

Religion in Human Evolution

*From the Paleolithic
to the Axial Age*

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Preface

Very deep is the well of the past.

THOMAS MANN, *Joseph and His Brothers*

Those moments which the spirit appears to have outgrown still belong to it in the depths of its present. Just as it has passed through all its moments in history, so also must it pass through them again in the present.

HEGEL, *Reason in History*

When one reads the poems and the writings of the ancients, how could it be right not to know something about them as men? Hence one should try to understand the age in which they have lived. This can be described as "looking for friends in history."

MENCIUS 5B:8

This is a large book about a large subject. It is therefore incumbent on me to give the reader an explanation of why it is so long (it could be many times longer), a road map, and a response to certain objections that may leap to the mind of some readers. I will begin by using the three epigraphs above to give an idea of what I am trying to do.

Mann's metaphor of the past as a well, in the opening sentence of his book, is complemented immediately by his second sentence: "Should we not call it bottomless?" It becomes clear in the long prologue that starts with these sentences that Mann is afraid, as he embarks on a story that reaches back into the second millennium BCE, that he will fall ever further into the past, lose his

grip on each ledge that he reaches for in order to try to stop his fall, and instead plummet ever deeper into what appears to be bottomless. Among other things he shudders at the thought of falling below the human altogether into the deep crevasses of biological evolution. Toward the end of the prologue he becomes preoccupied with another fear: that the past is dead and that to fall into the past is to die. But just as he completes the prologue he comes to the truth that guides his enterprise: he thinks about time. "The past of life, the dead-and-gone world" is death, yet death, because it is the eternally present, is life. Thus of the past he writes, "For it *is*, always *is*, however much we may say It was."¹ Girded with the thought that the past *is*, and therefore though apparently dead is also alive, he is ready to embark on his sixteen-year project of writing a book that even in the one-volume edition is over 1,200 pages long.

Hegel, we might say, picks up Mann's metaphor of the well and uses it in a way that Mann doesn't: the well as a source that gives us living water, without which we would die. Hegel is our modern Aristotle who took the effort to think about everything and put it into time, development, and history. For Hegel, we cannot know objective spirit, what we would call culture in the deepest sense, without knowing its history, even though we may think, wrongly, that we have outgrown it. Unless we pass through all the moments of the spirit's history in our present, we will not know who we are, will not be conscious of subjective spirit—that is, of our present cultural possibilities.

Finally, Mencius suggests that in history we can find friends who, if we make the effort to understand them, can help us on our way.² The passage in the epigraph is preceded by the thought that a "Gentleman"—the English term used to translate the ancient Chinese term *junzi* for a man of superior social status, which Confucius had transformed into a term for a man of superior ethical quality—would seek to befriend other Gentlemen in his own village and state, and even the whole empire, but also in history itself. Mencius is reminding us that we can find friends from whom we can learn all the way into the deep past.

Eric Hobsbawm has suggested that the acceleration of cultural change in our most recent past has threatened to cut us loose from history altogether, "snapping the links between generations, that is to say, between past and present."³ That would threaten the entire project to which I have just shown Mann, Hegel, and Mencius contributing, and call into question who we are as humans or where we want to go. No past, no future: it's that simple. One might also say, no present either. Cultural vacuum. Not likely, but even a threat of such a thing has to be taken seriously and has been countered of late

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by the call for deep or big history. David Christian's *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* and Daniel Lord Smail's *On Deep History and the Brain* may be taken as signs of the time.⁴ What Christian and Smail do is link us back to our history as a species, one species among many, all of which are our relatives, right back to the unicellular organisms of 3.5 billion years ago. And Christian goes even further than that, starting with the big bang of 13.5 billion years ago and ending with a universe that will have decayed into a state of "featureless equilibrium" billions of years hence. Both Christian and Smail are historians, and both recognize that they are breaking rather strong taboos in their profession, rejecting the established view that history begins with texts and so is only about 5,000 years old, and that anything before that is to be left to biologists and anthropologists. I follow them, rather modestly confining my concern to one subject area, religion, though in premodern societies that is quite an inclusive category, and to our own species, with only a glance into our biological ancestry, and ending, not with the present, but with the first millennium BCE, for reasons I will explain later.

