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Dharma, the Sacred, and Durkheim's Definition of Religion

I shall argue that Durkheim does not avoid the pitfalls of ethnocentrism in attempting a cross-cultural theory of religion. Durkheim's theory of religion does not avoid using a culturally specific, and/or derived, view of religion upon religious data. But, in a way, it doesn't really matter, because we all do the same thing inevitably anyway. Indeed, I shall also argue that his theory of religion remains as ethnocentric as commonplace Western theistic theories of religion that insist we conceive religion as belief in God. The difference is that Durkheim's conceptual thought about religion is ethnocentric in a most unexpected way. It is thus not ethnocentric in being either Jewish, or some other "Western" (i.e., Christian) theory, in disguise. It is, instead, Indian—a mélange of Hindu and Buddhist conceptions. Despite this, I am prepared to argue in future that his theory of religion marks progress in forming a useful cross-cultural category for comprehending religion.

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Indians Discover America: A Post-Colonial Thought Experiment about Religion

Why is the word, *religion*, an adequate word to apply in non-Western societies? After all, it is "our" word, and not necessarily "theirs." I am not telling my readers anything new in affirming the often-made observation that *religion* derives from Latin and comes to us with its own Western history. In an age with post-colonial sensibilities such as ours, the question naturally arises of why we might not instead be students of *dharma* or *sāsana* instead, rather than *religion*? Why don't we organize our field in terms of notions original to other cultures? After all, in a way, we already do so in terms of fields such as algebra and chemistry, words translating disciplines taken first from Arab culture (*al-jabr* and *al-kimiya*, respectively). Why wouldn't it make sense then to refer to what we call religious studies as dharmatology? We would then see what we call religion against the template of the Hindu notion of dharma, instead of doing as we do—reading dharma against the template of religion. Typically, when we read dharma through the lens of religion, as usually understood, we reduce it to morality, duty and such. But if we reverse our perspective and begin with dharma, I believe notions such as lived and experienced "way of life," transcendence, sacrality, moral structures, ritual order, social institutions and so on, will come further to the fore. Whatever else, starting with dharma would not put a belief in god at the top of the list defining religious studies as dharmatology.

Imagine then that history had taken another turn, and that the Indians—*real* ones, not Native Americans—had set out in ships from Kālīghāt to find an alternative to the land trade routes to the Mediterranean. Imagine further that our real Indians were blown off course and landed in the Americas, all while expecting to have arrived in Cadiz, Lisbon, Genoa, or Venice. And, thinking all the time they had arrived in the Mediterranean, our Indian navigators might well have recorded their first uneasy meetings with Native Americans. For them, these would be encounters with "Italians" or "Spaniards" (*sic*)—just as Native Americans are still mistakenly called Indians. This fictional Hindu "discovery of America," and, perhaps, their subsequent colonization of it, would have produced a very different world history than the one in high school textbooks. Native ideas of superhuman beings, gods, might have seemed like odd versions of the *maruts*, *devas* or even Śiva or Viṣṇu to them. But they would have been puzzled about whether (Aztec) human sacrifice could be comprehended within their category of *yajña* or

hotra, and that within "dharma." Why all the bloody business about carving out the heart of sacrificial victims? Why human sacrifice at all?! Yes, there were echoes of human sacrifice in the Vedas, but these days not even horses were sacrificed as they had been in the old days. Ghee or a King coconut was sufficient. Didn't these "Italians" realize that!?

Later, when Hindu navigators eventually found their way to Spain, Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean, they found problems with both actual as well as sacramental forms of sacrifice. They were relieved that the real Italians did not go in for the gory human sacrifices they witnessed in Teotihuacan. But, still and all, traces of human sacrifice prevailed among the real Italians, much as it was in the modern adaptations of ancient Indian practice found in the scriptures. But our Hindu mariners were not deceived with all the talk of sacramental presence and highfalutin talk of transubstantiation. The imagery of cannibalism in the Italian Rōman Kattolik darśana, embedded though it may be in the holy "sakrifais" of the Mass, were all-too-graphic. Perhaps this affection for bloody sacrifice and talk of paying for sins with the blood of "Kraist" among, at least, Roman Catholic Europeans was the reason they were so bloodthirsty and intolerant of people following other dharmas than their own. (And, just who or what is this "Kraist," anyway? Kṛṣṇa's western avatar?) Yes, the dharma of the "Italian" warrior class, like the Kshatriyas, called for a career of murderous violence. But why did killing other humans seem at times a divine obligation laid upon all Europeans? Whatever this strange thing called "religion" was, it could not neatly be mapped onto dharma. It only overlapped in places with dharma, such as that convoluted Italian version of the *Tri-murti* or *Tri-kāya* that they called the "Tri-Nity dāktṛn." Curious, that Rōman Kattoliks were so misled by the māyā of language.

