Religion as a Social Kind

Part 1: Kind Theories

The recently popular claims that religion is not something that "exists out there" and that religion cannot exist without the modern western concept "religion" have a number of motivations and often fuzzy or non-existent intellectual justifications. These are assertions about ontology. One of the difficulties in evaluating such claims comes from the thinness of the justifications that writers give even though the positions seem to point to highly developed traditions that range from a background of Kantian idealism to empiricist nominalism and structuralist linguistic idealism. Scholars in the study of religion who claim that religion is only words or rhetoric could make robust arguments from these, but do not.[1] Claims often invoke the work of Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault, and although the former worked from the Idealist and Romantic traditions mostly through the phenomenology of language and structuralism, his arguments are either just notoriously difficult to understand or offer no advance on the traditions upon which he depends.[2] Foucault's positions certainly also draw on both traditions but

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[1] As influential relatives of strong empiricist nominalism I would place instrumentalism in the philosophy of science, phenomenalism as an epistemological doctrine and positivism more generally. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics together with structuralism have generated the most important background for linguistic idealism in the humanities with a history going back to Dilthey's textualism. For an interesting historical situating of intrumentalist arguments, see Michael Gardner, "Realism and Instrumentalism in Ninteenth-Century Atomism," *Philosophy of Science 46* (1979), 1-34.

[22] The negative interpretation of Derrida is that he follows German Romantic doctrines about language, namely, that reasoning has no higher standing than any other use of language and that poetic language including irony, comedy and featuring sounds of words is of equal or higher standing. That giving reasons for what one advocates has had any higher standing than these other uses is a "plot" by philosophers, scientists and the powerful to control others. On this view, he excepts himself. His idealism comes both from phenomenology and the structuralist interpretation of Saussure, but "reason as a plot" from *Lebensphilosophie* and especially Heidegger's irrationalism. Probably the best

changed during his career and are difficult to clarify in that he often only admitted to his

positions obliquely and allusively with claims implicit first in his archeology of

knowledge and then in his genealogical narratives. There is a vigorous debate about

whether he was after his archaeological period an idealist or a realist, and about his

relation to the Kantian transcendentalist tradition.[3] What seems clear is that neither

philosopher has philosophical arguments for the kinds of claims noted above that are not

made more fully and lucidly in the main body of idealist/romantic and

empiricist/positivist traditions.

      Most centrally I aim to draw attention to the possibility that those who study

religion might "think with" not only traditions deriving from German Romanticism and

Idealism, but also from the intellectual left.[4] Whether there is anything beyond

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case for a more positive interpretation of Derrida regarding ontology and epistemology is
Christopher Norris, *New Idols of the Cave: On the Limits of Anti-Realism* (Manchester,
UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 78-155; *Derrida, Badiou and the Formal
Imperative* (New York: Continuum, 2012). Norris makes a case that Derrida has been
distorted in Post-Structuralism/post-modernism and that his approach is in concert with
Anglo-American and analytic philosophy in important respects.

[3] On Foucault's project as an idealist one, see Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*
(trans. E. Pile; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). On Foucault as an
idealist historian and his relation to Hegel, see Gary Gutting, "Introduction," *The
Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (ed. Gary Gutting; 2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2003), 65-69 and n. 42, p. 73; "Foucault, Hegel and Philosophy," in
Foucault and Philosophy (ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon; Oxford: Wiley-
Blackwell, 2010), 17-35. C. G. Prado argues that Foucault is a realist with an
epistemological nominalism in "Foucault, Davidson and Interpretation," in *Foucault and
Philosophy*, 99-117 and *Searle and Foucault on Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2005). On Foucault as a realist with a kinship to Marx's realism, see
Richard Marsten, *The Nature of Capital: Marx after Foucault* (London: Routledge,
1999).

[4] I use the not uncommon terminology of intellectual right and left in the sense that
foregrounds main lines from the Enlightenment or reactions against it. Even if political
right and left do often line up with the intellectual right and left, my point is not to draw
attention to that fact, but to find terms that will encompass all of the kinds of thought that
I want to generalize about in this essay. The so-called "New Historicism" has

language/thought *discernable* out there in the world (e. g., independent of human minds)

and that can be explained as congruent with our everyday ontological and

epistemological assumptions, including most prominently about the activities of other

human beings can arguably be considered the central dividing point in modern western

intellectual history.[5] Through the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth,

thinkers very widely held that mind penetrated or even was the universe.[6] Mind here is

not the brain/mind of recent scientific modernism. What most people assumed was a

mountain of rock as experienced by normal perception and described by the new science

of geology was actually a thought of a mountain or alternatively, nature was mind with its

own driving teleology and even self-consciousness. The rising scientific naturalism of

the next century made it difficult to entertain these doctrines. But this type of naturalism

as an overreaction to idealism, attempted to reject the entire philosophical enterprise of

ontology, of what do things consist? The positivism so successfully promoted by Ernst

Mach in the 1870s and 80s rejected all metaphysics and relations between philosophy and

science. So thorough was his rejection of anything but sense experience that he denied

the existence of atoms even though their existence was well proven by then. Researchers

were to theorize only to the point of sense impressions and not inquire further. To the

right, *Lebenshilosophie* and its branching into Heideggerian phenomenology staunchly

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predominantly German and French romantic and idealist inspirations and for the
constraints of the paper I will broadly include it under its inspirations.
[5] I include scientific realism under "everyday ontological assumptions." On this type of
realism, see Philip Kitcher, *Preludes to Pragmatism: Toward a Reconstruction of
Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 71-109 and especially 71-72. I
do not understand the overblown nominalism of Kitcher's "minimal realism," however,
unless it is a political conciliatory gesture.
[6] With delightful wit and deep insight in spite of his abhorrent social ideas seen in other
writings, see David Stove, *The Plato Cult and Other Philosophical Follies* (Cambridge:
Basil Blackwell, 1991), 83-177.

rejected scientific naturalism. Structuralism would reject the focus on "the subject" and experience in both of these, but agree in bracketing or rejecting naturalism. The mind, society and culture were structured and driven by unconscious and hidden codes that came from the structure of language and language created culture that is in sharp opposition to nature. Language only referred to itself, a kind of vicious holism. By the end of the First World War, thinkers had widely dropped the idea of mind being nature, but often kept the mental veil between the individual mind and nature that was part of Kant's legacy. Ironically and importantly, both those who championed triumphant positivistic science and those who opposed some devalued conception of natural science in subordination to *Geisteswissenschaft* came to assume the positivist's principle that ontology and metaphysics should be rejected. But more than one hundred years of failures by anti-ontological movements in the philosophy of science has led to a consensus that domains of knowledge do not work successfully without assuming real rather than ideal objects of knowledge.[7] There has been a massive turn toward realism in the disciplines and domains, except some areas of literary studies and religious studies, it seems. Even in "continental philosophy," the foundations have been shaken by Quentin Meillassoux's brilliant attack on anti-realism and idealism in *Après la finitude: Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence.*[8] Meillassoux is prominent in a vigorous new movement of

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[7] One sign of this consensus is a survey of 931 professors of philosophy from 99 major universities in the USA, Europe, Canada and Australia in which 81.6 per cent agreed with non-skeptical realism and only 4.3 per cent with idealism. The results can be found in the 11/2013 posting: http://philpapers.org/archive/BOUWDP.
[8] (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006), translated as *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008). ADD COMMENTS

European realist philosophers and thinkers in open opposition to the kinds of anti-realism that dominated the last century.[9]

The twentieth century was dominated by heirs of Kantian idealisms and positivism with language gradually replacing mind as medium of reality or as a determinative filter. In European thought, romanticism and idealism culminated in phenomenology that studied experience or consciousness of so-called phenomena (Kant's "how things appear to us") from the subjective first person point of view, hermeneutics (e. g., Heidegger, Gadamer) with its relentless often-reactionary conservatism and structuralism.[10] In the English-speaking world, the methodological skepticism of British empiricism left a mixed legacy of irrealisms, anti-realism and nominalism strangely together with its interest in science and science's implicit practical and theoretical realism. Structuralism (and so-called post-structuralism) and post-modernism drew on both traditions.[11] Marxist, Marxian, socialist traditions, logical empiricism (e .g., Reichenbach) and scientific realism in general were the main carriers of the intellectual

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[9] The movement has its own journal, *Speculations*. For a brief introduction to ideas of the movement, see Paul J. Ennis, *Continental Realism* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011).

[10] Most notably, I leave out Neo-Kantianism partly because its direct influence faded so quickly. But it would find a place in a more detailed telling of this story. This line from the right through structuralism and so-called post-structuralism ought to be placed in a broader historical context that goes back at least to Dilthey's textualism. For him the social was entirely spiritual/mental (in later terms, cultural) centered on the use of symbols that were to be interpreted as one would divine the truths of scripture. The debt to Schleiermacher is explicit. Notice that this leaves consideration of causality out of the human sciences.

[11] The two correspond to the scientistic and the romantic sides of structuralism (and so-called post structuralism), underlying structure and holism. I find it to difficult to write efficiently about "post-structuralism" without falling into the myth of "Post-Structuralism." On my view, the mostly French thinkers who have been placed into the Post-Structuralist cannon are simply structuralists. I will use "Post-Structuralism" for the primarily English speaking movement that created the canon and the guiding ideas of Post-Structuralism (with its feedback loop to Derrida) and "post-structuralism" for the mostly French thinkers who supposedly broke from structuralism.

left with bizarre anomalies like the Frankfurt school attempting to reinterpret Marxism with right wing thought.[12] The Vienna Circle of the 1920s and 30s and those likeminded across Europe were almost all Marxists, socialists and liberals who had to flee Europe in the face of fascism and the Nazi advance.[13] Most ended up in England, the United States and other parts of the English speaking world, so that realism "left Europe" with the progeny of Heidegger, some Husserlian phenomenologists and the spirit of *Lebensphilosophie* remaining to dominate in the vacuum.[14] Realism and realistic naturalism literally left continental Europe.

In light of my very rough admittedly perspectival map, I draw on recent work in the philosophy of the sciences and the history and sociology of the sciences with science here meaning any sort of disciplined inquiry that seeks explanation. But in keeping with recent scholarship, I think it more useful to think of "domains of inquiry" rather than the sciences and I would emphasize continuities with folk inquiry.[15] The kind of philosophy I recommend treats epistemological and ontological issues by close attention to studies "on the ground" of both contemporary and past inquiry and rejects types of philosophy and

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[12] Stephen Eric Bronner, (especially the chapter, "Sketching the Lineage: The Critical Method and the Idealist Tradition") *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, 2002), 11-34.

[13] I realize that the question of, for example, Carnap's empiricist scientific realism is a complex issue. See, Richard Creath, "Carnap's Scientific Realism: Irenic or Ironic," *The Heritage of Logical Positivism* ed. Nicholas Rescher (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1985), 117-135.

[14] Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007); Richard Sebold, *Continental Anti-Realism: A Critique* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014); Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000).

[15] For an interesting and promising approach regarding folk kinds, see David Ludwig, "Indigenous and Scientific Kinds," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* (forthcoming).

other intellectual traditions based on intuitive and *a priori* thought.[16] The approach

opposes mere armchair inquiry, uncritical reverence of tradition, psychological

introspection, appeals to (quasi-mystical) semantic and social holism and anti- or non-

naturalist epistemology and ontology. On this view, there are no principles about

knowledge or methods of inquiry that one can justify simply on an *a priori* basis. One

must draw inferences about principles and methods from actual practices of inquiry.[17] I

will attempt to mount an argument about how one might justify a counter claim to

"religion is not out there" with the theory that religion is a social kind and thus "out

there" and not reducible to the modern language of "religion" or to discursive formations.

My aim here is not so much to recommend the idea of social kinds as it is to illustrate

what it might mean to think about religion and "religion" in a way that is radically

different from the I/idealist and R/romantic traditions that the writers in question seem to

take as normative and beyond question.[18] Various approaches to natural and social kinds

have appeared since the 1960s in a period of enormous ferment and intensive discussion

about kinds and their application to areas of inquiry. I can only point to some of the

issues and to what seem to be the most promising approaches. To illustrate social kinds, I

will briefly discuss [omitted, in progress] the methods of the arch realist, anti-idealist and

committed naturalist, Karl Marx, who arguably had already developed contemporary-like

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[16] Kitcher, *Pragmatism*, 110-44. The approach is especially associated with Richard Boyd, e. g., "Homeostasis, Species and Higher Taxa," *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (ed. R. A. Wilson; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) and is lucidly set out by Hilary Kornblith, *Knowledge and Its Place in Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-27.

[17] The general tradition might be traced back especially to Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1955).

[18] I will attempt to capitalize romanticism and idealism when referring to the German versions or primarily German, and leave the lower cap for the broader intellectual currents.

concepts of natural and social kinds. His example proves particularly helpful because scholars, I believe, have shown how his realism and naturalism were subverted by the idealism, romanticism and positivistic scientism of later interpreters.

I will be using "idealism" in an admittedly overly schematic way in contrast to what is often called moderate, especially so-called scientific realism. The latter I understand as an empirical thesis that best explains modern domains of knowledge, their success and the metaphysics assumed by the methods of scientific knowledge. I understand scientific realism as a socially and intellectually specialized extension of the everyday realism that all people hold unless educated into idealism or irrealism. Although, I will at points, distinguish a variety of nominalisms, irrealisms and antirealisms, I use "idealism" for all approaches that do not entail that there is a world beyond the human mind that is not only? thought or language and that makes a substantial input into human processes of knowing. I want to bring together considerations of ontology and epistemology. Indeed, the boundaries between idealism and realism are difficult and highly variable with the very large number of realisms and irrealisms. By such lumping I pass over a huge number of important issues. But sometimes abstraction and generalization is necessary and especially with the need to address the diverse and often diffuse historical contexts implied in the debates about religion. Two hypotheses guide my approach. First, that much of the theory and practice in the humanities and social sciences seems to be done without a critical awareness of the ontological and epistemological issues involved and how important such issues are for the course and outcome of inquiries. Second, one cause for this failure of critical

awareness derives from lack of knowledge about the philosophical history of the currently popular approaches.