One thing that both Smail and Christian take for granted, with which I very much agree, is that history goes all the way back and any distinction between history and prehistory is arbitrary. That means that biological history—that is, evolution—is part of the human story all the way through, though quite a long time ago it gave rise to culture and has coevolved with it ever since.⁵ That will inevitably raise questions that I can deal with at length only in Chapter 2, which is devoted to religion in the context of human evolution, but that I must address briefly right from the start. Mann in his Prologue to *Joseph and His Brothers* was especially frightened of falling in the "bottomless" well into the prehuman vortex of evolution. He need not have been. Even though he wrote that book from 1926 to 1942, before the great advances in evolutionary theory that have occurred since the mid-twentieth century, there was still enough available for him, if he had had the time, to find that he had many friends among nonhuman organisms. It was known then, for example, that the atmosphere of the earth, with its plentiful supply of oxygen, was not present in the early years of our solar system, and that it developed only because unicellular organisms in the primeval sea had discovered how to use photosynthesis to feed themselves, thus producing a surplus of oxygen that, over the course of a billion years or so, created an atmosphere in which multicellular life—plants, animals, and others—could begin to inhabit the land masses that had previously been barren rocks. A little vote of thanks to these tiny microscopic creatures, without

whom nothing presently existing on dry land would be here, might have been fearlessly offered.

Most worrisome to many who fear the merging of evolution and history is the belief that they are based on two incompatible methodologies: evolution is natural science, rigidly deterministic and reductionist, allowing no freedom or creativity, whereas history is a humanistic study in which human freedom is at the center, in both its marvelous creativity and its terrifying violence. Grim determinism is not missing in some forms of neo-Darwinism, might I say the fundamentalist forms, in which the subject of evolution is genes, selfish genes at that, and organisms are only vehicles at the mercy of the blind forces of selection through which genes relentlessly propagate themselves. Richard Dawkins, particularly in his widely known book *The Selfish Gene*, is the best-known proponent of this view. In that book he writes, "We are survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes. I shall argue that a predominant quality to be expected in a successful gene is ruthless selfishness. This gene selfishness will usually give rise to selfishness in individual behavior."⁶ Dawkins's views attracted widespread attention after the publication of *The Selfish Gene*, but since then other, competing views have gained ground.⁷

Most students of evolution continue to believe, contrary to Dawkins, that it is the organism that evolves, not just the genes.⁸ Mary Jane West-Eberhard emphasizes the role of the organism (phenotype) in its own evolution: "I consider genes followers, not leaders, in adaptive evolution."⁹ Marc Kirschner and John Gerhart, in their important book *The Plausibility of Life*, develop a conception of the organismic control of variation: "On the side of generating phenotypic variation, we believe the organism indeed participates in its own evolution, and does so with a bias related to its long history of variation and selection."¹⁰ Of particular importance are the behavioral and symbolic aspects of evolution, which build on genetic capacities but are themselves not genetically controlled, as it is there that we will probably find most of the resources for religion—cultural developments from biological beginnings.¹¹ The evolutionary linguist Derek Bickerton suggests just how far back we must go to find these beginnings. Speaking of language but implicitly of culture, he writes: "The trouble with almost all previous attempts to look at origins is that they do not go back far enough. If we were to understand thoroughly all that language involved, we would probably have to go back to the birth of the lowliest animate creatures, for language depends crucially on a matrix of volition and primitive consciousness which must have begun to be laid down hundreds of millions of years ago."¹²

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A very suggestive elaboration of the degree to which organisms participate in their own evolution, an important kind of behavioral evolution, has been offered by John Odling-Smee and his colleagues in their book *Niche Construction: The Neglected Process in Evolution*. Odling-Smee et al. argue that we cannot understand evolution unless we see how actively organisms create the conditions for their own evolution. Natural selection is indeed blind, yet paradoxically it leads to purposive action: "If natural selection is *blind*, yet niche construction is *semantically informed* and *goal-directed*, then evolution must comprise an entirely *purposeless* process, namely, natural selection, selecting for *purposive* organisms, namely niche-constructing organisms. This must be true at least insofar as the niche-constructing organisms that are selected by natural selection function *so as to* survive and reproduce."¹³ Therefore Dawkins's argument that the unit of biological selection is the gene and that the organism is a "throwaway survival machine" is fundamentally mistaken. If the organism can learn, and that learning can change its environment and thus the survival chances of its offspring, then it is the organism, though to be sure it includes the genes (Odling-Smee et al. call it the phenogenotype), that is "the central unit" of evolution.¹⁴

There are a number of continuities between humans and nonhuman mammals and birds, some closely related genetically and some fairly distant, that I will discuss further in Chapter 2, but among them are empathy, including occasional empathy with members of other species, a sense of justice, and the capacity for many forms of cooperation.¹⁵ Play, found only in mammals and birds, with perhaps a few exceptions, is a particularly significant evolutionary heritage, as we will see. All is not rosy: aggression and violence also evolve, with the particularly nasty result that humans and our nearest primate relative, the chimpanzees, deliberately kill other members of their own species.