The moral to take from my thought experiment? The innocent assumption that our categories are universal is not true. Because of the way categories such as *religion* have been historically constructed, they may not best serve us in comprehending the thought-worlds of others. They fail at mapping onto other ways of looking on the world in some sort of one-for-one correspondence. How do we know other peoples have religion in the way we do, when *religion* is our word, not theirs? The debatable fit of a notion like religion to cover a world governed by dharma suggests as much. Postcolonial perspectives suggest that assuming that terms like *religion* or *magic* cover the world universally may, finally, be just Western ethnocentrism. We have taken our own experience, and the words we have to name it, and presumed that it is identical with that of others. In its nastier form, our tendency

to universalize our own concepts lies behind such self-confident arrogance as E. B. Tylor's casual reference to native folk as "savages." Tylor had no doubt that he possessed a set of universal categories for understanding all cultures. To him, it was just obvious that the "primitive" "they" were lower sorts of being—"savages"—while "we" were higher—"civilized." Recall as well how confidently evolutionist thinkers, like James George Frazer, refer to the way that "primitives" were supposed to have evolved from a belief in "magic" onto a higher level of development to an embrace of "religion." Frazer not only "knew" certainly what magic and religion were, he "knew" as well that all peoples had them—exactly in the form he himself thought about them.

We should take one additional thing from this modest little thought experiment: the hurt caused by our thinking about others in ways that do not take account of our historical situation in relation to others. How would we Westerners feel if we had constantly to object to the use of the term *dharma* to apply to our *religion*. How would we feel if we had constantly to explain why the term *dharma* did not quite catch the meaning of *religion*? And, while we might well *learn* a good deal from trying to understand religion (in a narrow sense) in terms of dharma, we would finally feel dissatisfied at the end of the effort. Just more square pegs in round holes. In the analogous situations of translation between different linguistic groups, a similar irritation (and a case of objective error) often confront us. Wouldn't Anglophones object were Francophones to insist upon understanding our words *command* or *demand* to mean what their words *commander* or *demander* mean? That's why the French rightly call such pairs of terms *faux amis*. As well, we could reverse the situation and put Francophones on the receiving end of a kind of linguistic or cultural "imposition."

But, whatever the source of such cultural "impositions," the discord remains the same and for the same reasons. Category language does not always translate well across different cultural domains, because cultural domains define semantic domains. Indeed, some, like Talal Asad, seem to say category terms *never* translate across cultural or civilizational domains, since they arise out of, and have their life within, incommensurable semantic domains.[1]

I shall argue that Durkheim does not avoid the pitfalls of ethnocentrism in attempting a cross-cultural theory of religion. Durkheim's theory of religion does not avoid using a culturally specific, and/or derived, view of reli-

[1] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

gion upon religious data. But, in a way, it doesn't really matter, because we all do the same thing inevitably anyway. Indeed, I shall also argue that his theory of religion remains as ethnocentric as commonplace Western theistic theories of religion that insist we conceive religion as belief in God. The difference is that Durkheim's conceptual thought about religion is ethnocentric in a most unexpected way. It is thus not ethnocentric in being either Jewish, or some other "Western" (i.e., Christian) theory, in disguise. It is, instead, Indian—a mélange of Hindu and Buddhist conceptions. Despite this, I am prepared to argue in future that his theory of religion marks progress in forming a useful cross-cultural category for comprehending religion. To show how the Indian character of Durkheim's theory takes shape, let me deflect it off the most impressive, yet wrong-headed, theistic theory of religion to date—that developed by Martin Riesebrodt in his *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*.