To understand social kinds, it is important to understand the notion of natural kinds as developed in the philosophy of the sciences. The general idea first entails that nature or the world does not come in some undifferentiated mass, but is divided into kinds of things. "What is out there" is lumpy in that the properties of things cluster in specific ways.[19] Second, that *Homo sapiens*, like other animal kinds, as a species that has survived for long periods of time has evolved so as to successfully interact with the world's kinds that are significant for the survival of the species.[20] It is impossible to imagine us being here from an evolutionary perspective and not think that humans could reliably (not infallibly or without ever constant revision) discern kinds related to the flourishing of the species in the relevant environments, including the social environment.[21] This is not truth, but relative reliability is an important place to begin when developing a naturalistic approach to epistemology and ontology. Cats can with amazing discrimination distinguish mice from grass, rocks, snakes, insects, other cats and on and on and somehow recognize what they can eat and what will harm them and on and on. Cats can distinguish natural kinds, even though they certainly do not have our linguistic concepts and categories. Of course, if one treats human beings as fallen from a

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[19] I borrow the vivid metaphor "lumpy" from Ron Mallon, "Social Construction, Social Roles and Stability," *Socializing Metaphysics: The Nature of Social Reality* (ed. Frederick Schmitt; Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), 334.

[20] This case needs to be made in a balanced and careful way unlike Quine's famous version, i. e., "Natural Kinds," *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 126. Kitcher finds the argument and its critics too speculative at this point, but I believe that this ignores, for instance, Hilary Kornblith, *Inductive Inference and Its Natural Ground: An Essay in Naturalistic Epistemology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) and supporting arguments in several publications.

[21] Kornblith, *Inductive Inference.*

heavenly world, say manifest in soul or (romantic intuitive) mind or reason or as raised above by language and culture, or transcendent in social and concept-using nature, then my robustly naturalistic assumptions will have little or no force. I want to think about humans in ways that are often closer to the way that neo-Darwinians think about cats than one might think about gods, angels or humans with Kant's transcendental mind.[22] This is certain to arouse horror in some, but at least find some degree of plausibility in others.

An older idea of natural kinds with pre-Darwinian origins entailed that kinds had to be differentiated by essences.[23] Essences were needed because, of course, one had to distinguish superficial properties from defining causal properties. Thus defining all things yellow as a kind would not make sense, gold, bananas and so on. But gold could be differentiated by its atomic number into a kind, with properties like its color and malleability understood as caused by that particular structure of 79 protons and 196.967 atomic mass units. Examples like gold or water seemed to call for ahistorical essences with necessary and sufficient conditions. The privileged paradigms of kinds for positivism and empiricism were elemental physics of pre-quantum mechanics and

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[22] There has been an enormous amount of labor, and in my view, self-deception, in denying beliefs and sophisticated intelligence to non-human animals. On such denial, see Frans de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2016) and on animal beliefs and knowledge, Kornblith, *Knowledge*, 37-42, 52-63.

[23] Aristotle and Locke are the key sources for kinds essentialism. Locke was realist about particulars and their properties, but mostly conventionalist or conceptualist about classification. The development of science about atomic and other structures and processes showed clearly that Locke's pessimism about "real essences" differentiating natural kinds was unfounded. That led to the more recent and influential essentialist theories of Hilary Putnam [*Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 215-71] and Saul Kripke [*Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980)] about natural kind terms. For Kant there is a sense in which spatio-temporal objects are essential, but not because there are such things in the world that we can know. Rather, such objects are constructs of the mind that give us a coherent experience of there being a world.

chemistry. Such kinds would be ahistorical, universal, with necessary and sufficient conditions and clearly bounded whatever the broader epistemic issues for knowing them. Unfortunately, such essentialism about kinds persists in certain small highly conservative quarters of analytic philosophy. In radical contrast, most idealist (stemming largely from Kant, including Hegel) and strongly constructivist/nominalist traditions (stemming mostly from Locke and Hume) usually held kinds to be objects constructed by human minds. A conclusion of some was that we carve up the world into things only due to our parochial preoccupations and interests. There is mostly mental (and social) construction with little or no input from the world. Ghost-like minds of a spiritual substance might not need a world, but that *Homo sapiens* could have survived and greatly flourished without any reliable knowledge of or abilities related to what is outside the human mind has seemed an absurd idea to some, most notably to those in naturalist and realist traditions.[24] Similarly, how could science since the 17th century judged from a pragmatic point-of-view have time after time succeeded in inquiries without any reliable way to get outside a prison house of mind or language?[25] The positions on the "idealist" side cannot explain theory change in the sciences. How could inquiry possibly adjust if there was nothing out there to adjust to?

Recent philosophy of science has changed the often-stark alternatives of this picture by the intensive study of practicing sciences and other areas of knowledge.

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[24] The type of realism that I am approving is far from traditional metaphysical realism that might even be anti-naturalistic. What I recommend is sometimes called scientific realism and related to the "natural ontological attitude," what people assume in order to negotiate everyday life. For non-metaphysical arguments supporting modest realism, see Kitcher, *Preludes*, 70-109.

[25] For the argument from success and anti-realist attempts to refute it, see Kitcher, *Preludes*, 114-15, 70-109; *The Advancement of Science: Science Without Legend, Objectivity Without Illusions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Philosophy has often studied the natural sciences closely regarding epistemic issues due to their nearly universally acknowledged practical successes. But the burgeoning of the biological sciences and recent extension of interest to other areas of knowledge has changed much in the philosophy of science. The "social constructionism" of Post-Structuralism and related trends clearly descends from the non-realist traditions noted above. For the question of religion, it is of great importance to emphasize that kind theorists do not think that human categories and human "construction" does not play a major role in our interaction with the world, especially concerning social kinds.[26] Such constructivism, in stark contrast to the constructionism of romantic and idealist traditions, is naturalistic.[27] In spite of much pragmatist and Post-Structuralist rhetoric, virtually all sides agree that many aspects of our thought and perception depend strongly on mental organization and social convention.[28] But the tradition that I am setting forth also thinks that the world gives enough "push back" to our activities, and especially to disciplined

[26] Ron Mallon, "Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/social-construction-naturalistic/>.

[27] This is not to deny an intense interest in nature in certain romantic and idealistic periods and strains, especially in the post-Kantian idealism of Schelling and the traditions of *Naturphilosophie*, but this interest is starkly different than the Darwinian scientific tradition. I am not well informed about what happened in Europe, but *Naturephilosophie* and scientific naturalism come together in American Pragmatism. For an illuminating treatment of early Idealism and Romanticism, see Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Neo-Kantians, e. g., Hermann Cohen, Ernst Cassirer, certainly brought together an interest especially on mathematics and physics with idealism.

[28] Although such mediation might be far less than often thought, such as in the most naturalistic accounts, e. g., Ruth G. Milliken, *On Clear and Confused Ideas: An Essay About Substance Concepts* (Cambridge Studies in Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Language: A Biological Model* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). A few have developed interesting arguments that supposedly entail direct perception without representations and with the mind conceived as an evolutionarily tool of action. See Anthony Chemero, *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA; MIT press, 2009).

inquiry, that kinds can be approximately and fallibly discerned. The news is that people

in the sciences and domains of inquiry, most relevantly, the cognitive sciences, do not

think that humans directly perceive a world unmediated by brain and mind.[29] But that

does not inhibit them from thinking for extensively considered reasons either that there is

a real world or that it *can* be reliably known.[30] And reliably-known means according to

its kinds. Just the frequently made claim that all knowledge is mediated does not tell us

anything of much help. Eye-glasses mediate vision and cell phones talking, and both

shape communication in specific ways, but the crucial questions concern the specific

ways shaping occurs based on empirical inquiry. I will label the mainstream social

constructionism of the humanities and social sciences that has been highly popular since

the 1980s, idealistic romantic social constructionism. I do this in order to bring into relief

another sort of social constructivism that I will call realist social constructivism. The

former as typically practiced is either a kind of liberatory unveiling or skeptical attack on

generalization: people think that x is biological and natural, or caused by the way the

world is, but in reality x is socially constructed or there is q exception to y generalization,

therefore y is not a viable category.[31] The realist versions of construction also often seek

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[29] Of course, there are different camps about how mediation works as in the debates about modularity and plasticity, and mind as theory application versus an emphasis on new learning. See the debate between Fodor and Churchland: Jerry Fodor, "A Reply to Churchland's 'Perceptual Plasticity and Theoretical Neutrality,'" *Philosophy of Science* 55 (1988), 188-9; Paul Churchland, "Perceptual Plasticity and Theoretical Neutrality: A Reply to Jerry Fodor," *Philosophy of Science* 55 (1988), 167-87.
[30] There are a few cognitive scientists who have made non-realist arguments, most notably, Henry Plotkin, *Darwin Machines and the Nature of Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1993); Pascal Boyer, "Natural Epistemology or Evolved Metaphysics," *Philosophical Psychology* 13 (2001), 277-97. Both arguments seem ill conceived.
[31] Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999),1-35.

to unveil the social nature of things for purposes of social amelioration, but with major

differences in theory and practice, especially in adding consideration of causality to

convention.

Several approaches to realism with natural and social kinds have become

significant for many areas of inquiry.[32] Sociology, for instance, has gone through a

transformation by turning from obsession with the hypothetico-deductive methods of

ontology-shy empiricism with is statistical number crunching to realist induction often

using case study methods and sparking the return of historical sociology.[33] Like other

versions of kinds theory, the widely used approach of Richard Boyd holds to the

importance of distinguishing primary properties from secondary properties in natural

kinds and social kinds, but also rejects essences.[34] For Boyd and others, the most useful

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[32] The bibliography is too large for a note, but some examples of kinds applied to domains or compatible forms of realism follow: Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Howard Engelkirchen*, Capital as a Social Kind: Definitions and Transformations in the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Alexander Wendt, *The Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). There is now a whole tradition of realism from Roy Bhaskar's "critical realism" in the social sciences that has also made substantial inroads into the humanities.

[33] E. g., *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (ed. Alexander George and Andrew Bennett; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Philip Gorski, "Social'Mechanisms' and Comparative-Historical Sociology: A Critical Realist Proposal, *Frontiers of Sociology* (ed. Peter Hedström and BjörnWittrock; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[34] "How to Be a Moral Realist, *Essays on Moral Realism* (ed. G. Sayre-McCord; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 181-228; "Realism, Anti-Foundationalism and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 61 (1991), 127-48; "Constructivism, Realism, and Philosophical Method," *Inference, Explanation and Other Frustrations: Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (ed. J. Earman; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 131-98; "Homeostasis, Species, and Higher Taxa," *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (ed. Robert A. Wilson; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 141-86; "Kinds as the 'Workmanship of Men': Realism, Constructivism and Natural Kinds," *Rationalität, Realismus, Revision: Vorträge des 3. Internationalen*

paradigms come from the biological sciences. One frequently cited model for natural

kinds is the biological concept of species. The concept of species like "religion" has been

given numerous definitions, but unlike with "religion" the evaluation of these

conceptions has not taken place primarily at the *a priori* and conceptual/rhetorical level,

but with analyses that stress the realist criteria of their usefulness in various research

programs. If species, e. g., cats and dogs – are natural kinds, such kinds are historical,

have blurred and changing boundaries and are in some cases indeterminate.

Nevertheless, recent theory argues that we can and should be able to distinguish cats from

dogs as things out there in the world. The kinds are not just tricks of language or mental

concepts or social constructs, or merely ways that we divide the world due to our

parochial human interests, although interests, of course, play a central role in our

linguistic and other social practices. Cats and dogs provide an interesting example

because they are animals domesticated by humans. One could even argue that dogs have

been "constructed" by human breeding practices. So are they natural kinds or social kinds

or mental /linguistic constructs or just categories reflecting human interests? This

problem arises partly due to the imperfect suitability of the term "natural kinds" that was

coined by John Venn in 1876 following John Stuart Mill's idea (1843). Mill had

employed a term that some think more useful, "real kind."[35] The kinds tradition

developed as an alternative to epistemological and ontological idealism.

Kongresses der Gesellschaft für Analytische Philosophie (ed. J. Nida-Rümelin; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 52-89. It does not seem to be clear whether Boyd means his Homeostatic Property Cluster theory to apply to all kinds or to a large sub-category of kinds.

[35] Muhammad Ali Khalidi, *Natural Categories and Human Kinds: Classification in the Natural and Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

The main distinction drawn by the concept has typically been between what is really "out there" with some sort of boundaries – to be vague at this point – and what is only in the mind plus the signs and other conventions produced by humans. Such distinctions are difficult to draw, but the imperfect attempts have been productive, practically and theoretically helpful in various domains of inquiry. Some theorists have even used the terminology "investigative kinds" or "epistemic kinds."[36] The approaches that I find most useful emphasize something like mapping causality in order to make distinctions. For an example of a social kind that is conventional and not causal and thus not natural or real, Muhammad Khalidi uses the example of the category "permanent resident."[37] The properties associated with this kind are based on rules, laws, concepts and other conventions. One can discover little about the kind that is not already implicit in the concept. Knowledge of the kind primarily involves analysis of the concept. Of course the kind can possibly enter into various causal patterns and relations, but does not have to. The study of effects of the category "permanent resident" on a particular population would or at least should involve causal inquiry. The domestic dog is the result of human goals, desires, ideas about breed characteristics, traditional breeding practices and so on, but the kind dog is not like permanent resident. Something is not a dog just because some humans have ideas about it or because they enact some rules or write a story about it. Its properties are at least partly independent of us and we can discover new things about it by inquiry. In Cartesian language, one might say that it is objective

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[36] Khalidi, *Natural Categories*, 43, 158.
[37] Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Three Kinds of Social Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90 (2015), 102-112.

and not subjective.[38] Breeders and biologists have shown that it is an entity that is part of all sorts of causal networks and patterns. A particular dog has been inexactly copied from other dogs and on and on.

