is one of "function."⁴⁵ Given these restrictions, I am baffled by what "entire religion, parts and all" could possibly mean for Sanders. I find no methodological hints on how such entities are to be discovered, let alone compared. His results give me no grounds for confidence.

It is at this point that Neusner joins the discussion. He affirms the enterprise of comparing "an entire religion, parts and all, with other such *entire* religions"⁴⁶ and goes on to state as a prerequisite for such "systematic comparison" (the term Neusner substitutes for Sanders's "holistic comparison") "systematic description." Who could disagree? We must describe what we are comparing before we compare. But much hinges on the meaning of the term "systematic." In Neusner's generous, initial proposal:

Systematic description must begin with the system to be described. Comparative description follows. And to describe a system, we start with the prin-

cial documents. . . . Our task then is to uncover the exegetical processes, the dynamics of the system, through which those documents serve to shape a conception, and to make sense of reality. We must then locate the critical tensions and inner problematic of the system thereby revealed: What is it about?⁴⁷

Here the difficulties begin. Despite the bow to the notion of the social construction of reality, for Neusner, a system is a document, located at a quite specific point in space and time, a system is the generative logic (in Neusner's term, the "agendum") of a quite particular document, its "issues." The more one goes on with Neusner, the more it becomes clear that each important document may well be a system in itself. How, then, is each documentary system to be compared with each other? Let alone with "an entire religion, parts and all"? I can find no answer to these questions in Neusner. Rather I find an elegant ethnography of Mishnah, and, to some degree, of Tosefta and Sifra. As I have argued above, comparison in such an ethnographic mode is necessarily accidental.

It would appear that Neusner has proposed what might be taken for an effort in historicizing atomism, a proposal for comparing "Judaisms,"⁴⁸ an enterprise seen as problematic by Neusner. He appears to eschew wider comparison which he views as that which often "compares nothing and is an exercise in the juxtaposition of incomparables."⁴⁹ If this be an exaggeration, and there is much in Neusner's recent writings that suggests that it is, what in method and theory prevent it? We are left with the dilemma shrewdly stated by Wittgenstein:

But isn't *the same* at least the same? We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself. . . . Then are two things the same when they are what one thing is? And how am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?⁵⁰

Wittgenstein's last question remains haunting. It reminds us that comparison is, at base, never identity. Comparison requires the postulation of difference as the grounds of its being interesting (rather than tautological) and a methodical manipulation of difference, a playing across the "gap" in the service of some useful end.

We must conclude this exercise in our own academic history in a most unsatisfactory manner. Each of the modes of comparison has been found problematic. Each new proposal has been found to be a variant of an older mode: Moore, of the encyclopaedic; Goodenough, of the morphological; Neusner, of the ethnographic. We know better how to evaluate

comparisons, but we have gained little over our predecessors in either the method for making comparisons or the reasons for its practice. There is nothing easier than the making of patterns; from planaria to babies, it is done with little apparent difficulty. But the "how" and the "why" and, above all, the "so what" remain most refractory. These matters will not be resolved by new or increased data. In many respects, we already have too much. It is a problem to be solved by theories and reasons, of which we have had too little. So we are left with the question, "How am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?" The possibility of the study of religion depends on its answer.

Notes

This essay originally appeared as chapter 2 of *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 19-35. Copyright 1982 by the University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

1. On these handbooks, see H. Hadju, *Das mnemotechnische Schriftent des Mittelalters* (Vienna, 1932); P. Rossi, *Clavis Universalis arti mnemoniche e logica combinatoria da Lullo a Leibniz* (Milan and Naples, 1960); F. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966). I should note that I was led to take the starting point in memory for this essay by rereading the classic study by M. Hallbach, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1952).

2. E. B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, 3d ed. (London, 1878), p. 130. See also Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2d ed. (New York, 1889), 1:115-16.

3. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3d ed. (New York, 1935), 1:53, see also, 1:221-22.