Durkheim, Theism and the Sacred

Riesebrodt's *Promise of Salvation* attempts nothing less than a cross-cultural, and thus universal, theory of religion. A great and laudable effort! But, at the same time, it offers me a useful foil for developing heretofore overlooked radical—Indian—contents of Durkheim's views about the nature of religion. Essentially, Riesebrodt sees religion theistically: notably, religion flies in to intervene whenever existential crises afflict us. As is well-known, Durkheim fundamentally conceived religion non-theistically in the strict sense of the term—without requiring a god. Instead, Durkheim saw religion as the administration of the sacred, and understood the sacred as a source of power, the presumed energizing and nurturing basis for normal life, whether in crisis or not.

Riesebrodt instead conceives human existence as a series of impending catastrophes. Once this basis is established, Riesebrodt's logic compels him to picture religion as the descent of a superhuman being to effect a rescue—hence the book's title, *The Promise of Salvation*. In a tip of the hat to the ever-industrious "cog-sci" types, Riesebrodt's interventionism can only be logically inevitable once the rules of the god-to-the-rescue game are laid down.

Once we realize that Riesebrodt, like most behavioral or social scientists, is also a "god" guy, certain notions follow. Thus, for him, the "specific meaning" of the "social action" that is religion "lies in its relation to personal or

impersonal superhuman powers."[2] The problem is why Riesebrodt has taken the theistic route, when others, like Durkheim, used available non-theistic options? In a way, of course, Riesebrodt's entire book speaks to this question. But it does so only from behind the safety of relying on confirming evidence alone. We search in vain for a Popperian falsification test of Reisebrodt's interventionist thesis. Yes, Riesebrodt's theory is reasonable and plausible. But, granting this, we still might want to know why Riesebrodt's theory is compelling and necessary. Why have other options faded out of sight? What deeper reasons lie behind his having opted for defining religion necessarily in terms of a "theory of action" at all? And, why do so in terms of "a specific type of meaningful social action" that is "universal" and theistic?

The answers to these questions depend upon what Riesebrodt imagines the "specific type of meaningful social action" that we call religion to be. For Riesebrodt, religion's salience resides in its dwelling at the extremes in human life, in "crises." Riesebrodt is convinced that many, or most people, we might describe as religious are in the grip of a sense of existential crisis. All religious people are thus on the edge, at risk of lurching into calamity. As such, it makes excellent sense to see religion as "interventionist practice" (89) that primarily offers a "promise of salvation" (89) from these extremes of "crisis," "calamity," and "catastrophe." The logic of religion thus understood then dictates that salvation becomes the business of a god or some other higher power. Only a "superhuman power" is equal to the task of pulling people back from the brink of calamity. Says Riesebrodt: "the promise to avert misfortune, to overcome crisis, to promise salvation, presupposes powers that can keep this promise" (148). A "cog-sci" guy could not have put it better. Yet, once seen in the light of its complete investment in crisis, does Riesebrodt's theory of religion satisfactorily cover the field? Or, is it really an a priori effort—only one possible perspective on religion, readily confirmed by reference to only one set of religious facts, but not to others?

Here, I think Durkheim offers other—and I think bigger—ideas. Refusing to reduce religion to crisis control, he asks: what about the rest of life? Is religion not agent, asks Durkheim, unless we are on the brink? What about the life-blood of everyday, even humdrum, human existence? An example that comes to mind is the need for the kind of authority needed to enable human flourishing, or the kind of energy needed to sustain human life, human institutions. Here, of course, Durkheim's well-known notion

[2] Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 71.

of society sustaining individuals plays its part. Put crudely, if society is god in the Durkheimian view, then ordinary social life is infused with sacrality all the time—especially when we are called to rise above our own individual needs and wants. This perspective might also be called "dharmic" because, like dharma, it calls attention to the domain in which properly ordered human flourishing occurs. "Better to do your own dharma badly than the dharma of others well," the Bhagavad Gītā teaches. Dharmic order, like a well-constituted social order, constitutes the order by which the world of humans and things live in harmony.

So, hold the catastrophe and bring on life. True, Durkheim would not deny the need for "superhuman power," such as a god, to fill out life. But does that god need to be the "interventionist" deity—one who acts to interrupt the normal course of life and *in extremis*? Instead of focusing on the interventionist superhuman being of the theistic imaginary, Durkheim takes a categorically different tack. Central to Durkheim's theory of religion, a non-interventionist "sacred" functions as an abiding, sustaining source of energy, legitimacy, and purpose. In this way, and without intervention from beyond, the Durkheimian sacred lays the foundation for human flourishing. As a kind of language of transcendence, religion in the Durkheimian mode offers a grammar facilitating ways good to think about human flourishing.