Boyd's use of species theory illustrates key features of his approach. How to define "species" is a hotly debated matter in biology and the philosophy of biology. Boyd knows that the most widely accepted definition has species as an interbreeding natural population in a particular ecological niche rather than as a type of organism.[39] The definition is historical. But without at all diminishing the historical dimension, Boyd stresses that in their actual research, in their practices of induction and explanation, biologists constantly rely upon the projectable idea of a species as a type of organism with properties such as regarding morphology, DNA similarities and differences, ecological niche and so on in a way that is integral to specific research projects. As the Wikipedia article "Species" states, "A useable definition of the word "species" and reliable methods of identifying particular species are essential for stating and testing theories and for measuring biodiversity . . ."[40] Boyd's approach, of course, has an obvious fit with non-cladistic approaches that emphasize the divergence of traits in speciation. But it is able to also theorize historical and other dimensions in a dynamic way. Boyd thinks that a similar approach can be used for human social kinds.[41] On such an approach to religion, any working definition of religion would not be only

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[38] I should confess that the language of "being out there" has a potentially unhappy Cartesian side to it in that it might suggest a Cartesian mental interior cut off from the world. I have borrowed the language from scholars who have argued that religion is discursive and not real, i. e., out there.

[39] "Higher Taxa."

[40] "Species," 3,12,16.

[41] E. g., "Higher Taxa," 153-56. He gives the example of the feudal economy.

conventional or linguistic-rhetorical, but might be made to emerge from the investigation of a pattern or patterns of human activity, relations and other causal structures that might come into relief with successful explanation. "Patterns" or "structure," "success" and "explanation" would be among the key theoretical terms of art in need of revision in ongoing inquiry.

As noted, for those who reject essences in theorizing kinds, one still has to distinguish primary elements, that is, the properties and relations that cause the kind and enable it to have stability and reproduce itself, from secondary properties that result from the causal structure (like the color yellow in gold and bananas). Boyd has introduced and developed the idea and metaphor of homeostatic property clusters as a way of understanding primary causal structures.[42] The idea of homeostasis here points to the way that kinds maintain relative stability, often in particular environments. When two hydrogen atoms are bonded to an oxygen atom, water exists, a kind and thus a relatively stable homeostasis of properties that cause it. Water in turn has properties such as liquidity at certain temperatures as a result of this causal structure. But recent kind theorists argue that a similar approach can be taken to biological and social kinds that can often be approximately and fallibly defined with the goal of increasing refinement. Unlike with water, biological kinds reliably reproduce even though error, change and blurred boundaries between kinds are constants. Part of what biological kinds are involves inexact copying, change and novel configurations. Other areas of complex and approximate knowledge that are inherently historical include meteorology, the geological

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[42] "Moral Realist"; "Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds"; "Higher Taxa." Some have developed Boyd's theory of homeostasis in application to specific domains, e. g., R. A. Wilson, *Genes and the Agents of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

sciences, the social sciences and, of course, human history. It makes no sense to talk of kinds with essences in these and other related areas of inquiry.

Very recently, proposals have been aimed at refining Boyd's Homeostatic Property Cluster account. Some have argued persuasively that if "mechanism" is to be taken in any but the loosest metaphorical way, many kinds lack a mechanism that holds the kind's properties together.[43] Some kinds have relatively stable clusters of properties, but one cannot pinpoint an obvious or clear mechanism. Thus kinds with mechanisms would be only one type with other types having different ways of maintaining some relative stability. Boyd seems to have allowed for this himself in writing: "Either the presence of some properties [in a family of properties] F tends (under appropriate conditions) to favor the presence of others, or there are underlying mechanisms or processes which tend to maintain the presence of the properties in F, or both."[44] It has also been suggested that "homeostasis" might be misleading in biology if it were to imply the notion of an ideal natural state that the homeostasis maintains. The notion that variability is some kind of deviation from what is natural has been sharply rejected in biology and other areas as a holdover from long discredited forms of essentialist thinking.[45] Homeostasis then might fit some kinds, but not others or the concept at least needs to be carefully defined. Proposals then for "a simple causal theory"[46] or perhaps "a

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[43] C. Craver, "Mechanisms and Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Psychology* 22 (2009), 575-94; Matthew H. Slater, "Natural Kindness," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 66 (2015), 375-411; Khalidi, *Natural Categories*, 72-79;
[44] "What Realism Implies and What It Does Not," *Dialectica* 43 (1989), 16.
[45] Eliot Sober, "Evolution, Population Thinking, and Essentialism," *Philosophy of Science* 47 (1980), 360.
[46] The terminology comes from Craver, "Mechanisms."

stable property cluster theory"[47] that would encompass a wide variety of natural kinds

and be applicable to social or human kinds seems to be a promising direction.[48]

It is crucial to understand what Boyd's theory is about. Boyd writes: ". . . the

philosophical theory of natural kinds has, as its only subject matter, the ways in which

accommodation demands of the various disciplinary matrices, are or could be,

satisfied."[49] "Accommodation demands" mean accommodation between the

classificatory, explanatory and inductive practices of particular disciplinary matrices and

the causal structures of the relevant phenomena." Khalidi's theory has the same

epistemic emphasis. The approach assumes that there is a world out there with causal

powers and effects that shape inquiry in the process of theorizing natural and social

kinds. The researcher's theories resemble drafts that are projected onto some aspect of

the world to see if they improve inductive and explanatory success. Boyd's theory tries

to explain how researchers have successfully done their work. Theorizing a kind, say a

species of animal, allows the inquirer to make inferences about properties of a certain

population on the basis of a suitable sample of the kind with a basis also for explaining

exceptions and variation. One can often infer certain properties from the presence of

other properties including historical properties in the biological domains, geology,

cosmology and the social sciences. Some properties have temporal causal priority over

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[47] The terminology comes from Slater, "Natural Kindness."

[48] I am, however, not persuaded by Slater's attempts to push the theory in the direction of pragmatism/idealism (aka irrealism, unrealism). One can admit a moderate pluralism into the theory, but still maintain that classifications used with strongly epistemic purposes are different from other uses connected with different interests. On this, see Khalidi, *Natural Categories*, 61-64 and chapter 6 who seems to me to offer a better account.

[49] "Kinds, Complexity and Multiple Realization: Comments on Ruth Milliken's 'Historical Kinds and the Special Sciences,'" *Philosophical Studies* 95 (1999), 86-87.

others. Some require very specific contexts like a virus. A virus can only continue to

exist and replicate if it finds a host cell to live in. Social kinds usually require specific

social environments, background conditions or contexts. With biological entities, the

causal centrally includes the historical. What exists is in some sense a replication or

reproduction of what came before. Social kinds are typically complex combinations of

causal and conventional structures. A difficult theoretical concept, "convention" has

usually been conceived as that of the human and social that is, as it were, "agreed upon,"

(as in the arbitrariness of language), but neither cognition nor a regularity of activity.[50] If

religion is a social kind and not just a modern western ideal or only ideological or a folk

classification that has been mistakenly imposed across history and the globe for the

purposes of domination, it will have both causal and conventional elements that allow for

relative stability and replication.[51]

As these historical areas of knowledge show, in theorizing homeostatic property

clusters or just relatively stable clusters of properties, every individual instance does not

have to exhibit every typical property. So there is variation over the instances and

change. Key parts, then, of inquiry about social kinds are their histories and the possible

emergence of variation within and across kinds. But kinds do exhibit relative degrees of

stability that involve the ability of instances to replicate. Boyd, Ron Mallon and others

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[50] Michael Rescorla, "Convention," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/convention/; and especially, Boyd, "Philosophical Method."

[51] For excellent critical discussion of claims that "religion" is just ideological, see Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 101-105 and throughout.

have argued that some of these properties are relations (i. e., relational properties).[52] The

admission of relations readily allows for causal properties to combine with human

convention in social kinds. Social practices are activities that significantly combine

convention and causal human activity.

The issue of stability brings into relief key differences between idealistic romantic

social constructionism and kinds constructivism. In the former case scholars have often

strongly emphasized the instability of the social constructions that they unveil. But in

other moods with the notions that reality is socially constructed and that this construction

inheres in language that determines thought, scholars see resistance as nearly futile. Even

Ian Hacking's important work on looping effects, for instance, and "making up people,"

emphasizes the great instability and changeability of such identity constructions.[53] But

his account of these processes is too thin and too linguistic/conceptual, if less so than in

most Post-Structuralist constructionism. Does the person who reads such a social

constructivist account and discovers, for instance, that race or gender is merely a social

construction, then change identities. Do the social conventions, laws and attitudes of

others toward this individual suddenly change? A critical perspective can be gained by

[52] Ron Mallon, "Social Construction, Social Roles, and Stability," *Socializing Metaphysics: The Nature of Social Reality* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), 335-36, 352. For a critique of recent attacks on relations, and an attempt to link nominalism and idealism, see Herbert Hochberg, "Nominalism and Idealism," *Axiomathes* 23 (2013), 213-34.

[53] "Making Up People," *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individualism, and the Self in Western Thought* (ed. T. C. Heller, M. Sosna and D. E. Wellbery; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 222-236; "The Making and Moulding of Child Abuse," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 253-88; "World Making by Kind-Making: Child Abuse for Example," *How Classification Works: Nelson Goodman among the Social Sciences* (ed. M. Douglas and D. Hull; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 180-238; *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

noting the way that some idealistic romantic social constructionism typically assumes certain deeply ingrained Western ideas about the natural versus the social and cultural. The biological and the social are often made mutually exclusive with regard to categories, roles and so on. Furthermore, biology and nature are hard and unalterable, but what is social or socially constructed is soft and unstable. On this view, what is social mostly involves ideas and conventions seen in the mental lives and behavior of individuals and groups. The guiding notion here is that an attitude or idea can be shown to be harmful, wrong or false and voluntarily changed. But social roles and other social kinds, often, but not always, seem to have a considerable degree of stability. Again, does the African American who finds out that race is socially constructed then cease to be who he or she had been in such a way that race is no longer a deep aspect of identity or does the individual become free from the complex of racially shaped social relations in which the person has lived? Does the man who discovers that gender is socially constructed now deeply think of himself as ungendered? The debunking goals in this type of social constructionism may be noble, but the theoretical resources badly underestimate the stability of many social constructions and the causal elements involved. Clearly what we consider natural in the human sphere is often more malleable than what is social. As noted, scholars in the romantic idealistic traditions often assume that drawing the line between what is natural and what is social unproblematic or that it is all social. That is far from the case and the issue calls for much intellectual labor and theory that can address the challenges inherent in the two difficult concepts. Kinds theory, I believe, is the most promising approach available for explaining both stability and changeability.

Sally Haslanger has made enormous contributions to critiquing what I am calling idealistic romantic social constructionism and to elaborating a much more powerful constructivism based on realism about the social and a certain theory of kinds. Her work builds upon and reacts to feminist thought that has been extremely important in the debates about social construction. That thought has been roughly divided between romantic idealistic positions and especially scholars inspired by Marxism who have resisted the former's focus on ideas, classification and language.[54] Her book, *Resisting Reality*, based on articles produced over roughly twenty years that have already had a large impact on feminist scholarship, race theory and social theory more broadly, makes incisive use of conceptual analysis from the tradition of analytic philosophy, but pushes notably beyond that tradition in many respects.[55]

Whereas Boyd and those who have followed his lead have emphasized causal explanation, Haslanger has taken the angle of ontology, asking not how social kinds come into existence or are caused and replicate, but how they are constituted. She applauds Hacking's work but criticizes it for being too ontologically and socially thin and

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[54] On Marxian, socialist and related feminisms see, Ann Ferguson and Rosemary Hennessy, "Feminist Perspectives on Class and Work," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/feminism-class/; Catharine Mackinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader* (ed. Stevi Jackson and Mary McIntosh; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 182-90; Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), but originally published 1983; Many writings of Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig could be added to the list among others.

[55] *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Ron Mallon also critiques Hacking's kind theory regarding instability in "Social Construction," 339-46.

lacking critical depth.[56] Social construction for him is mostly about the social causes of

identities. In this scenario, individuals receive and internalize socially available

classifications and self-understandings in an interactive way in a social matrix. Because

these individuals receive the classifications and change their identities in reaction to the

categories and categories change, there are no stable kinds. The process of modified

categories and identities goes on continually. Hacking surprisingly even draws a

conclusion that has been central to much of the romantic idealist tradition that the human

sciences are fundamentally unlike the natural sciences and need a special approach (e. g.,

phenomenology, hermeneutics. Verstehenism, post-modernism, culturalism). But as

Rachel Cooper has argued, Hacking's "human kinds" have not only cultural and

conceptual histories, but also causal histories.[57] The "human" and the "natural" cannot

be so easily separated.

Hacking is a realist with some skeptical nominalist tendencies from the empiricist

tradition that show up in his thinking about kinds.[58] Haslanger shares much with him, but

she uses a variety of kinds theory that though ontologically weak compared say to Boyd,

has been remarkably productive for social thought.[59] Reminiscent of those who think

religion is only a matter of language or classification and not "out there," Haslanger

critiques Post-Structuralist (romantic idealist) feminists and theorists of race who say that

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[56] *Ibid.*, 113-38.

[57] "Why Hacking is Wrong about Human Kinds," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 55 (2004), 73-85.

[58] On kinds, Hacking claims a "moderate" tradition with Venn, Mill, Russell, Price and Quine ("World Making," 185). See also his "A Tradition of Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 91 (1991), 109-26.