4. Note that David Hume, in his discussion of the Laws of Association in the third chapter of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, writes of the similarity between words in different languages "even where we cannot suspect the least connection or communication," and thus moves from association as a matter of individual psychology, to association as an anthropological issue (in the edition by C. W. Hendel [Indianapolis, 1955] the passage quoted occurs on p. 32).

5. E. O'Gorman, *La idea del descubrimiento de América* (Mexico City, 1951). Compare his own English-language version, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington, 1961). I have oversimplified O'Gorman's important argument as to the nature of invention. He maintains that the "New World" was invented over time as explorers came to realize that it was a world that their traditional world view had not anticipated. See further, W. Washburn, "The Meaning of 'Discovery' in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *American Historical Review* 68 (1962): 1-21.

6. *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York, 1854), 2:31.
7. Ihab H. Hassan, "The Problem of Influence in Literary History: Notes toward a Definition," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14 (1955): 66-76. I quote p. 68. At the present, comparative law and comparative literature are the only two humanistic enterprises that function in such a way as to merit the title discipline. The question of "influence" has been much debated in comparative literature. In addition to Hassan, I have been much influenced by C. Guillén, "Literatura como sistema: Sobre fuentes, influencias y valores literarios," *Filología romanza* 4 (1957): 1-29, in its clarification of the psychological nature of the postulation of influence—although I dissent from the conclusions he reaches.
8. H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 5th ed. (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), p. 152.
9. J. Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 240-64.
10. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963), 1:14.
11. B. Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (Paterson, 1964), p. 126.
12. J. H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (Urbana, 1955); S. Toulmin, *Human Understanding* (Princeton, 1972), 1:133-44 et passim.
13. F. Boas, "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology," *Science* n.s. 4 (1896): 901-8. I quote pp. 907 and 903-4.
14. See F. Egan, "Social Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Comparison," *American Anthropologist* 56 (1964): 743-63 for a useful overview.
15. HRAF comparison is embodied in G. P. Murdock's classic *Social Structure* (New York, 1949) and his proposal "World Ethnographic Sample," *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957): 664-87. For the methodology, see F. W. Moore, ed., *Readings in Cross-Cultural Methodology* (New Haven, 1961), and R. L. Merritt and S. Rokkan, eds., *Comparing Nations: The Use of Quantitative Data in Cross-National Research* (New Haven, 1966). The encyclopaedic nature of the enterprise will become apparent to even the most casual reader of these works. This is not surprising inasmuch as the first proposal for such a study was made by E. B. Tylor, "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (1889): 245-72 (see the important note by F. Galton on p. 272). Within the sociological literature chiefly concerned with intrasocietal comparison, see, among others, G. Sjöberg, "The Comparative Method in the Social Sciences," *Philosophy of Science* 22 (1955): 106-17, and R. M. Marsh, *Comparative Sociology: A Codification of Cross-Societal Analysis* (New York, 1967).
16. H. Pinard de la Boullaye, *L'Etude comparée des religions* (Paris, 1922), 1:385 and 387.
17. Hence, their sharp critique of the evolutionary school.
18. Hence, their sharp critique of the naturalist school. See further, J. Z. Smith, "Myth and Histories," in H. P. Duerr, ed., *Mircea Eliade Festschrift* (Frankfurt, 1982).