In connection with the issue of the ethnocentrism of our categories, Durkheim's thinking about the sacred reprises, either intentionally or not, the norms of a culture not his own. He embraces those religious perspectives that epitomize non-interventionism—Buddhist or Hindu dharma, Hindu Atman-Brahman non-dualism, or even perhaps Spinoza's monism. In India, we arguably find the immediate origins of the oft-noted Durkheimian sociological monism. Of course, given the entanglement of European rationalism in Indian Vedanta since the early nineteenth century, and given Durkheim's neo-hegelianism, the threads of influence may be impossible to untangle.[3] But I hope to persuade readers that it is worthwhile to focus in on Durkheim's immediate context of associations with colleagues and peers in the Paris of the late 1890s. I claim that Durkheim's writing about the nature of religion—about the sacred—reflects a mélange of Indian conceptions, such as the monism of *atman-brahman* identity as well as the foundational idea of dharma.

[3] Ivan Strenski, "Durkheim, Hamelin and the French Hegel," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 16, nos. 2–3 (1989): 146–49.

What Did Durkheim Know of India?

But what evidence is there that Durkheim knew enough to appropriate Buddhism or monistic Hinduism notions upon which to base his mature idea of the sacred, or even to permit them to enter his thought processes? Is it not obvious that he bases his mature theory of religion on the Australian ethnographic data of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, or upon his own ethnocentric Western notions of religion? While there is no smoking gun, there is abundant circumstantial evidence that Durkheim was in an excellent position to exploit the data of the religions of India, both Hindu and Buddhist. First, as is well known, Durkheim was in the closest collaborative relations with his nephew, Marcel Mauss. Second, Mauss was by training an Indologist, apprenticed, in a way, to the greatest French Indologist of his day, Sylvain Lévi. As Mauss put it, his "second uncle," Sylvain Lévi was

> a patriot, *un Français, un petit Parisien du Marais*, a descendant of Alsatian Jews—who showed in practice how much he felt himself to be a man both of his milieu and his work. He never wanted to break with his race, with his traditional milieu, from which he never wanted to be completely emancipated. And indeed during these times of trouble, he wanted to surpass the limits of duty. But he was also a citizen of the world, someone chosen by the universal spirit.… His will for peace, his intimate knowledge of people, the power of his thought, shaped all his activities. Alongside the life of a savant, friend, husband and father, Sylvain Lévi had another life as well.[4]

This proximity to Lévi, by way of Mauss, thus put Durkheim in immediate proximity to the leading Indological thinker of the age. Added to that, in *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim refers with approval to Abel Bergaigne—Sylvain Lévi's teacher—precisely where Durkheim discusses his concept of religion: bk. 1, ch. 1, sec. 2. Thus, if some notion is in the back of Durkheim's mind as he theorizes religion, I submit it is something like the transcendent *brahman*! There can be no doubt that Durkheim held Lévi and his thought in the highest regard, not least of all because Mauss did.

Third, Lévi authored the 1898 work, *La Doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brahmanas*, which contained many ideas about the nature of religion later

[4] Marcel Mauss, "Sylvain Lévi," in *Oeuvres. Volume 3. Cohésion sociale et divisions de la sociologie*, ed. Victor Karady (1935; Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 535–47.

found in Durkheim's mature thought.[5] In that volume, Sylvain Lévi dwelt at length on the existence and behavior of a strange power, reminiscent of the Durkheimian sacred, at the heart of brahminical sacrifice that he, like Robertson Smith, likened to "electricity."[6] For Sylvain Lévi, this power—the *brahman* of Indian thought—was a property of sacrificial ritual itself. It is an "impalpable and irresistible power which is released … like electricity." Sylvain Lévi reports that "the force of sacrifice, once released, acts blindly; he who does not know how to tame it is broken by it."[7] By comparison, mention of religion as a matter of "forces" dominates many of Durkheim's discussions of the nature of religion. Examples include *Elementary Forms*, bk. 2, ch. 6 and ch. 7, sec. 3, where Durkheim sees impersonal forces at the basis of religion or in bk. 3, ch. 1, sec. 4, where Durkheim elaborates how "religious forces" move religious believers, or in his eloquent defense of his concept of religion as being a matter of dynamic forces, as given in his speech before the joint meeting of the Free Thinkers and Free Believers.[8] Thus, not only did the tide of Lévi's prestige carry Durkheim along with it, but the specific aspects of Lévi's thinking about non-interventionist, non-theistic concepts of religion seem to find their way into Durkheim's conceptualization of religion as well.

