Definitions…

“He who knows one, knows none,” Goethe regarding language….

“He who knows one, knows none,” Max Mueller (Sacred Books of the East) re: religion….

Specific (specificity) - - - - - < spectrum or scale > - - - - - General (generality)

**Descriptive (‘is,’ fact) - - - - - vs - - - - - Normative (‘ought,’ value)**

Essential or Substantial Definitions – vs – Functional definitions…

IF Essential – it IS a descriptive definition, Rel is X.

Danger of bias here? Proscriptive…

IF Functional – it IS what it DOES…

Danger of finding the need filled through other means… Secularization…

‘Family Resemblance’ definition – Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, 66: “…a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing…,” i.e., no essential definition (def’n of an essence) but a definition based on similarities…

Orthodoxy – vs – Orthopraxy

Orthodoxy – ‘right belief’ – danger of sloppy ethics/morality?

Orthopraxy – ‘right practice’ – danger of hollow ritualism?

Ritual (Catherine Bell) – discipline - - practice?

From Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006. On **THEORY** -

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have understood theory in a variety of ways, and one helpful overview lists five primary notions of what theory is and how it functions: (1) the deductive-nomological view, which understands theories as systems of universal laws deduced from axioms and corresponding to mind-independent external reality; (2) the law-oriented view, which trumpets the same ideal but suggests we cannot identify universal laws but only “law-like regularities”; (3) the idealizing notion of theory, which further refines the deductive-nomological view by suggesting that the regularities—not laws— should be understood as “ideal types,” or the scholar’s idealizations of human motives; (4) the constructivist view of theory, which goes further

still in rejecting the ideal of attaining universal laws as it challenges correspondence theories of truth and proposes that theory offers only “contextual understanding of interacting motives;” and (5) critical theory, which agrees with constructivists in their criticism of the deductive-nomological approach but emphasizes power relations and ethical issues.

(p 7f)

Knowledge (KN) –

Gettier Definition: KN is JTB

J = justified – you can explain it, it’s NOT a lucky guess, you can provide reasons why you think X is the case… an account (*logos* in Greek – as in bio*logy*, geo*logy*, astro*logy*, semio*logy*, gnoseo*logy*….

T = it’s true (but how do we assess the truth of a matter?)

B = Belief – you believe it…

Theories of **Truth**

Correspondence Theory –

Statement X corresponds to situation Y, a real state of affairs…

Presupposes some idea of objectivity

Coherence Theory –

Statement X *coheres* with (links to, connects with) situation Y AND other statements about not only Y, but X and Z as well…

Performative Theory –

We (or someone, or a group…) *determine* truth, as if by decree

Pragmatic Theory –

What is true is what is acted upon, truth a effect, not a cause…

Euhemerism – named after Greek, Euhemerus, ca 4th c BCE who said the gods were just great men from the past whose reputations were elevated to supernatural level in myth.

Xenophanes - c. 570 – c. 478 BC - "God is one, supreme among gods and men, and not like mortals in body or in mind."

*Stromateis* by Clement of Alexandria, a second/third century Church father, reads:

But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves. (DK. 21. B15)

Cicero, 106 – 43 BCE –

*De republica* 3.33, “True law is right reason in agreement with nature… It is a sin [*nec fas*] to alter this law …. we need not look for an interpreter of it outside of ourselves. … there will be the one everlasting and immutable law that always applies to all nations ….”

From Jensen, Jeppe Sinding. *What Is Religion?* London: Routledge, 2014.

Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). One of two fathers of sociology (the other the German Max Weber)

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

(Durkheim 2001: 46), quoted in Jenson, p 2

Sacred versus profane dichotomy (opposition)

Sacred ‘things set apart’

Profane – ‘things NOT set apart’

Transcendent (adj) – nn = transcendence – ‘beyond’ - - - vs - - -

Immanent (adj) – nn = immanence – ‘accessible here & now…’

Sigmund Freud (1856–1956), founder of psychoanalytic theory

Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father.

(Freud 1961: 42), quoted in Jensen, p 3

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) - theologian

“…[T]he essence of the human religious attitude is “ultimate concern,” because humans are concerned with the conditions of their existence,”

Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It is the most centered act of the human mind … in the dynamics of personal life”

(Tillich 1957: 5), *ibid*.

Clifford Geertz (1966) - anthropologist

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

(Geertz 1973: 90), quoted in Jensen, p 4

Religion as symbolic code – like a language, a field of study, or the coherence of a well-done novel, story, or film.