19. H. Winckler, *Altorientalische Forschungen* (Leipzig, 1900), 3: 274.
20. A. Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients* (Leipzig, 1904). For the historian of religion, the most important edition of this work is not one of the three German editions (Leipzig, 1904, 1906, 1916), but rather the English translation by C. L. Beaumont, *Old Testament in Light of the Ancient East* (London, 1911), vols. 1-2, with new materials added by Jeremias. The bulk of vol. 1 constitutes a major essay by Jeremias on the *Weltbild*, which was not incorporated into the German version.
21. Jeremias, *Old Testament*, 1:4, n.2.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Jeremias, *Old Testament*, 1:4.
24. On the debt to the Pan-Babylonian school, see, among others, B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London, 1960), p. 74.
25. See G. F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921): 243-44, and Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927-30), vols. 1-3, esp. 1:129 and n.1.
26. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:16, 115, 135; 2:295; 3:vii-viii. It should be understood that the passages in Moore cited in notes 26-33 are intended as clear examples of the point in question and do not constitute exhaustive lists.
27. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:22 and n. 1, 110, 220, 281, 323, 386; 2:22, 395.
28. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:ix, 23-27, 44, 119; 2:154.
29. Moore, *Judaism*, 2:279-395, esp. pp. 289, 292-95, 394-95. Cf. 1:404.
30. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:551.
31. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:332, 417, 544-46. Whether this is Protestant bias or a caution to his own formulation of the "church" of Judaism, or "catholic (universal) Judaism" (1:111)—a formulation which is derived from S. Schechter—I cannot determine. I suspect the former.
32. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:460, 476, 515; 2:65, 88 n.1.
33. Moore, *Judaism*, 2:394-95.
34. R. Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa* 41 (1971): 85-108.
35. J. L. Borges, *Ficciones* (New York, 1962), esp. p. 49.
36. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:21-22 (emphasis mine). Note that the first sentence is a statement of the doctrine of "survivals," on which see 2:8.
37. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:viii.
38. G. F. Moore, *History of Religions* (New York, 1913-19), vols. 1-2. See the pungent remarks on this work in J. Bailie, *The Interpretation of Religion* (London, 1928), pp. 130-31.
39. E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York, 1953-70), vols. 1-12. The quotation is taken from 12:vii.
40. In my attempt to construct a synthetic account of Goodenough's model, I have drawn on Goodenough's essays: "Symbolism in Hellenistic Jewish Art: The Problem of Method," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56 (1937): 103-14; "The Evaluation of Symbols Recurrent in Time," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 20 (1951): 285-319; "Symbols as Historical Evidence," *Diogenes* 44 (1963): 19-32, as well as on the relevant sections in *Jewish Symbols*, 1:3-32; 4:3-70; 11:3-21, 64-67; 12:64-77.

41. I have combined two passages, one from "Evaluation of Symbols," p. 298, the other from *Jewish Symbols*, 8:220.
42. J. Neusner, "Comparing Judaism," *History of Religions* 18 (1978): 177-91.
43. E. P. Sanders, "Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: A Holistic Method of Comparison," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 455-78.
44. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 16.
45. Sanders, *Paul*, pp. 16-18.
46. Neusner, "Comparing Judaism," p. 178.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
48. On the problem of defining and classifying early Judaism, see J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), chap. 1.
49. J. Neusner, *The Talmud as Anthropology* (New York, 1979), p. 28, n. 33.
50. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3d ed. (London, 1958), p. 84e (no. 215).

Part One

COMPARATIVE RELIGION:
THE STATE OF THE FIELD

THE "END" OF COMPARISON

Redescription and Rectification

JONATHAN Z. SMITH

"In Comparison a Magic Dwells" was delivered as a lecture some twenty years ago. Now, shorn of its tactical setting, it is open to comparisons both to its subsequent reevaluations in my own work, on a trajectory from the initial typologies of "*Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit*" to the constructive proposals of *Drudgery Divine*,¹ and to its reconsiderations and reconstructions in the works of others, beginning with the most suggestive article on comparison of the past two decades, F. J. P. Poole's "Metaphors and Maps,"² and continuing through the writings of several scholars in this volume.