Four, like Durkheim's sacred, again, the force of *brahman* force lay at the core of the religion elaborated in Sylvain Lévi's book. Both saw the sacred as a product of ritual action. Durkheim famously does this in bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 3 of *Elementary Forms*. There, Durkheim elaborates the way rituals create and revive society, as a coda upon his arguments immediately preceding that show how the gods depend upon sacrificial rituals, instead of the other way round. In particular, Sylvain Lévi showed how Vedic and Brahmanic sacrifice assumed that ritual itself actually produced the gods. This meant, first of all, that the definition of religion could be separated from a belief in the existence or even the idea of God. Sylvain Lévi says, for example, that the nature of the religion revealed in the *Brāhmaṇa*s is constituted by sacrificial ritual. Thus sacrifice "is God and God par excellence." Further, sacrifice "is the

[5] Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brâhmanas* (Paris: Leroux, 1898).

[6] William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 2nd ed. (1894; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1923).

[7] Lévi, *Doctrine du sacrifice*, 77.

[8] Émile Durkheim, "Contribution to Discussion "Religious Sentiment at the Present Time"," in *Durkheim on Religion*, ed. W. S. F. Pickering, trans. W. S. F. Pickering and Jacqueline Redding (London: Routledge, 1975), 181–89.

master, the indeterminate god, the infinite, the spirit from which everything comes, dying and being born without cease."[9] The Durkheimians were as well quite aware of this aspect of Sylvain Lévi's thought. Note, for example, how Mauss's 1900 review of *La Doctrine du sacrifice* in *L'Année sociologique* picks up this theme.[10] So potent is the sacrifice, says Sylvain Lévi, that even if gods are relevant, those very gods are "born" from sacrifice, are "products" of it. Behind the figure of Prajapati, a major Hindu creation deity, therefore, is the sacrifice: "Prajapati, the sacrifice is the father of the gods … and its son." Moreover, sacrifice is identified as the life source of the gods.[11] And, sacrifice is also said to save the gods.[12]As Louis Renou has noted, Sylvain Lévi in effect argued for the "omnipotence" of ritual.[13] Durkheim did precisely the same.

Five, note, also, in *Elementary Forms*, bk. 1, ch. 1, sec. 2, that Durkheim used Indian religion, particularly non-theistic Buddhism, to defeat all theistic, and thus interventionist, concepts of religion. The inclusion of Buddhism, and by extension Hindu Vedānta, thus expanded the definition of religion beyond theism to become the "administration of the sacred."

Lévi's investigations of sacrificial ritual contributed as well to the related positive and non-theistic idea of the sacred, subsequently made famous by the Durkheimians.[14] Further, instead of the idea of the gods defining religion, the notion of an impersonal sacred power behind the gods and empowering them took over. It requires little imagination, of course, to see here the *sacré* of the Durkheimians, which for Mauss was "fundamental"—"the ultimate aim of our researches [is] the sacred"—and in the same breath go on to say that it was also the "highest reward of our work on sacrifice."[15]

Confirming this perspective, some Durkheimian scholars, such as Donald Nielsen, suggest that Durkheim's notion of a non-interventionist sacred was, in effect, over-determined. Nielsen suggests that the influence of Spinoza and his monism are at work in Durkheim's conception of reli-

[9] Lévi, *Doctrine du sacrifice*, ch. 2.

[10] Marcel Mauss, "Review of Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice*," in *Oeuvres. Volume 3. Les fonctions sociales du sacré*, ed. Victor Karady (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), 353.

[11] Lévi, *Doctrine du sacrifice*, 27.

[12] Ibid., 38.

[13] Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brâhmanas*, with an introduction by Louis Renou (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1966), viii.

[14] Mauss, "Review of Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice*."