[59] See especially *Resisting Reality*, 151-57, 200-210, 305-307, 365-405. It seems to me that Haslanger's relatively nominalistic view of kinds causes her to rely heavily on semantic externalism of the Putnam/Kripke type that is itself controversial.

women and gender or racial structures are only creations consisting of language or discursive practices. She has little trouble showing the fallacious arguments, for example, of Judith Butler who claims that since our discursive practices mediate our relation to the world that any attempt to refer to something independent of our discursive practices compromises the attempt so that one cannot refer to anything that is not just yet more mostly politically loaded discourse.[60] Butler's position means that there is no real kind, women, only linguistic categories about women and gender. But as numerous feminist critics have pointed out, there can thus be no group women to organize for politically, to think about critically and no way to change the social subordination of women. One can only play with discourse about women and bemoan the prison house of language or assert one's individual freedom from all categories. Religion is not a social group of any sort and more difficult to theorize as a kind, but similar issues apply. Haslanger calls women an "objective type" and defines a woman as a person who is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, legal, political, medical, social X and so on) and a target for such subordination due to observed or imagined bodily features thought to be evidence of the person's biological role in reproduction.[61] Women, the kind, women, is out there in the world. This working definition then becomes the basis for social theory and social criticism about the objective type. The most salient objective properties in the theory are relations, mostly social relations. Women constituted by these conditions are "really out there." The properties are neither merely nominal nor are they essential. They are not only categories and discursive practices, although Haslanger does not underestimate the importance of categories and

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[60] *Resisting Reality*, 150-157.
[61] E. g., *Resisting Reality*, 132-33.

discursive practices. In Haslanger's theorization, someone who is "being raced" is being treated in certain ways by others, e. g., the media, the police, educational institutions, medical institutions, neighbors and family. Women from different cultures and periods of time might have very different relations, but there is also objective commonality. They are all subordinated in certain objective ways related to bodily features or imagined bodily features and so on. I concur with those who think that if Haslanger added a stronger causal dimension to her theory that it would be even more robust and effective.[62] Boyd, Khalidi, and Haslanger give us three different but related forms of kinds theory that allow for robust critical social theory. In my view, Hacking stands on the edge of the approach, far from romantic idealistic social constructionism in most ways, but limited by his empiricist ontological? assumptions.

As mentioned above regarding Hacking, one of the central normative programs of some romantic and idealistic traditions with powerful strands in *Lebensphilosophie*, Neo-Kantianism, phenomenology and hermeneutics has been to make strong distinctions between human beings and nature, between the social and the natural and between disciplines and ways of knowing that have humans as subjects versus nature as object. But perhaps the most common way of doing this has been simply to treat human beings as only cultural and conceptual. Thus philosophers have often seen what they call "mind-dependency" as the hallmark of the social in opposition to the natural.[63] Although the recent theory regarding kinds, talks of "natural kinds" and "social kinds," and the latter

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[62] E. g., Theodore Bach, "Gender is a Natural Kind with a Historical Essence," *Ethics* 122 (2012), 231-72.

[63] Khalidi, *Natural Categories* has persuasive arguments about mind-dependence/independence and misuse of the concepts, e. g., 142-57, 165, 221-27. This paragraph draws on Khalidi's discussions.

are certainly different in some very important respects, the best, I believe, emphasizes the continuity between the two. There is a sense in which most social kinds are also natural kinds. Researchers have proposed many social kinds such as economic recession, racism, money, prime minister, capital. Each it is claimed have certain properties and relations that allow for the particular social formation and relative stability, e. g., property clusters or some causal structure. As noted above, while some social kinds like "prime minister" are largely constituted by the specific concepts and attitudes-practices that human beings have about them, others like recession and racism, can exist without the mind dependency of humans. Racism and recession can exist without being thematized, named or at all recognized by people as distinct kinds. Human attitudes, human convention and causation thus play varied roles in the structuration of social kinds. I will argue that religion is similar to recession and racism in that it can exist as a relatively stable, self-replicating cluster of social and psychological properties without being recognized or named. This conclusion potentially undermines the claim that religion can only exist with a certain modern discourse of "religion."

As noted, a great deal has been made of the fact that social kinds, unlike most natural kinds, are often mind-dependent/language dependent. This dependence of social kinds on human attitudes, categories and thought is often believed to make a huge ontological and epistemological difference. John Searle, for instance, has argued that social kinds are ontologically subjective, although epistemologically objective.[64] But I agree with Khalidi that mind dependence for social kinds is a red herring.[65] Because kinds depend upon human cognition in various ways does not make them unreal or

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[64] *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).
[65] "Three Kinds," 98-111.

subjective. This would be the case if the mind belonged to a different order of existence as conceived in some forms of idealism and dualism instead of belonging to the natural world and if mental states or neural processes were spiritual or immaterial or of a *sui generis* ontological order of language.[66] The entire romantic idealistic tradition is in this respect inescapably haunted by Kant's transcendental subject. The distinction between social kinds with properties and relations linked causally versus those linked conventionally proves to be a more helpful, but different kind of distinction. Human beings, of course, are "causal systems," but it can be helpful to analyze social kinds as various combinations of causal and conventional properties and relations that form relatively stable clusters in order to exist.

Searle emphasizes examples such as money, elections, marriage, and private property that involve conventions, laws and rules for their existence. For something to function as money, it has to be believed to be money and thus used as money. But very many social kinds, as noted above, do not depend upon people having thoughts about the kinds themselves in order to exist: e. g., racism, poverty, recession, economic markets, social fields.[67] There have been societies with no concept of racism and yet they had

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[66] My argument implies specific positions about causality and supervenience. Namely, I find the approach of Jaegwon Kim highly unpersuasive (e. g., "Blocking Causal Drainage and Other Maintenance Chores with Mental Causation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67 (2003), 151-176. For approaches that I find convincing, see Panu Raatikainen, "Causation, Exclusion and the Special Sciences," *Erkenntnis* 73 (2010), 349-363; C. List and P. Menzies, "The Causal Autonomy of the Special Sciences," *Emergence* (ed. G. Macdonald and C. Macdonald; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); A. Marras, "Kim's Supervenience Argument and Nonreductive Physicalism," *Erkenntnis* 66 (2007), 305-327

[67] Amie Thomasson, "Foundations for Social Ontology," *Protosociology,* 18-19 (2003), 269-90; "Realism and Human Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67 (2003), 580-609.

people who were racist.[68] Such kinds, of course, could not exist if people did not have mental states that allow for such things as beliefs that others are of an inherently inferior or despised constitution and if they did not perform actions that involved treating others as of an inferior nature. But the racists need not be aware of or understand their behaviors under a description such as racism.

Before briefly discussing capital as a social kind in Marx [**omitted, in-progress**], it might be useful to say more about the recent theory concerning kinds and some of its other assumptions. One of the problems for what I have characterized as the idealist range of positions, including structuralism and Post-Structuralism is the mysterious causal powers that the view often seems to attribute to signs, e. g., language, discourse, rhetoric. On one reading of Foucault, for instance, human beings are constructed by discourse and operate entirely according the causation of its mysteriously appearing totalities. The approach to kinds that I am describing is clear about signs: In themselves they have no causal powers. To use a homely illustration, the chalkboard drawing by a basketball coach of a play with the positions and movements of the players in itself is without causation.[69] Only when that set of signs is enacted by the players does causation occur. In other words, "the influence of classificatory practices on causal structure always supervenes on ordinary causal mechanisms."[70] The idealist notion that our ways of classifying the world in themselves change the world has many absurd consequences including that historians would change what had happened in the past by

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[68] In more recent work, e. g., *Making the Social World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 116-17, Searle has admitted that there are kinds like recession that do not depend upon attitudes about them, but vaguely suggests their constitution by indirect mind dependence.

[69] Engelskirchen, *Capital as a Social Kind*, 4-5.

[70] Boyd, "Enthusiasm," 145.

writing about it. The distinction between interpretation and the thing interpreted would disappear. This is not to say that the "enacted" effects of the classificatory practices of both the historian and the objects of the historian's study are not enormous, but that power is only due to ordinary and knowable causal mechanisms, not some inscrutable power of signs.

Some of the most important recent developments concern how one conceives the roles of theory and explanation. During the emergence of modern science in the 17th and 18th centuries, thinkers characteristically developed their ideas and practices in opposition to medieval science and especially medieval Aristotelianism, Platonism and Christian beliefs about the supernatural. This generated an enormous emphasis on the empirical, the observable, in opposition to the unobservable and metaphysical. Thinkers such as Locke, Hume and Kant wanted to help science by getting rid of such things as Platonic ideas, real universals, and demons in favor of knowledge founded on concrete observable entities in the everyday world. Overall, empiricism also protected the new thinkers by demarcating their domain and the new knowledge as only about the observable, allowing religion its own domain. Their work would be no threat to religion that was in the domain of the unobservable for which science could remain agnostic. This move deeply shaped the form of religion in western modernity, but also science. Furthermore since the knowledge of science would be empirical, based on observation, theory about what could not be observed would be minimized, even eliminated.[71] Thus much philosophy is just recently getting over the idea that thinking about metaphysics is illegitimate. In the

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[71] One example is the use of Ramsey Sentences that place terms of theories into purely existential quantifiers.

empiricist tradition, explanation based on theories, it was claimed, had to derive directly

from observation.

But as the understanding of science and domains more generally has developed, it

has become ever clearer that science and the domains of knowledge deal with both the

observable and the non-observable and especially the relations between the two in

particular cases. One cannot see atoms or subatomic particles or the properties and

relations that cause a recession or a field of social relations or natural selection or the

facial recognition system of the brain or how we see color and on and on. The past is

completely unobservable for historians. Thus, to be simplistic, knowledge of

unobservables requires theory and since one can only see what the unobserved has

caused, the search for causality makes explanation central. Explanation, however, begins

as a kind of imaginative educated guessing and cannot spring simply from observation or

evidence. But on the Anglo-American side, a once dominant positivism and empiricism

and some successors have long tried the foundationalist move of minimizing or denying

the theoretical dimension of inquiry by claiming that each theoretical sounding sentence

was based on another sentence that ultimately went back to and was secured by an

observational sentence or simply by observation. In addition to rejecting the whole

approach of such arguments from language that are (or claim to be) *a priori* and

foundationalist, the recent philosophy of science upon which I have been focusing

stresses the "profound theory dependence" of all the methods for obtaining knowledge.[72]

This includes such things as principles of classification, methods for finding and

assessing evidence and for assessing success in explanation. It has been plausibly argued

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[72] Boyd,"Philosophical Method"; "Enthusiasm," 133.

that specialists in the various fields and domains are only able to make reliable inferences based on observations or evidence when guided by methodological principles regarding what is taken to be approximate knowledge of real kinds with unobservable properties, both natural and social. On this view, in practice, inquiry seems to presuppose and require natural and social kinds. In other words, reliable explanation even in fields like history and religious studies cannot flourish without inferences that are not possible unless one assumes real kinds as part of that explanation. Put another way, successful inductive inference and successful explanation in the past seem to have constantly pointed toward natural and social kinds. Such inquiry involves radical contingency because there are no simply *a priori* methodological principles. Principles and methods to frame inquiry always depend upon selecting from and adapting principles and methods that have been used in past inquiry. Inquiry and principles of inquiry reach out from past inquiry, build on it, but go on in new ways that often could not have been predicted. The goal of this social process is increasingly better explanation.[73]

This theory dependence means that any attempt to define kinds – a particular process of classification - must be *a posteriori* and revisable in light of new inquiry. The implied critique of scholarship with idealist and constructivist claims about "religion" and religion is that no robustly explanatory program of inquiry can get off the ground with idealist/romantic assumptions and methods. The arguments from "our discourse about religion" and the (modern western) history of the concept have a strongly, if not entirely, *a priori* and conventional quality to them. *A priori* means the old idea that one can obtain knowledge prior to or without experience by analyzing language and concepts.

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[73] Boyd, "Enthusiasm," 133.

But if kind theory is correct, stopping inquiry at this point precludes robust causal explanation. The great number of scholars who have assumed or argued that there is something out there with some sort of coherence related to our language of "religion" are implicitly holding to an intuition of a real social kind or kinds that is/are out there. If reliable inquiry about kinds is always *a posteriori*, just studying the concepts, the idea of religion, e. g., of modern European language speakers, cannot without the attempt to theorize causal structures ever get beyond folk usage and intellectual traditionalism. The fundamental idea of "modern critical knowledge" is that it is not just conventional.

Our folk concepts about social processes, the brain/mind, the physical structures of the world and on and on are almost always extremely varied, contradictory, local, often ideological and unreliable in light of "scientific" knowledge. This should be no surprise since such linguistic practices are part of everyday negotiations of living and not struggles within traditions and complex social formations aiming at best explanation. So, of course, the modern western discourses of "religion" are extremely varied – even more than the religion-is-not-out-there-scholars admit – and are subject to numerous and varied expressions of power interests. "Religion" cannot be a useful concept for social and historical inquiry that involves explanation without robust causal inquiry. But for the scholar interested in kinds theory, these facts about language use and practice can be the beginning point for causal inquiry and then in turn enhanced critical study of language and other convention. The work of those who have analyzed the concepts and rhetoric is necessary and important, but not sufficient. The scholar may have the intuition that there might be some structure of causes that generates at least some or even much of the language and activity of what people in the West, at least, think of as religion. To make

inquiry about an intuition of a causal structure, the scholar must look for the normally not observed, the non-obvious, social and psychological processes that are often not or never perceived or perceived as significant on the level of folk practice. How far one can generalize the theorized kind is largely an empirical matter promoted with the process of projecting the kind in historical, ethnographic and sociological inquiry.

Part 2: Toward Theorizing Religion as a Social Kind

It might be helpful to begin with some comments about what the task is and is not. The task of theorizing the kind religion is not the description of an essence. An essence is an unchanging core to some entity. A social kind like religion will have a history and instances will vary in the properties and elements of their ontology, even if a number of the properties and elements will typically be reliably present in some combination at any one time so as to allow for a degree of stability. The kind religion will also not be the expression of a myth or a theology, even though it will involve people having mental content such as representations, beliefs, desires and other mostly unconscious mental states. A developed socially shared narrative, a myth, like very numerous other things traditionally associated with religion is best thought of as something secondary, but widely, even typically, generated by the kind religion. The kind religion would be relations and processes that have generated much or most of the data that we call "religion," but the kind must not in any way be confused with our concepts of "a religion" or "religions" as in "Christianity and Buddhism are religions." Such historical traditions are far too heterogeneous, porous and unstable to be social kinds, although they may be made up of many social kinds linked in various ways.

The task is to look for evidence of a relatively stable set of relations, causal processes and conventions that one can theorize as generating *some of what our folk or traditional conceptions treat as "religion."* The implications of these latter emphasized words bear particular importance. As a realist inquiry, that is involving causal explanation, the theory formation ought to be *a posteriori* and allow for projection.[74] Thus one might conclude that the theory describes something that is out there, but that it is too far from our concepts of religion to helpfully be called the kind religion. But even such a failure might be regarded as progress. One could simply call the theorized entity the X kind related to religion, but alternatively if it can be plausibly thought of as having generated much of the endless cultural variation that we call "religion," then it ought to be capable of helpful projection in further research into religion. In the latter case, it might be useful to call it the kind, religion, since it would be able to aid in the explanation of much of what we would conventionally call religion. Such usefulness would suggest that there are not only conventional, but also causal relations between the kind so formulated and the world.