"In Comparison" took its starting point from the relationship of comparison to memory, as developed first by Aristotle,³ extended in mnemotechnics, in associationist epistemologies and psychologies, and reconfigured, critically, with respect to magical thought by Tylor and Frazer. In this history, Aristotle's category of the different or other (the *heterōn*) has largely dropped out; similarity and contiguity remained. However, with the possible exception of Jakobson's extension to a general account of cognition, under the rubrics of metaphor and metonymy,⁴ similarity and contiguity have proved incapable of generating interesting theory. The perception of similarity has been construed as the chief purpose of comparison; contiguity, expressed as historical "influence" or filiation, has provided the explanation. In a deliberate adoption of Frazer's caustic language for magic, "In Comparison" argued,

In the vast majority of instances in the history of comparison, this subjective experience [of the recollection of similarity] is projected as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like. It is a process of working from a psychological association to an historical one; it is to assert that similarity and contiguity have causal effect. But this, to revert to the language of Victorian anthropology, is not science but magic.⁵

Such a view, giving precedence to similarity and contiguity at the expense of difference, is deeply embedded in Western discourse, especially since the amalgamation of biblical and Greco-Roman anthropologies in Christian cultural thought. This was a totalistic system that prevented surprise whenever similarities or differences were encountered in the peoples mapped upon it. The genealogies that underlay the system, as well as the biblical anthropogenic narration, guaranteed the essential unity of humankind. All were children of Adam and Eve, even though their lineages must be traced through Noah's three sons. Differences were, therefore, accidental. Somatic and economic differences were the results of climate and ecology. Cultural variegations were caused by a particular group's forgetfulness of primordial knowledge, and by mixtures brought about by processes of contact, conquest, migration, and diffusion. Even when the biblical framework was repressed and the myth of primordial knowledge rejected, essential unity was continued through the postulation of some post-Kantian universality of cognitive capacities (in older language, the "psychic unity" of humankind) still linked to historicistic, genealogical explanations.⁶ Such an explanation could even be adapted to a more atomistic view of cultures, where similar mentalities in similar natural or social environments produced "independent inventions" of parallel phenomena.⁷

Genealogical comparisons have been successful and provocative of thought in a few cases: in comparative anatomy, in historical linguistics, as well as in more recent developments in folkloristics and areas of archaeology. Each of these cases fulfills three preconditions: first, the comparative enterprise is related to strong theoretical interests; second, the data for comparisons form an unusually thick dossier in which micro-distinctions prevail; and third, as a consequence of the first two preconditions, the genealogical comparison has been able to provide rules of difference.⁸ At present, none of these preconditions are fulfilled in the usual comparisons of religious phenomena, but there is nothing, in principle, to prevent their successful deployment.

In light of subsequent work, the turning point in the article, displaced by its typological concerns, was the replacement of the language of dis-

covery with that of invention. As elaborated in later writings, there is nothing "given" or "natural" in those elements selected for comparison. Similarities and differences, understood as aspects and relations, rather than as "things," are the result of mental operations undertaken by scholars in the interest of their intellectual goals. Comparison selects and marks certain features within difference as being of possible intellectual significance by employing the trope of their being similar in some stipulated sense.⁹ It is this relationship between invention and difference which grounds the conclusion of "In Comparison" as expressed in its penultimate paragraph: "Comparison requires the postulations of difference as the grounds of its being interesting . . . and a methodical manipulation of difference, a playing across the 'gap' in the service of some useful end."¹⁰

The "end" of comparison cannot be the act of comparison itself. I would distinguish four moments in the comparative enterprise: description, comparison, redescription, and rectification.¹¹ Description is a double process which comprises the historical or anthropological dimensions of the work: First, the requirement that we locate a given example within the rich texture of its social, historical, and cultural environments that invest it with its local significance. The second task of description is that of reception-history, a careful account of how *our* second-order scholarly tradition has intersected with the exemplum. That is to say, we need to describe how the datum has become accepted as significant for the purpose of argument. Only when such a double contextualization is completed does one move on to the description of a second example undertaken in the same double fashion. With at least two exempla in view, we are prepared to undertake their comparison both in terms of aspects and relations held to be significant, and with respect to some category, question, theory, or model of interest to us. The aim of such a comparison is the redescription of the exempla (each in light of the other) and a rectification of the academic categories in relation to which they have been imagined.