A symbol – like a unit of vocabulary

The code –like the grammar, how those units work together

Pascal Boyer – cognitive science of religion…

…[R] religion is broadly conceived as an evolutionary by-product (a “spandrel”) rooted in the propagation of attention-grabbing representations that violate ordinary and psychologically intuitive perceptions of the world,” (Jensen, p 5). “It [religion] may function in some ways, but mostly negatively as superstition and deceitful “false” consciousness.

(ibid)

Jensen, 2014 – scholar of religious studies

Semantic and cognitive networks comprising ideas, behaviours and institutions in relation to counter-intuitive superhuman agents, objects, and posits.

(p 8)

Thomas A Tweed (see above) challenges these all on grounds of ‘staticity’ – he sees them all as too static, too fixed…. He writes, “Theories are simultaneously proposals for a journey, representations of a journey, and the journey itself.” (p 9).

His theory is that religions are itineraries of a journey that include crossing – change – transformation (stepping outside of the boundaries of self-interest), and dwelling – stabilization – immersing oneself in a community, a body of practices, a set of scriptures… not one or the other, both…

Cognitive Science of Rel…redux…

Pascal Boyer

“…[R] religion is broadly conceived as an evolutionary by-product (a “spandrel”) rooted in the propagation of attention-grabbing representations that violate ordinary and psychologically intuitive perceptions of the world,” (Jensen, p 5). “It [religion] may function in some ways, but mostly negatively as superstition and deceitful “false” consciousness,” (ibid.).

‘On the contrary, because they had many sophisticated inference systems, they became vulnerable to a very *restricted* set of super-natural concepts: the ones that jointly activate inference systems for agency, predation, morality, social exchange, etc. Only a small range of concepts are such that they reach this aggregate relevance, which is why religion has common features the world over.

(Boyer 2001: 324–5), cited in Jensen, p 5

Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, p 6, “Sacralization is then a sort of brake applied to unchecked infinite adaptations in symbol systems.”

Scott Atran and Ara Norenzayan –

In every society, there are 1. Widespread counterfactual and counterintuitive beliefs in supernatural agents (gods, ghosts, goblins, etc.) 2. Hard-to-fake public expressions of costly material commitments to supernatural agents, that is, offering and sacrifice (offerings of goods, property, time, life) 3. Mastering by supernatural agents of people’s existential anxieties (death, deception, disease, catastrophe, pain, loneliness, injustice, want, loss) 4. Ritualized, rhythmic sensory coordination of (1), (2), and (3), that is, communion (congregation, intimate fellowship, etc.) In all societies there is an evolutionary canalization and convergence of (1), (2), (3), and (4) that tends toward what we shall refer to as “religion”; that is, passionate communal displays of costly commitments to counterintuitive worlds governed by supernatural agents. Although these facets of religion emerge in all known cultures and animate the majority of individual human beings in the world, there are considerable individual and cultural differences in the degree of religious commitment. The question as to the origin and nature of these intriguing and important differences we leave open.

(2004: 713–14), quoted in Jensen, p 34

Ara Norenzayan. *Big Gods*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013

“The Eight Principles of Big Gods

1. Watched people are nice people.

2. Religion is more in the situation than in the person.

3. Hell is stronger than heaven.

4. Trust people who trust in God.

5. Religious actions speak louder than words.

6. Unworshipped Gods are impotent Gods.

7. Big Gods for Big Groups.

8. Religious groups cooperate in order to compete.”

(p xiii)

Textuality and Institutionality

Antonio Damasio, ‘extended consciousness’ – not about religion per se, but about recording – oral stories and lessons, books, and institutionalized traditions

Extended consciousness allows human organisms to reach the very peak of their mental abilities. Consider some of these: the ability to create helpful artifacts; the ability to consider the mind of the other; the ability to suffer with pain as opposed to just feel pain and react to it; the ability to sense the possibility of death in the self and in the other; the ability to value life; the ability to construct a sense of good and evil distinct from pleasure and pain; the ability to take into account the interests of the other and of the collective. (2000: 230), quoted in Jenson, p 43

Emic (adj) – from INSIDE a tradition – speaks within that belief…

Usually normative, although may not necessarily be so

Etic (adj) – from OUTSIDE the tradition – might be merely descriptive, might also be critical

Theology (nn) – supports a tradition emically – tells one what religion is correct and why,

Usually implying that others are wrong

Highly normative

Works through ***apologetics*** – discourse that supports a certain tradition

Sometimes through ***polemics*** – attacks on other traditions…

Religious Studies – etic - descriptive

Religions vs spirituality

Religion – a tradition, a collective identity

Spirituality – individual, specific – ‘sheila-ism’?

**My own –**

Grand explanation - - - - - - - - - - - socio-political structure - - - - - - - - - - - -personal/devotional

(semi-philosophical) (institutions) (ethics,

personal salvation

Also the arts in rel…)