The kind, religion, would also not be a history of the origins or historical development of religion, although some knowledge of these would surely be necessary in formulating the kind. My theory does draw upon the idea of two historically manifest types of religion, with one type being historically predominant after the other type.[75] But

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[74] Projectability is a feature of real kinds, namely that such kinds have properties that point to other properties in a reliable way and therefore support robust inductive inferences. The classic treatment of the topic is Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (n. 14 above). There is a substantial bibliography on projection including on its relevance for varied domains of inquiry.

[75] For these types in the ancient Mediterranean, see my, "The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings Versus the Religion of Meanings, Essences and Textual Mysteries," *Ancient*

regarding the kind or kinds, the key point is ontological not historical. Religion # 2 has

widely depended upon the existence of religion # 1. They certainly can and do co-exist

and mutually affect each other, but religion # 1 does not need for # 2 to be there in order

to exist. Kinds of exchange are central to both historical types, but the first focuses on

reciprocal gift giving that has traditionally been described as "material." The second,

often not excluding versions of the first incorporated into it or independently alongside,

has its focus on such things as the gift of loyalty to a god, a morally good self, living so

as to conform to the way things truly are and so on. In turn, God or the Dao or pneuma

and logos or some other agent or anthropomorphized dimension of "reality" with some

agent like characteristics "rewards" the one who "gives." Exchange has not disappeared,

but has been transformed by the "rationalizing" of intellectuals. In East Asia, West Asia,

South Asia, the Mediterranean and other places religion # 1 was pervasive when literate

experts rose in power to claim that religion # 1 had conceptions of gods and non-obvious

beings (hereafter "gods/NOBS") that were too local or morally unworthy or too

anthropomorphic or that the practices were too "material" or too economic and frequently

that religion # 1 was done in ignorance of essential writings.[76]

Mediterranean Sacrifice: Images, Acts, Meanings, (ed. Jennifer Knust and Zsuzsanna Varhelyi New York; Oxford University Press, 2011), 35–56; "Kinds of Myth, Meals and Power: Paul and the Corinthians," in *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians*, (ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill O. Miller Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 105–49; "Why Expert Versus Non-Expert is Not Elite Versus Popular Religion: The Case of the Third Century," *Religious Competition in Late Antiquity* (ed. Nathaniel DesRosiers and Lilly C. Vuong: Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 139-53.

[76] These changes have often been associated with the so-called Axial Age, a category that I do not use, but that partly fits the relevant chronology in several areas. Another, insufficient but interesting category would consist of those periods in which animal sacrifice was attacked and sometimes made symbolic by rising intellectuals such as in China, India, West Asia, the Mediterranean and Europe.

This hypothesis about kinds can be stated as a relation between pervasive economic orders and human tendencies to imagine gods and NOBS. First, the relative stability and ubiquity of religion in history derives from its embeddedness in the non-modern agricultural-pastoral economies. The potential for relatively stable mental representations of gods/NOBS may be a general human characteristic, but only a particular common environment that facilitates that potential could produce relatively stable and pervasive (religious) social practice and cultural formations. Second, the religion created by literate intellectuals has built upon this stability and ubiquity in the context of the political economies and cultures of pre-modern city-states and empires. The central puzzle to the second hypothesis is the relation of literate often religiously specialized experts to the economies (with cultures and political orders) of those states and empires. Unlike many forms of Marxist and Marxian theory, these hypotheses do not reduce religion to an epiphenomenon of the economy, but also do not make religion autonomous, although some historical instances of social fields consisting of relations among religious experts attained some degree of semi-autonomy. The approach also does not make religion innate or a human universal, but still accounts for its historical ubiquity. In this way, one can understand how dominant or pervasive religion has often been in cultures while at the same time seeing that conditions can arise to make non-religiosity or irreligion pervasive in some cultures. My account brackets (for the moment) the peculiar instance of western modernity that may involve a third historical type of religion deeply connected to religion # 2.[77]

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[77] The question about religion in modernity, however, is part of understanding modern and recent scholarship on religion and the issue of whether it is "out there" or not, realist or idealist construals.

My hypothesis proposes that very fundamental social and cognitive processes have generated religion # 1 and that religion # 2, dominated by literate experts in "knowledges" and writings, modifies but cannot (completely) do without elements of religion # 1. Even though the experts (either politically supported or semi-autonomous) often criticize religion # 1 as carnal, material, bloody, ignorant, unorthodox, magical and so on, religion # 2 still embodies patterns of exchange with whatever corresponds to the gods/NOBS of religion # 1 and the pattern still involves communication, e. g., signs, revelations, and often some things participants do that is considered higher than the "material gift-giving" of religion # 1. Finally, the religious practices of # 2 generate some sort of reward or payback, although the ideology of the experts often but not always involves the rejection of "bargaining with" or reciprocity with the higher or purer or more universal god or principle with agent-like and teleological characteristics. In particular historical/cultural instantiations, religion is always a matter of more and less and can shade off into what has traditionally been classified as a philosophy or science. What makes these two patterns difficult to see is not only cultural variation, but also that they are typically embedded in structures of political power from gender hierarchy in households to the organizations of city states, kingdoms and empires. Such political structures with their social arrangements can support, suppress, combine and modify both patterns of religion in numerous ways. Nevertheless, religion # 1 has historically continually persisted and reappeared even when # 2 disappeared and keeps appearing alongside religion # 2 even when the experts do not approve of it.

An interesting example is contemporary China. Buddhism and Daoism came on the scene as movements of intellectuals with strong critiques of traditional religion.

Ancient Confucianism, long portrayed as a largely secular "system of belief," has been shown by recent manuscript discoveries to be far more "religious" and similarly advocating its own intellectualized religious practices.[78] From the revolution of 1911 through the 1980s, the governments took many approaches to suppressing and controlling both the "three teachings," more or less official religion, and so-called popular or traditional religion.[79] But even with the option of Daoist or Buddhist official practice gone, even during the days of the Cultural Revolution, it has become clear that traditional/popular religion just went underground, especially in homes.[80] The Kitchen or Hearth god (*Zao Jun*) and many other deities and deified human beings were and are engaged in intensive exchange with prayers, divination, and offerings.[81] Such practices are clearly often intertwined with production, distribution/exchange and consumption of goods, especially food. As the suppression from the communist government eased after the mid-1980s, there was a massive reemergence of this kind of religiosity.[82] Meanwhile

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[78] For example, the texts from the Shanghai Museum discussed by Sarah Allan, *Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015). For other discoveries reshaping views, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes: Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and Related Texts (Columbia University Press, 2014); Wang Zhongjiang, Daoism Excavated: Cosmos and Humanity in Early Manuscripts (Three Pines Press, 2015).*

[79] For a masterful summary account of Chinese religion that gives due weight to both religion # 1 and # 2, see the introduction to Donald S. Lopez, *Religions of China in Practice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[80] On the issues surrounding the concept of popular religion in the Chinese contexts, see Stephen Teiser, "Popular Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54 (1995), 378–395 and for its relations to the idea of religion # 1 and # 2, see my "Why Expert Versus Non-Expert."

[81] Ronald G. Knapp, *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols and Household Ornamentation (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1999).*

[82] Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). One of the valuable contributions of this book is its account of how local "popular religion" (# 1) gets modified by what I call the civic political order. In spite of normative Chinese and western categories, Fan

Daoism and Buddhism, long described by scholars as (along with Confucianism) the

essence of Chinese religion also revived somewhat but under close government control.

Clearly the massive, seemingly spontaneous, emergence of such exchange with hundreds

of thousands of local and supra-local gods (of heaven, underworld and earth), spirits and

the deified was a separate phenomenon. This so-called popular religion is clearly a

version of religion # 1. Ethnographers have also studied the lively continuation of

religion # 1 among the 30 million strong Chinese diaspora of Southeast Asia with its

central pattern of exchange.[83] Divination, prayer and gift giving with conceptions of

reciprocal relations toward gods/NOBS in a largely agricultural and/or domestic and

neighborhood context are the central activities of this religiosity.

The theorized kind ought to be based upon historical evidence, ethnographic

evidence and evidence from the cognitive/psychological disciplines. I obviously cannot

present and analyze the evidence in this essay. I can only point to the claims that I am

making about the evidence. Thus I have proposed my auxiliary or historical background

hypothesis that divides the evidence into the two major types. The first pattern

dominated numerous cultures in the ancient Mediterranean and Europe, Africa, China,

South and West Asia, Mesoamerica and other places before and sometimes after the rise

of religious social formations based upon the power of literate experts who were often

supported by dominant political powers, but has persisted up to the present in many

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Lizhu and Chen Na, "The Resurgence of Traditional Chinese
religion,":http://fudanuc.ucsd.edu/_files/201306_China_Watch_Fan_Chen.pdf is a
helpful account. One site, refers to a 1995 estimate that 80% of the contemporary
population practiced some form of traditional folk religion
(http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/religion-traditional.htm).
[83] E. g., Jean DeBernardi, *The Way That Lives in the Heart: Chinese Popular Religion
and Spirit Mediums in Penang Malaysia (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).*

places as what has typically been described as folk, primitive, popular, syncretistic and dominated religion.

A factor that has obscured the fundamental social processes of these two broad types comes from the way that modern and sometimes earlier forms of thought, including academic scholarship, has rigidly segregated "the economic" from "the religious." The social practices inherent to religion # 1 have sometimes been classified as economic, but usually in pejorative ways deriving from traditions of Christianity, Buddhism, South Asian religion and Islam. The Durkheimian tradition has fostered this separation. For Durkheim, the "secular sphere" was individualistic and instrumentally oriented. The religious sphere was communal and expressive. The idea that religion is essentially expressive has in my estimation had a baleful effect on the study of religion and has been a central theme of religion in Western modernity.

To get things off the ground, I want to talk about the abstraction of two types of imagined exchange between gods, other non-obvious beings and humans. The basic components of religion # 1 are four interrelated features: (1) populations living with concepts of gods and similar non-obvious beings as human-like agents; (2) Kinds of exchange between humans and the gods/NOBS imagined by humans; (3) means of communication/prayer with some of the gods/NOBS; (4) divinatory practices, signs and messages from the gods/NOBS. The cultural variation in conceptions of god/NOBS is enormous, but the pattern of such beings with which 2, 3 and 4 are imagined to take place is endemic to all of these cultures in the relevant historical periods. So also there is great variation in patterns of exchange, communication and divination. Even with an enormous variety of gods and NOBS, variations of related practices and enormous

cultural difference, these practices appear to be constant and common across the
evidence.

These interrelated practices have been so common and so widespread that the fact
ought to call for explanation from the relevant disciplines and areas of the social sciences
and humanities. That religious studies has typically not seen this evidence of ubiquity as
raising a fundamental question signals to me that religious studies has to a large extent
not been interested in treating religion as a normal human phenomenon studied in the
university. Other disciplines such as historical sociology, history and sometimes cultural
anthropology have typically accepted the master narratives of the West and of
Christianity, especially the defeat of inferior polytheism by superior monotheism and
applied the templates to other "advanced civilizations." Religion number 1 becomes
relegated to the categories of survivals and popular heterodoxies. But if the
pervasiveness of the patterns is correct, the fact calls for explanation. Success in
theorizing the kind religion would be an aid in explanation.

The pattern goes as follows. Individuals and groups have culturally available
beliefs and representations of gods and NOBS and assume that such beings exist, though
largely invisible to them. A locally significant number of beings in this category are
imagined and treated as human-like agents with desires, purposes, personalities and so
on, although the anthropomorphism is variable and a matter of more or less with
intellectualist classes, when they arose, often preferring less. Such culturally specific
"knowledge" of gods/NOBS may typically be held as ambiguous, or uncertain, yet people
bet on a pragmatic relation to some of these gods/NOBS. In their daily lives people in
the cultures also assume that individuals and groups can establish and maintain exchange

relations with some of these beings. The gods/NOBS or some subset of them are

believed to control aspects of the environment of human life or to produce and give

things to people from nature such as health, children, crops, good and bad fortune,

weather and so on. Since such beings are typically invisible most of the time but can see

what humans are doing, participants view them as significant sources of strategic

information. Humans in return give back honor, thanksgiving and especially gifts of

enormous variety.

Such patterns of reciprocity with gods and NOBS has and still is in certain places

so common and basic to the cultures that researchers often pay little attention to it.

Obviously this lack of attention on the part of researchers arises in part because the much

more visible and impressive mass of institutions, ritual complexes, art, architecture,

socio-political arrangements and above all the bodies of teachings and writings produced

by literate (usually) elites and often supported by the political order captures the attention

and seems vastly more important than ordinary prayer, offerings, signs and the intuition

of approachable non-obvious beings. Indeed, the attitude of denial seems to me endemic

to the idealistic traditions for which only the "higher products" of mind such as art,

thought and language are of importance.[84] Unfortunately this perspective ignores what a

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[84] Although it would apply, I am thinking not so much of Platonism as post-Kantian
thought that broke down Kant's clear distinction between the intellectual and the sensible
faculties and thus between phenomena and noumena so that mind "ruled all" without any
independent input from the world. After the Second World War, Saussurean linguistics
and elements from the Prague School, primarily phonology, was conceived, especially in
France, but also elsewhere, as scientific and yet it came to replace classical and post-
Kantian philosophical psychology in the social sciences in a way that resembled the mind
of idealism (except that it treated only "the unconscious") in that language worked
without any independent input from the world.

large portion of the populations in question were and are doing religiously day in and day out. This is a very thin sketch of pattern number one.