Notes

1. J. Z. Smith, "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," *History of Religions* 11 (1971): 67-90; idem, *Map Is Not Territory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 240-64; idem, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London: School of African and Oriental

Studies, University of London, 1990; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

2. F. J. P. Poole, "Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986): 411-57.

3. Aristotle, *De memoria et reminiscentia*, 451b. 19-20, which employs the terms, "[starting] from something similar, or different/opposite, or neighboring." It is the category of the different that marks an advance; Plato had already identified similarity's and contiguity's roles in memory in the *Phaedo*, 73D-74A. See further the translation and useful commentary in *Aristotle On Memory*, by J. Sorabji (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1972), pp. 42-46, 54, 96-97.

4. R. Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Fundamentals of Language*, by R. Jakobson and M. Halle (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 53-82, and often reprinted.

5. J. Z. Smith, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 22; 26.

6. Note that even in the case of Eliade and Lévi-Strauss, incorrectly understood in the article as being ahistorical, diffusion theories play a central role in their interpretations of myths and rituals. That is to say, both scholars work with an essentially spatial rather than a temporal construction of the historical.

I am quite sensitive to the justified criticism that my treatment of structuralism in the article was more than "exceedingly brusque." Rightly chided by Hans Penner's review (*History of Religions* 23 [1984]: 266-68), I spent the next three years reworking the materials, which resulted in the sustained meditation on and dialogue with structuralist theory in *To Take Place* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For the purposes of this volume it suffices to state my deep indebtedness to structuralism's focus on relations of *difference* for enlarging my understanding of that term with respect to the comparative enterprise.

7. I shall not here repeat previous discussions on the issue of homology versus analogy, which is the locus where these issues have been most thoroughly debated in both biological and cultural comparisons; see Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, pp. 47-48, n. 15. I should note the technical terminology of homogenetic (homologous) and homoplastic (analogous) similarities, originally coined by E. R. Lankester, "On the Use of the Term Homology in Modern Zoology and the Distinction between Homogenetic and Homoplastic Agreements," *The Annals and Magazine of Natural History* 6 (1870): 34-43, and reexamined in a recent symposium, M. J. Sanderson and L. Hufford, eds., *Homoplasy: The Recurrence of Similarity in Evolution* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1996).

8. Archeology has been less successful than the other named fields in fulfilling this third precondition. For example, the meticulous classification of pottery types was linked to strong historicist theories of "artifactual cultures," invasions, migrations, and diffusions, but rules governing difference only become possible when relations of identity, such as pottery type = particular culture/change of type = change of culture, are challenged. See, among others, the general critique of C. Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 3, 18, 23-24, 86-94, *et passim*. For an in-

fluential example which meets all three preconditions, see the work of J. J. F. Deetz, *The Dynamics of Stylistic Change in Arikara Ceramics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965); Deetz and E. Dethlefsen, "The Doppler Effect and Archeology: A Consideration of the Spatial Effects of Seriation," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 21 (1965): 196-206; and Deetz's summary, *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977).

9. In this paragraph I have drawn on Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, pp. 50-53. In those pages I insisted on the priority of analogous to homologous modes of comparison in order to reinforce the notion that "comparison does not necessarily tell us how things 'are' (the far-from-latent presupposition that lies behind the notion of the 'genealogical' with its quest for 'real' historical connections)" (p. 52). For the purposes of this epilogue, I have relaxed that insistence and provided (above) three preconditions which might properly ground comparisons in the service of an homologous theory.

10. Compare the reformulation of this sentence in Smith, *To Take Place*, pp. 13-14.

11. Compare Burton Mack's insightful elaboration of these four "moments" in my work in Mack, "On Redescribing Christian Origins," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996): 247-69, esp. 256-59.