[15] Ibid.

gion.[16] In the main, the "result has been a reconstruction," Nielsen tells us, of Durkheim's "social thought around the philosophical problem of totality and an image of his work as the embodiment of a sociological monism whose central features are strongly reminiscent of Spinoza's philosophy."[17] This is in effect to say that Nielsen believes that since Durkheim thinks holistically or in terms of holism, totality and substance, and since Spinoza did as well, then Spinoza too must be a powerful force in shaping Durkheim's intellectual projects. This might be so. Indeed, Nielsen believes that linking Durkheim and Spinoza places Durkheim in the longer civilizational tradition of Jewish thinkers such as Philo, Maimonides, and Spinoza, who responded to the challenges posed to inherited religious culture by the modernizing forces of their respective ages with the creation of distinctive forms of religious philosophy.

In linking Spinoza, Judaism, and Durkheim, Nielsen argues in sum for the recognition of Durkheim's distinctive achievement as a religious and metaphysical philosopher who attempted, like others before him such as Spinoza, to combine traditional religions horizons with modernizing philosophical and scientific perspectives into a totalizing theory.[18] Now, whether or not Nielsen is right, he and I see the same sort of thing in Durkheim. To wit, Durkheim uses a language consistent with classic Hindu monist ideas to articulate his idea of the sacred as the essence of religion—not the interventionist deity of Riesebrodt's book.

Riesebrodt curiously—but also perhaps conveniently—leaves the Indian possibilities argued by me (and at least by analogy, by Nielsen) out of his discussions of Buddhism. The ideal of Nirvana has set the parameters of ultimate, sacred, value that have given Buddhist civilization the core values that have informed its flourishing for well over two millennia. Buddhists leave the "interventionism" to *devata*s. And, as students of Durkheim will recall, here is precisely where Durkheim chose to expand the definition of religion beyond the cramped quarters of (interventionist) theism by defining religion as the administration of the sacred. In this domain, Riesebrodt has little or nothing to say to religious folk. Other sorts of "bumps on the neck" occasion quite another sort of theorizing of religion.

[16] Donald A. Nielsen, *Three Faces of God: Society, Religion, and the Categories of Totality in the Philosophy of Émile Durkheim* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[17] Ibid., xi.

[18] Ibid., xiii.

Part of an answer may be first found in Riesebrodt's understandable, yet odd, irritation at theorizing religion as an intellectual matter—as "a theologically normative system." What else is theorizing but an intellectual matter, theological or no? Religion would be better theorized, says Riesebrodt, as an "institutionalized complex of practices" (77). The "meaning of religious practices" can only be understood "on the level of institutionalized practices or 'liturgies'" (72). Riesebrodt is an 'action' guy, not a 'thought' guy. Well and good. But shouldn't we at least clean up the theoretical or intellectual part of the conceptualization of religion before shifting to presumably safer polemic ground? As long as Riesebrodt has made the thrust of his book an effort at conceptualizing what a good definition of religion could be, why not see the job to completion? My Durkheimian rejoinder to Riesebrodt seeks to do precisely the job of completing his initial conceptual ambition to produce a universal concept of religion.

But an appeal to practices cannot really remedy what ails Riesebrodt about current theorizing about religion—its rejection of the universality of religion. While religion is not universal, thinks Riesebrodt, by virtue of anything conceptual, he counters that religion is universal because it names "certain types of meaningful action"—actions which are themselves universal (21). All religions, says Riesebrodt, seek to "avert misfortune, overcome crises and produce or mediate salvation" (148). But as laudable or not as this shift from ideas to practices might be for certain purposes, Riesebrodt cannot help but slip back into theorizing. Thus, he concludes by telling us that religion should be conceived in terms of distinctive "interventionist" practices—"sacrifice, prayers, formulas and chants" (86)—that are themselves universal human phenomena. How, one might ask, are these universal practices conceivable outside the notion of an interventionist deity? We cannot so easily escape theorizing.

The Durkheimian "Correction"

It should surprise no one who understands the classic theorists of our field to conclude that Riesebrodt's alignment with Max Weber cries out for correction in the Durkheimian direction that I have articulated. Here I write not so much as someone long working within the framework of Durkheimian theory, but, rather, as someone who has come to appreciate the profundity of the opposition of Durkheim to Weber. These two represent a good deal more than cheering sections on opposite sides of a playing field. Durkheim

and Weber differ because they differ in fundamentals no one, to my mind, has yet overcome. There is much more to say about Durkheimian theory of religion than Riesebrodt's stiff representation allows (62–65). I believe that by bringing out the origins of Durkheim's thinking about religion in the religious thought-world of India, I have done something to fill out what that opposition means.