So, what are the processes of the kind, religion, that have allowed it to arise and persist so widely across the globe and history? They consist of the way some cognitive propensities and fundamental social processes can interact in certain circumstances. I begin with a few points about the broadly human cognitive propensities.[85] I follow the widely accepted results of cognitive psychology and the neurosciences, but I think that even without this now large body of mostly experimental research one could arrive at the same or a similar set of conclusions with more traditional psychology, historical and anthropological research on anthropomorphism or other models of the mind such as connectionism or even so-called embodied cognition.[86] I will remain relatively agnostic about issues concerning how much of the brain/minds architecture comes from human biological nature, how much arises from experience and the degree of brain plasticity.

Researchers from the various brain/mind sciences agree that the classical western conception of the mind as a centralized all purpose thinking organ either in the romantic version that stresses intuition and feeling or the Enlightenment version stressing reasoning or the recent holistic version that minds are just individual expressions of a historical and cultural totality are not viable models. The brain/mind consists of many

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[85] For an important defense of the value of the cognitive sciences to the humanities, see Edward Slingerland, *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body & Culture*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[86] For an early cognitive theory by an anthropologist, see Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and regarding predecessor theories, "Early Cognitive Theorists of Religion: Robert Horton and His Predecessors," *Mental Culture: Classical Social Theory and the Cognitive Science of Religion* (ed. Dimitris Xygalatas and William McCorkle; Durham, UK: Acumen, 2013), 33-51.

devices or systems or tools evolved to meet evolutionary challenges with kinds of

coordination or lack of coordination.[87] In radical challenge to traditional conceptions of

mind, the neurological and cognitive sciences hold that conscious reflective thinking,

conscious beliefs and desires, are supported by and decisively shaped by a large number

of intuitive or unconscious mental tools, "non-reflective beliefs." These tools allow very

fast rough and ready ontological categories – e. g., whether something is living,

inanimate and bounded or inanimate and unbounded (water), an agent (able to initiate

action on the basis of internal states such as desires) - to be activated and connect with

other tools so as to shape reflective thinking. Some of these tools are present in very

young infants and some like theory of mind (ToM) that allows us to unconsciously

attribute beliefs, desires, moods to others in complex interactive ways emerge at about

three years of age.[88] In short, the theory about the propensity to have concepts of

gods/NOBS holds that this tendency occurs because a large number of intuitive mental

tools, their relations to other tools and to reflective thinking accidentally support the

formation of such beliefs.[89] Above all, human minds are designed to over-attribute

agency to the world and to see purposes, emotions, desires and other aspects of mind in

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[87] I borrow the language, "mental tools," from Justin Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2004). For this consensus, and the debates about mind, see *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate* (ed. Daniel Sperber, D. Premack and A. J. Premack; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture* (ed. Lawrence Hirschfeld and Susan Gelman; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For a more popular account, see Stephen Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).
[88] H. Welman, D. Cross and J. Watson, "Meta-Analysis of Theory of Mind Development: The Truth about False Belief," *Child Development* 72 (2001), 655-684.
[89] Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe?*, 15. Regarding, "accidentally," a believer can always assert that the accident is due to God's (which
god is always an insoluble problem) design.

the non-human world.[90] If what appeared to be a bear at dusk turns out to be a boulder

there is little cost, but to err on the side of not attributing agency can be costly.[91] Of

course, there is much variation in the human population with one range regarding ToM

going from autism to schizophrenia. The first attributes theory of mind with difficulty

and the latter sees agency and mind everywhere.[92]

There is no god or religion module.[93] Rather certain cognitive tendencies and

abilities that evolved in the face of environmental challenges as side effects make it very

easy for humans to form, hold and transmit concepts of often invisible beings with

human-like agency, and human-like desires, moods, emotions and so-forth, but with

some features that break the rules of human-like existence. Experimental work has

shown that such minimally counterintuitive beliefs store easily in the memory, are easily

recalled and easily transmitted to others.[94] Researchers have shown that a wide range of

culturally particular, but widespread types of such beings share a common set of

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[90] A key concept in numerous cognitive theories of religion, see the clear and concise accounts with the technical bibliography, in Barrett, 31-44 and Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 75-86.

[91] Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*, 4-5.

[92] Catherine Caldwell-Harris, Caitlin Fox Murphy, Tessa Velazquez, Patrick McNamara, "Religious Belief Systems of Persons with High Functioning Autism," Cognitive Science ConferenceProceedings:http://csjarchive.cogsci.rpi.edu/proceedings/2011/papers/0782/paper0782.pdf

[93] This great distortion of the cognitive theory of religion that undermines its central claims is often falsely attributed by opponents of the cognitive approach. This sadly includes Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2011), 629, n. 154 and Russell McCutcheon, "Will Your Cognitive Anchor Hold in the Storms of Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78 (2010), 1186.

[94] The terminology is from Barrett. See *Why Would Anyone Believe?*, 21-30. But the idea and theory is from Pascal Boyer. See, for example, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Development* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), especially 51-136.

characteristics, e. g., the beloved dead, ancestors, ghosts, local and "mid-level" gods, "demons," "spirits."

In the most widely accepted cognitive approach, the category gods/NOBS obtains its coherence from the theory of minimal counter-intuitiveness. A great deal of research has focused on the way that non-reflective mental tools supply automatic ontological categories such as that something is an agent or an artifact or a category of inanimate entities or a living thing. In connection with the categories, descriptors supply properties to the categories. Agents are entities that can initiate action on the basis of internal states. Living things grow and eventually die, but inanimate physical object like rocks do not.[95] An MCI obtains when the concept violates some of the properties of the normal concept. A tree that was invisible or that talked or a mountain that aged and died would be MCI concepts. MCIs stimulate creative inferential potential. It is inviting to imagine what someone like us could and would do if they were invisible to others or if they could overhear what people said and thought and so on. Violate too many properties and the concepts are difficult to acquire, remember correctly and have little inferential potential. A god who had the normal counterintuitive properties of a god but was all powerful, three persons in one, all knowing, everywhere at once, non-temporal and non-spatial is massively counterintuitive and the type of god/NOB concept often produced by experts in

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[95] Still the idea of a mortal rock misses the logic of the theory. Counterintuitive concepts have the claimed affects when they describe agents who have imagined or real effects *relevant to* those holding the concepts. I would add a stress on the potential for interactivity and communication. Mortal and immortal rocks are counterintuitive to the extent that they make no sense without some explanatory framework, but rocks that possessed some human characteristics of mind, communicated and possessed agency would fall into the theory. Such rocks are abundant in "aboriginal" Australian thought/practice. For an attempt to discredit such cognitive theory of the counterintuitive with the idea of a mortal rock, see

religion # 2.[96] The MCI theory of the psychologist proves extremely helpful for several reasons including that it allows researchers to deploy a category that bypasses the limitations of definitions based ultimately on the normative content of native beliefs. Santa Claus or a space alien or a leprecaun or the Dao or Stoic pneuma or Zeus or a buddha could all be MCI religious concepts as long as they involve a role in social practices as agents. My "god/NOB" terminology is shorthand for the list that could potentially fill the category with culturally specific examples

MCI god/NOB concepts come most commonly in three variations.[97] First, they may have counterintuitive biological properties such as gods with bodies and appearances like ours, but who are immortal. Mortality is a property of biological entities. In a variation, they can have animal bodies, but otherwise be like us yet immortal. Second, such agents may have counterintuitive physical properties such as beloved dead and ancestors who no longer have bodies. Third, god/NOB agents can be physical objects such as trees or mountains that have agency and mental features added to them. Literate experts tend to reduce the anthropomorphic features such as in a principle of the universe that shapes it according to its purposes. Very often, religious experts merely expanded and reorganized more locally conceived gods/NOBs into families, hierarchies, empires and so on.

My thesis holds that religion has very widely arisen and persisted when human populations have imagined such locally approachable god/NOB agents as participating in their social practices of the production, distribution/exchange and consumption of goods deemed important to the humans in question according to the logic required by the

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[96] Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe*, 20.
[97] Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe?*, 45.

concepts of such beings. The vast majority of the world's population have lived

agriculturally and pastorally oriented lives with the goods mostly related to food

production.[98] In 1800, after two centuries of unprecedented urbanization, 97 per cent of

the world's population still lived on farms or other (e. g. fishing villages) non-urban food

producing sites.[99] The practices are fundamental in the sense that they involve the

production, distribution/exchange and consumption of food, although variations on

giving gifts to gods/NOBS can be almost endless. A key point for the theory, then,

entails evidence that psychological propensities would support concepts, representations

and inferences about god/NOB beings producing the offspring of humans and animals,

the produce of crops, good fortune and so on (the elaborated possibilities seem endless)

and having an interest in interacting with humans, including the exchange of goods (e. g.,

food, entertainment, honor).

The cognition most important for the stability of religion # 1 is the practical

cognition of those performing the activities. Such cognition is largely intuitive know how

and response to the contingencies of life e. g., inferring that a child, or a disease or the

bountiful harvest came from some god; or burning or leaving food in a certain place as a

gift to a god because the god may have caused some instance of good fortune. It is a kind

of coping with life and "how to do" practical sense. There are god-conceptions and

practice-conceptions in play, but there need be little or no theory, theology, or

consciously articulated explanation. Certainly, "exegetical" interpretation of practices (e.

g., was the ritual done correctly, was the gift accepted?) and inferences about the

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[98] Hunter-gatherer societies also fit in that direct participation in production, distribution/exchange and consumption of food is central.

[99] Population Reference Bureau: http://www.prb.org/Publications/Lesson-Plans/HumanPopulation/Urbanization.aspx.

workings and moods of gods/NOBS and regarding what should be done, were pervasive. But there is little beyond the components of religion # 1 to produce some kind of explicit, much less uniform or correct theology. This is not to deny that complex myth as oral lore developed in many cultures, but even in non-literate cultures experts likely played a key role in the development, transmission and maintenance of such lore.[100] The ubiquity of religion # 1 with its pattern of commonality, then, derives mostly from the innate tendency fostering the imagination of gods/NOBs participating in practices that were ubiquitous in every society during the periods in question.

While Greek poets and philosophers created, revised and elaborated stories and theories about the nature of gods/NOBS and about particular deities, in ordinary life and places like courts of law and household religion, the extremely religious Athenians, for example, very rarely spoke of particular deities in practicing religion # 1.[101] Rather they spoke of "some divine being (*daemon*)" who probably did this or that or made an offering to "whatever deity" might be appropriate and had heard the prayer or accepted the offering. Civic cult was a combination of the traditions of the intellectuals and the sensibilities of religion # 1, but there was a major hiatus between the practice of religion # 1 and the elaborate and certain knowledge of the intellectuals and their traditions. The temples and festivals of the cities might seem remote from the typical household religion of # 1, but production, distribution/exchange, consumption, prayer and divinatory practices were absolutely basic to what went on in the temples and festivals. By at least the third century and until the Protestant Reformation, the focus of everyday religion for

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[100] For important work on the larger cultural effects of "oral experts," see Atran and Medin, *Native Mind*, especially 213-223.
[101] For the development of these claims about Greek religion, see my "Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings."

most Christians was interaction with saints, martyrs and the beloved dead largely according to the pattern of religion # 1, but alongside a civic or quasi civic religion of public festivals and some distance from the official liturgies and theologies of the church.[102] Similar generalizations are possible about China, South Asia and other places.

Religion # 2 seems more difficult to bring into critical perspective. Much in my theory hangs on the hunch that we have gotten the ontology of religion backwards. Religious Studies descends from expert interpreters of books, traditions and official practices in highly literate religious traditions. Anthropology formed partly from the romantic idea of cultures and societies as bounded and structured integral symbolic wholes. The idea that religion has been generated by book culture, official institutions and/or that it is the primordial holistic inheritance of a people or a race comes so naturally to scholars of religion that it has seemed beyond question.[103] The move from romanticism and idealism to critical realism and from classical philosophical concepts of mind or of society as a great mind to the new naturalistic picture of the brain and

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[102] See my, "Why Expert," and Ramsey MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400*, (WGRWSup 1; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). For a quaint, but important and well documented account of religion # 1 in the Medieval west, see Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). Unfortunately much of Bartlett's account of the early martyrs is pious fantasy. For critical historiography, see Candida Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012); *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).

[103] Much of this social holism has come from Durkheim, of course, but the likely rather frightening basis in *Völkerpsychologie* (ethnic/racial psychology) and specifically the theories of Wilhelm Wundt has gone widely unnoticed or misunderstood. In Wundt's objective idealism, individuals have folk-souls that is the part of the person shared with all others in the race or culture. For discussion and bibliography, see, Lars Udehn, *Methodological Individualism: Background, History and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2001), 34-39.

cognitive sciences deeply challenges those seemingly unassailable ideas. The intellectual forces that have led to the demise of social functionalism and structuralism have also been part of the challenge to those ideas. Listen to the cognitive anthropologist, Scott Atran and the psychologist, Douglas Medin: "for our purposes, it is just a non-starter to treat or define groups in terms of shared properties." What could be more counter-intuitive for the scholar of religion.

Of course the critique made of the traditional ethnographer is now well known. The ethnographer would arrive at the site and ask where one could find the authority who knew the ways of the people. The answers to the questions about the x culture would be carefully recorded and then confirmed by observation that treated differences and "outside influences" as not truly belonging to the genuine culture. So then one could write a strait forward account of the culture of the Nuer or the Dinka or whatever group. Historians have done something similar when they have described, say, some place and time of Christianity based solely upon writings that have been passed down by the tradition. At least two major types of assumptions about mind lie unexamined in the ethnographer's methods. The "culture sponge" model of mind assumes that "the culture" presents its content in terms of meanings, symbols, messages and so on and minds simply soak up whatever comes their way throughout life. Second, even the most anti-humanist post-modernist – if for himself if no one else - usually keeps some room for the folk and classical-humanist idea that individuals receive information from the culture and from teaching and they then rationally sift and evaluate this information and decide what to keep or approve and what to reject. Another variant would hold to basically the same

process, but replace "rationally" with something like "according the culturally shaped desire that one happens to have."

The problem is that even the shallowest study of how the transmission and retention of culture actually works shows that this almost common sense picture is radically wrong. Any individual mind "encounters" vast amounts of potential input that never gets retained and what is retained is stored in different ways and with wildly different degrees of difficulty.[104] What is retained, stays or disappears in various ways and to various degrees related to distinct patterns. The neuro and cognitive sciences want to know how this amazingly differentiated selectivity occurs and what its patterns and tendencies are. Humanists and social scientists need to realize that "culture cannot explain culture, and religion cannot explain religion."[105] The culture sponge view does not explain anything. Neither does the structuralist-poststructuralist view that language (phonological and syntactic patterns) inhabits us and makes us.

To understand religion # 2, one needs some way to understand the differential spread and retention of cultural items (e. g., beliefs) together with cognitive and social theory that explains the effects of experts, especially literate experts, on what some population "knows" and does. Both cognitive psychology and social theory have contributions to make.[106] Religion # 2 flourishes in socially differentiated cultures in

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[104] For a groundbreaking study of these issues based on ethnography and cognitive theory, see Atran and Medin, *Native Mind* and also Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
[105] The quotation is from Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe?* .,
[106] For the effects of experts, see Atran and Medin, *Native Mind*, especially 213-223; Stowers, "The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings," and "Why Expert." On theory and experts, see Daniel Ullucci, "Toward a Typology of Religious Experts in the Ancient Mediterranean," *'The One Who Sows Bountifully: Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers,'* (BJS 356, ed. Caroline Johnson-Hodge, Saul M. Olyan, Daniel Ullucci and

which experts have a place. While the social practices upon which religion # 1 thrives

are agricultural and pastoral, the power of religion # 2 comes from intellectual practices

and technologies (e. g., writing, books) most often seen in more urban settings.

Intellectual practices include reading, writing, making speeches, taking interpretive

positions, claiming expertise and authority over bodies of knowledge, making and

interpreting divine laws, articulating true beliefs, and various modes of inculcation. As

noted, religion # 2, however, presupposes religion # 1 and often absorbs, modifies or

"corrects" the practices and beliefs that it attributes to religion # 1. The latter's concepts

of god/NOBS, for instance, are wrong or inadequate or ignorant. The experts often hold

that the practices of religion # 1, done with intuitive know-how, need meanings and

expert knowledge. The experts explain what the activities really mean. From a cognitive

perspective, the experts base their products and authority on technologies that enhance

and extend reflective thinking such as writing, social articulation of explicit beliefs,

literate education of guilds and so on. While the largely practical understanding of

religion # 1 fits what researchers have called the cognitive optimum and arises easily

from production, distribution/exchange and consumption. The teachings of the experts,

that often include thematizing "things related to" gods/NOBS, tends toward abstraction,

the supra-local, sometimes the esoteric, and in general, kinds of reflective beliefs that are

not so easily acquired, stored and retained.[107] As noted above, the experts of religion # 2

Emma J. Wasserman; Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2013), 89–103. For an important study of religious experts in the early Roman Empire, see Heidi Wendt, *The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Much of Pierre Bourdieu's extensive *oeuvre* is also relevant.

[107] On the cognitive optimum, see Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 90, 195. The practices of the experts involves Harvey Whitehouse's "doctrinal mode" of religious transmission:

tend to also advance a pattern that still involves exchange with whatever god/NOB – even anthropomorphic principles – that they advocate. They also maintain forms of communication such as divination and revelation, but with the practices now "based upon" their teachings, interpretations and found in the writings that they guard.

Why is the thesis outlined above plausible and explanatory of the enormously widespread religion number one? First, the social practices of producing, distributing, exchanging and consuming food (and other valued commodities) is universal. All human groups must have versions of these practices to live and until recently most people lived close to agriculture. This makes the family and household central to religion # 1 in that most food/economic production took place within households in pre-modern societies. It also makes women and gender central to religion, but the neglect of religion # 1, the prejudices of researchers and the paucity of historical evidence for some times and places has contributed to neglect of that centrality. Second, it is simply a fact that most people in most cultures have imagined interaction with some kinds of beings in the god/NOB category. The cognitive propensities seem to me the only plausible way to explain this fact. The theory, then, holds that the practices tend to evoke inferences about imagined gods/NOBS as participants in the practices. Cognition regarding gods/NOBS supervenes upon fundamental social practices to produce and sustain religion # 1. Social and political organization beyond families, households and simple social formations would then tend to produce cultural elaboration built upon religion # 1. So, for example, the religion of Greek and Roman cities featuring offerings to a variety of gods, temples and calendars of religious festivals most centrally amplified the basic practices. Rituals in this context

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Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission (New York: AltaMira, 2004).

tend to be everyday practices made special. At home, the god gets a libation from an ordinary cup. At the temple, the cup is of finely wrought silver. The goat is led into the courtyard of the house, slaughtered at a rude altar and eaten at the table. A procession of festively clad elite celebrants lead the cattle to the magnificent temple for the offerings before monumental statues of the god followed by a sumptuous feast. It is well to remember that all of the public celebrants were raised with religion # 1 in their homes.

So what more precisely is the social kind religion that can be seen most clearly in religion # 1? The kind is a structure of conventional and causal relations and other properties together with a context or environment that, according to the hypothesis, has generated much of the enormous cultural variety of religion # 1 and that forms a related structure for religion # 2. First are the properties of the cognitive propensities to have beliefs about gods/NOBS that can be imagined to play roles in social practices. The relation between the relevant cognitive tools, generated beliefs and their activation in the imagination of practices is not one to one, but probabilistic. The propensities in this way are causal of the beliefs about gods/NOBs participating, but the fundamental social practices of production, distribution/exchange and consumption are causal of religion taking the form of exchange with gods/NOBS. The relation between the cognitive propensities and the social practices can be thought of as a kind of supervenience, with the cognitive supervening on the social to produce something new. Without the interlocked pattern of exchange practices, individuals might have intuitions about MCI agents in various circumstances, but such "perceptions" would not form a stable pattern, much less a pattern that is central to social life. The imagined participation of the

gods/NOBs in production, distribution/exchange, and consumption makes these agents socially and culturally central.

Psychologists have shown that even people who think of themselves as critical non-conformists, accept conventional practice when most others do.[108] Once in place, this tendency toward conformity would lend additional stability. Social practices in general have their own structures with causal and conventional features. But practices, as not only cognitive scientists, but also social theorists of practice such as Pierre Bourdieu and Theodore Schatzki have shown, combine non-conscious practical know-how with social convention and social coordination.[109] Actions in themselves are also, of course, causal. The so-called background conditions for religion # 1 are hunter-gatherer or agricultural and/or pastoral social groups. The biological need for food and the particular human abilities to obtain and consume the food are partly causal of the socio-cultural shapes of such societies.

Two other cognitive features may also play an important role in the way that the kind, religion, works. Researchers have concluded that humans especially tend to attribute agency and have MCI concepts when faced with situations of interpretive ambiguity in their lives.[110] The patterns of interpretive ambiguity inherent in agricultural and pastoral ways of life would then be stimulants fostering the development of active god/NOB concepts. Inferences about the activities of gods/NOBS make sense to people in such situations. Why has it not rained for a month? Why did the wheat wither and

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[109] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): Theodore Schatzki, *Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Social Change*, (University Park. PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

[110] A central theme of Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*.

die? Why was the crop so bountiful this year? How can I avoid crop loss this year?

Agriculture involves constant contingency with factors that are largely out of the farmer's

control. These questions should not be understood as raising general theoretical (e.g.,

theological) issues, but as practical questions about everyday coping. The agency of a

god/NOB comes easily in such situations.

The second cognitive feature comes in mental tools described as facilitating social

exchange.[111] Some researchers see strong evidence of this. If true, such social exchange

mental tools would likely be important for the theory. I can only make a few general

remarks about findings from a large body of research and make one point. Researchers

have shown that social reasoning, including about kinds of exchange, involve extremely

complex mental operations that especially use theory of mind (ToM), the ability to

attribute mental states. Among other things they have concluded that there are mental

tools devoted especially to social reasoning about scenarios involving "social contracts,"

e. g., distribution, exchange, fairness and so on. One example of the experiments used to

draw this conclusion is Wason Selection Task test in which subjects are asked to identify

violations of a basic conditional rule.[112] But the rule is always in the form of some

concrete social or other situation. The reasoning is what would be used, for example, to

detect those who were or were not acting fairly or living up to their side of the bargain.

Very many of these tests have been given to subjects about reasoning in all sorts of

scenarios that do not involve social situations. Subjects always do poorly, answering

correctly 5-30% of the time. But in social reasoning they are correct 65-80% of the time.

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[111] Tremlin, *Minds and Gods,* 115-118.

[112] Lawrence Sugiyama, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "Cross Cultural Evidence of Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange among the Shiwiar of the Ecuadorian Amazon," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 99/17 (2002), 11537-11542.

If such reasoning were based on general mental reasoning instead of a specialized social tool, one would expect consistent results. The test was also given to the Shiwiar of the Amazon who rarely see outsiders and live as hunter gatherers and gardeners. On the Wason test they got scores identical with Harvard freshman and extremely close to scores of subjects in Hong Kong, the UK, Germany and elsewhere even when the questions involved social situations alien to them. Neuroscientists have also found a type of brain injury in which the person loses the ability to perform Wason type reasoning for other domains, yet the social reasoning is fully intact and also the reverse where social reasoning is impaired. The reasoning would include versions of these forms: "If you take this benefit (from the god), then you must satisfy the requirement" and "If you satisfy the requirement, then you may take the benefit (from the god)." I suggest that in the basic social situation of the production, distribution/exchange, consumption pattern of pre-modern agricultural/pastoral cultures that such highly developed social reasoning would easily plug in MCI agents while involved in those practices, e. g., "I am receiving the benefit of this produce. To whom do I own an obligation?" And in fact, evidence from the cultures in question show them constantly considering scenarios where questions such as what is fairly owed to the god/NOB, to which one, from whom and exactly how should it be paid?

The properties that make up these three aspects - specific cognitive propensities, particular social practices and background conditions – could be analyzed into the relevant fundamental properties in great detail. One could, for example, use the important work of Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson on the way that the mind represents action and the relation to ritual. But to prevent the writing of a hefty tome this sketch

should suffice for the present purposes with a focus more broadly on the three aspects.[113]

The way that they form a network of causal and conventional features constitutes a stable property cluster social kind as outlined above in discussion of kind theory. Prayer or other means of "speaking " to gods/NOBS and divinatory practices are an essential part of this network of properties because production, distribution/exchange and consumption are impossible without communication between the parties involved. While how one produces and what one produces and distributes, exchanges and consumes is vastly variable, the primary properties noted above including the communicative ones are constitutive of religion. One can therefore think of primary fundamental properties and secondary more culturally variable properties that are at least partly caused by the primary characteristics.

More needs to be said about features of religion (with the focus on # 1 at this point) that produce stability and thus allow it to have enough cohesiveness to be a social thing, even if being recognized as a social thing is not part of this cohesiveness. Indeed, the populations in question might not even place all gods/NOBS into a single category and further they might not seek long-term exchange or any exchange with some of the culturally available gods/NOBS. They may associate the mountain spirits only with being present in the mountains and not connect them with the ancestors to whom they offer a bit of food at every meal. The people may also typically fear or at least try to avoid the demons or gods of the deep forest. One key to understanding the stability of the kind comes from the fact that the god/NOBS are deemed to participate in the basic practices "according to the logic of such beings." All participants in the society know

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[113] *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

that these to–various-degree human-like beings are not normal humans.[114] The combination of human-like and counterintuitive properties of such concepts means that whether the people in question have one category (or overlapping categories) for them or not, activities directed toward them will be shaped by the dual logic of human/not human. Gods receive gifts, but they do not normally appear at the dinner table and eat like humans. Meat and grain turned into rising smoke might be their way of consuming. As in China, one might burn a prayer ribbon in order to talk to them. Again, the social practices interacting with the MCI cognition is causative. The mostly intuitive practical sense of the human agents shapes specific patterns of imagined interaction with the relevant gods/NOBS. And that imagined interaction generates modified activities of production, distribution/exchange and consumption, i. e., as if the gods were interested and involved agents.

Fundamental to the basic social practices are those of choosing relevant and interested parties. One does not cooperate with just everyone for producing goods, e.g., growing crops, fishing, making pottery. One does not distribute the goods to everyone or exchange goods with everyone. One does not share the dinner table or other kinds of goods with everyone. Most often those chosen for such are family and friends, although other categories also apply such as neighbors, fellow citizens, suppliants, gods. It may be intuitive that the mountain spirits are too far away and in such a different realm that they cannot be interested parties. But if one travels through the mountains, it would make perfect sense to leave them an offering, ask for their aid or do other things *according to the logic of exchange.* As with humans, some god/NOBS are not eligible interested

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[114] But they can possess or inhabit a human or be mistaken for one.

parties because they have been conceived as enemies or to be feared. In such cases, one either seeks to avoid them or to adopt practices that are the opposite of seeking exchange relations. These include what have often been called apotropaic practices or practices of appeasement and manipulation. In all of these cases, however, what ties the activities together as the kind religion are the practices directed at and modified for exchange (or non- and anti-exchange) with gods/NOBS.

Cohesiveness also derives from the interdependence of the basic practices. Consumption presupposes production and distribution or exchange. Either you produced it (with the aid of the gods) or someone else did and it was distributed to you or you got it by exchange. Distribution/exchange allows that persons from different social formations can substitute for positions in the production, distribution/exchange process. Likewise different god/NOBS can substitute at different places in the process. In polities larger than the household, the central process of religion can be institutionalized on a large scale. Public temples in the Greek city were frequently the sites of festivals to which large numbers of citizens were invited. Hundreds of goats, sheep and cattle might be slaughtered at an altar dedicated to Athena who received special parts of the animal in a special way appropriate to gods/NOBS. But when the animals were born, perhaps offerings were made to Pan who was seen (or also seen) as producer of the bounty. The temple, like many in the Mediterranean, West Asia and other places, was a locus for redistribution. In the instance we are imagining, large numbers of citizens, probably according to rank and gender, got meat that was the centerpiece of a huge feast. Priests and central celebrants got choice food and priests the valuable hides of the animals. At each point of the exchange process there could be substitutions of persons and

god/NOBS. Some of the farmers, for instance, who raised (produced) the animals might not be present at the feast, although they would likely be citizens of that city. Athena might not be the only god to consume at the feast. Dionysus might be offered a libation at the tables and prayers said to various appropriate deities. The ways in which production, distribution/exchange and consumption tie together in practice (and logically) presuppose one another and create cohesion for the kind even as it allows for social elaboration, cultural creativity and social multiplicity.

One can also think of intellectuals creating, and with their authority as literate and learned, trying to institute certain typical substitutions in the structure of the process. On the more modest end of the spectrum, scribes working for a king, such as in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, might come to think that a local god of the land and of a city like Athena made little sense for ruling an empire with ambitions to control the civilized world. Assur would have to be a more cosmic supreme ruler with a large pantheon and a cosmogonic mythology. Assur would be like a cosmic Assyrian king and similar to earlier supreme gods. One could elaborate on specific ways production, distribution/exchange, and consumption might be reshaped, but practice and thought about Assur was still fundamentally shaped by the structure.

Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, would be an example of a much more radical intellectual shaped by his rather autonomous location in the social and political scene. All of the traditional notions of human-like gods are untrue and immoral. Likewise practices of exchanging with gods or appeasing them or doing things to get in their favor are all misguided. Instead, the one true god is a great mind rationally ordering the whole cosmos and taking the form of structuring *pneuma* in the created world and *aether* above that.

One can take part in traditional Mediterranean religious practices as long as one knows

that such activities as offerings to Demeter should be viewed only as symbolic reflections

on one aspect of Zeus's beneficent ordering of the cosmos. The only way to have a good

life comes from knowing the way that God has ordered the moral and cosmic processes

of the world and living by that knowledge.[115] If one does recognize God and honor him

by living such lives, one will possess happiness not unlike that of God himself.

Otherwise one will be miserable and evil. Although on the extreme side of the spectrum,

the production, distribution/exchange, consumption pattern is nevertheless obvious and

appears clearly when Stoics compare their religion to traditional religion. The world has

been created by a rational mind so as to reward those who consistently honor that

rationality and live by it. Zeno's religion is near the borders of the category, but still

recognizable.[116]Again, the coherence and stability of the kind seems to me to persist even

when such radical revisions occur as when figures like Zeno envision modified god/NOB

entities and substitute practices about the "divine ordering of the self" for "literal

offerings."

Religion # 2 is parasitic on religion # 1. Experts deploying their prestige (social

and symbolic capital) and often political power and organization reinterpret the practices

of religion # 1 creating a modified version of its stable property cluster, but also

undermining some of its stability. Much of the stability caused by the MCI concepts

elicited by the basic practices of exchange in an agricultural context may be lost or

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[115] Nicely summed up in Cleanthes', *Hymn to Zeus.*

[116] The exchange pattern central to Zeno keeps him in the category, but some properties
are missing or deformed. One can pray to Zeus, but prayer would be for the sake of
human psychology. Zeus set the world up and guides it via reason, but he is not an
interactive agent. Zeus might communicate in the sense of having planned some
"message" for an individual as part of the plan for the whole course of the universe.

attenuated in religion # 2 as, for example, when highly intuitive god/NOB concepts get

replaced by the concepts of literate specialists who tend to emphasize the ontological

differences between gods and humans. Reinterpretation takes the form of rationalized

explicit teachings, doctrines and versions of practices supposedly based upon or given

meaning by the teachings. Instead of religion # 1 that arises rather "spontaneously" in the

agricultural/pastoral environment, the experts must create practices and institutions that

seek to inculcate the relevant population of non-experts into the teachings and

intellectualized practices or at least to organize a caste or guild of experts who do things

the right way and are said to represent the larger social formation. Research has shown

that it takes an enormous cultural effort such as schools, the production of writings,

intellectualized speeches, massive iconic representation of religious beliefs, weekly

sermons, policing of thought and behavior and so on to maintain the vitality of such

intellectualist beliefs.[117] And contemporary studies of Christians show that the average

believer constantly intuitively recasts orthodox concepts into MCI forms.[118] Buddhism

and some forms of Christianity have thrived by allowing, even promoting, forms of

religion # 1 for average people. While religion # 2 may be official for all, it is often only

grasped by the educated religious elite, for whom the norms of the "religion" are

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[117] This is Harvey Whitehouse's "doctrinal mode" of religious transmission in *Modes of Religiosity*. Even with much cultural effort there is strong evidence that the intellectualized forms of religion do not take well on most people. One example is the recent Pew knowledge survey in which people were asked very elementary questions. Even with their own traditions, they barely scored above 50%: "U. S. Religious Knowledge Survey: Executuve Summary," Pew Research Center, Washington, D. C. : http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/
[118] [118] Justin L. Barrett and Frank Keil, "Conceptualizing a Non-Natural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts," *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1996), 219–47; Justin L. Barrett, "Theological Correctness," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999), 325–39

honored, but even for them often intuitively irrelevant. For the theory of religion as a kind, the so-called doctrinal mode of the intellectuals means that the forms of instruction, iconography, intellectualized ritual and so-on must causally substitute for some of the more intuitive imagination of gods/NOBS playing a role in lives and social formations. But this "extra effort" usually requires a high level of political power and institutional organization. Unsurprisingly, religion # 2 flourishes in socially differentiated societies with strong political structures and can therefore act symbiotically with the social organization and culture of city-states, kingdoms, empires and similar social formations.

Often religion # 2, is not closely connected with an agricultural and/or pastoral context. In East and South Asia, the Mediterranean and Europe, historically, experts arose who claimed that the most important production, distribution/exchange, consumption was what we would call moral and mental goods related to goals such as salvation or wholeness or enlightenment for the self. Nevertheless, as in the example of Zeno, there was in each case an intellectualized agentive principle or god/NOB who is the source of what is "good" or productive and some sort of cultivation of the self in light of the modified MCI agent who is the source of whatever is the goal. Importantly, several of these traditions run by literate experts claimed to have succeeded forms of religion # 1. Nevertheless, they at some point incorporated forms of religion # 1 into practice, at least for the non-literate "masses." These claims of reforming or superseding religion # 1 usually form a part of their myths of origin (e. g., idol worship to the true transcendent god, carnal Judaism to spiritual Christianity, Vedic literal sacrifice to post-Vedic true devotion). Often the religious experts presented as producers of goods for the self, soul or mind have been contrasted to those who "placated" gods with products from

the farm. Thus religion # 2 arguably shares enough of the primary structure of causal and conventional features, recognizing the large number of possible substitutions and the additional causal role of "indoctrination," to be counted as the same kind, religion. Like with kinds ranging from social to biological, the kind, religion, has a history, can mutate and vary, but still be considered a kind because it has a relatively stable core of primary properties seen in that history.[119]

If religion is plausible as a social kind with something like the characteristics argued for above, what are its implications for the debate about whether religion is "out there" and whether it is only a discursive creation of western power? Clearly religion would be one of the large number of social kinds for which people need not have a concept or attitude towards in order to exist. Recession, inflation, social field, racism and so on need not be recognized as kinds or entities at all. At least before modernity, the concept of the kind, religion, does not seem to have been a constituent of its property cluster. The opposite is true for the most conventional social kinds for which recognition of the kind wholly or partly constitutes its existence. But social kinds like religion and racism are not "mind independent." For recession or inflation to exist, people must have concepts of money, commodities, saving and purchasing and many other things. Religion on my analysis has such conventional elements, but also many relatively stable causal properties that can be perceived and explained. It is "out there" and has very real effects in the physical and social world. The kinds approach illustrates how epistemology and

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[119] The intuitively attractive patterns of exchange then help to make sense of the phenomenon studied by Justin Barrett of people reinterpreting orthodox teachings to fit relations to MCI agents. I would argue that one of the reasons that the often abstract and cognitively difficult concepts of religion # 2 have made sense is that they have been (mis)heard by non-intellectuals as echoing the patterns of the more intuitive # 1.

ontology belong together unlike in the anti-metaphysical approaches of positivism, Post-Structuralism and other highly skeptical traditions.

If the kind religion is those properties associated with the stable property cluster seen in practices involving imagined exchange with agents and teleological principles in the god/NOB category – with two major historical variations -, how does one think of the historical/cultural profusion of things religious that massively exceed the property cluster? Although one is unlikely with a social kind or a biological kind to find an absolutely clear boundary between the two, one would theorize a relative distinction between primary and secondary properties. An example might help the point. If one were to theorize democratic government as a social kind, its stable property cluster might include the election of representatives in the ruling government by a vote of the governed population. Such elements as elections, representation, candidates, representatives and so on could be elaborated as the relatively stable cluster. But whether the democratic government is parliamentary, or television advertizing is allowed in campaigns, or what are the particular qualifications for candidates, or how elected officials dress, or whether popularism is characteristic of the politics, or whether voting takes place in dedicated voting buildings or in churches and on and on would be highly variable secondary properties caused by the effects of the common relatively stable properties of the kind, democratic government. The kind would not be a matter of necessary and sufficient conditions.[120] But a limited and sufficient number of interacting or networked properties would have to be present at any one time for the kind to exist. With such relative stability, secondary properties can multiply and vary with great profusion.

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[120] Well argued by Khalidi, *Natural Categories*, 15-22.

Religion seems to first *clearly* get recognized as an entity in western modernity as has been now widely argued. One can ask how the concept and discourse about religion then affects the social kind. As with many other social kinds, variations for which the concept of the kind becomes one of the central properties of the kind might mean a significant modification. Seen in this way the issue calls for research. Because plausible theories of a social kind must be based upon broad and representative historical and ethnographic evidence and epistemological and ontological theory from philosophy and the special sciences, a proposed stable property cluster will not necessarily be intuitive to most people. Indeed, what broad cultural belief thinks essential to religion varies enormously ("Bob's religion is golf"). As argued above, then, analysis of discourse alone is unlikely to allow scholars to decide which properties attributed to religion are central and capable of generalization and which are historically and geographically more local. One must have a method that assumes realism about religion and therefore involves consideration of causality.

Kinds theory helps to clarify what I see as one of the most confused conceptual issues in the recent discussions of "religion." Scholars constantly slide back and forth from the concept "religion" to "a religion" or "religions." Religions are typically extraordinarily complex claimed traditions, mangles of social formations with some guild of authoritative experts, characteristic social formations, institutions and amorphous populations that constantly change in their relations to what authorities deem to be the norms. "A religion" is a concept of traditional Western (and other?) cultures and a common modern folk conception. "Religion" should be some theorized category shaped by the most reliable practices regarding knowledge. The kind, religion, would be a cross

cultural social entity theorized as a kind for its potential as an epistemic object eliciting empirical feedback. "Religion" in this sense would be like "the economy," "language," "feudalism," "gender" and numerous similar largely epistemic concepts. Such empirically and critically sensitive concepts have characterized the idea of critical knowledge in modernity.

If a theory of religion as a social kind is plausible, the approach sheds light on the issues raised by those who say it is a concept invented by (some x in?) western modernity. The features that these scholars claim have been falsely attributed to the rest of the world's cultures are never things such as prayer or communication with gods/NOBS, making offerings to gods/NOBS, obeying a divine law, seeking to live by the guiding principle of the cosmos, dedicating oneself to an agental force or a god. But think how absurd it would be for someone purportedly interested in human cultures to ignore the simple fact that many millions of individuals *both* in antiquity and western modernity have prayed to gods, and billions more in Asia, the Americas, Africa and elsewhere. And recognizing this fact, but denying that there is enough similarity across the instances in varied cultures in order to place them in a class would be just as absurd.[121] Such a denial might uncritically appeal to the fact that the "system" of beliefs of the prayers varies or that the postures, vocabulary and syntax and on and on vary. Idealistic history thrives on such differences attributed to supposed organic cultural wholes that make any practice within the whole unique and incomparable. For good

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[121] Those who make such claims of incommensurability have often appealed to cultural holism. Cultures are such bounded and integrated wholes, and the populations in them so totally molded by the cultures, that any cultural item can only be defined by reference to its integral place in the whole culture. For a still instructive critique, see Jerry Fodor and Ernest LePore, *Holism: A Shopper's Guide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

widely recognized reasons such social and semantic holism has, in my estimation, been discredited. Even without kinds theory, domains of knowledge "recognize" that in any social or cultural concept or perceived entity that some locally or widely associated properties are more important than others. This idea of a hierarchical relation of properties in the concept may be rough and intuitive, but it is an essential feature of concepts and thus human thought. Take democracy again. It may very well be true that men wearing business suits or two houses of a legislature or television campaigning or posters or misuse of campaign funds or manifest destiny or numerous other things are in popular and scholarly conception associated with democracy. But these features cannot be as important for democracy, the concept and the practices, as popular voting, elected representatives and so on. Theorizing religion as a social kind *explains* why some features are more central, persistent and pervasive than others.

This also helps one to understand that looking in pre-modern or non-western cultures for many of the connotations that religion-is-not-out-there scholars want to use when they claim that, say, Mediterranean antiquity did not have religion, misdirects attention from what is more central to what is local. (For the sake of clarity, I will set aside the endlessly confusing habit among these scholars of sliding back and forth unconsciously between the concepts of "religion" and "a religion" or "religions" in their arguments on this topic.) One of the most common claims is that central to the concept of religion is the notion of personal private belief. (One should see Schilbrack, *Philosophy*, for a sharp critique of the vast confusion and ignorance surrounding the concept of belief/beliefs.) According to these writers, this notion has been foisted on the pre-modern and non-western world when scholars use the concept of religion for these areas. (I will

ignore the fact that that generalization is not even true for all varieties of religion in western modernity.) Surely the facts that both ancients and moderns have had practices that centered on exchange and communication with imagined beings in the gods/NOBS category must be considered a more important commonality than the difference that the ancients had not developed a discourse about the nature of their commitment to certain beliefs. The latter must be considered a local secondary property that arose at a certain time in northern Europe in light of the pervasive relatively stable properties of the kind, religion, across history and the globe. With the idea that kinds have relatively stable clusters of primary properties, one can see that, for example, the ancient Greek and Roman language that spoke of "the things of the gods," meaning those beliefs and practices associated with the gods, is not so far from what should be considered more central to the modern concept, "religion."