What evolution as a whole means gets us into large issues, which almost inevitably become issues of ultimate meaning that overlap with religion. Some scientists have expressed "awe" at the immense process of evolution extending over billions of years. Whether awe moves us into another realm than science is something we will have to consider later. Even when evolution is declared meaningless, as when Dawkins writes, "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference,"¹⁶ that is a kind of religious position: the ultimate meaning of life is that there is no meaning. Perhaps Dawkins too has moved into another sphere.

I have been trying to suggest that evolution is considerably more complex than what some biologists and many humanists think, that there is a place

within it for meaning and purpose, and that indeed meaning and purpose evolve. My particular interest in evolution is in the evolution of capacities, which has been a remarkable part of the story: the capacity for creating oxygen; the capacity for forming large complex organisms after a couple of billion years when only unicellular organisms had been around; the capacity for endothermy—the ability of birds and mammals to maintain a constant body temperature that allows them to survive in quite extreme hot or cold temperatures; the capacity to spend days or weeks, in the case of many mammals and birds, or years, in the case of chimpanzees and other apes, or decades, in the case of humans, in raising helpless infants and children unable to survive on their own; the capacity to make atomic bombs. Evolution gives us no guarantee that we will use these new capacities wisely or well. Such capacities can help us or they can destroy us, depending on what we do with them.

I hope this gives some idea of what I mean by evolution and why I think it is important if we are to understand who we are and where we might want to go. But what do I mean by religion, and what is the evolution of religion? Religion is a complex phenomenon, not easily defined, though I will spend much of the first two chapters trying to define it. Just to get things started I will draw on Clifford Geertz's well-known definition.¹⁷ Paraphrasing him, religion is a system of symbols that, when enacted by human beings, establishes powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations that make sense in terms of an idea of a general order of existence.¹⁸ It is interesting to note what Geertz left out. There is no mention of "belief in supernatural beings" or "belief in gods (God)," which many current definitions take for granted as essential. It is not that Geertz or I think such beliefs are absent in religion, though in some cases they may be, just that they are not the defining aspect.

I agree with Geertz that symbols are basic to religion (as they are to many spheres of human action, including science); that is to say, religion becomes possible only with the emergence of language.¹⁹ The idea of a prelinguistic religion, as in the notion of "chimpanzee spirituality," seems implausible to me, though there are developments among some nonhuman animals that provide resources that could contribute to what would become religion among human beings. There is even the possibility that something like religion might have developed in earlier species of the genus *Homo*, *Homo erectus* in particular, who might have had some kind of protolanguage, but not full modern syntactical language.

In his essay "Religion as a Cultural System," Geertz was trying to specify what religion is in relation to a number of other spheres that are organized by

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other systems of symbols. Following Alfred Schutz, he contrasts these several cultural spheres to the world of daily life, which Schutz took to be the "paramount reality" of life. As Geertz puts it:

The everyday world of common-sense objects and practical acts is, as Schutz says, the paramount reality of human experience—paramount in the sense that it is the world in which we are most solidly rooted, whose inherent actuality we can hardly question (however much we may question certain portions of it), and from whose pressures and requirements we can least escape.²⁰

What distinguishes common sense as a mode of "seeing" is, as Schutz has pointed out, a simple acceptance of the world, its objects, and its processes as being just what they seem to be—what is sometimes called naïve realism—and the pragmatic motive, the wish to act upon that world so as to bend it to one's practical purposes, to master it, or so far as that proves impossible, to adjust to it.²¹

For Schutz the world of daily life is characterized by striving, by working, by anxiety. It is the premier world of functioning, of adapting, of surviving. It is what some biologists and some historians think is all there is. Among language-using humans, however, the world of daily life is never all there is, and the other realities that human culture gives rise to cannot fail but overlap with the world of daily life, whose relentless utilitarianism can never be absolute.

There are two more things that we can say now, saving for later a fuller discussion of the world of daily life. In spite of its "apparent actuality," the world of daily life is a culturally, symbolically constructed world, not the world as it actually is. As such it varies in terms of time and space, with much in common across the historical and cultural landscape, but with occasional sharp differences. Yet because the world of daily life appears "natural," it involves the suspension of disbelief in the world as it appears. In what Schutz calls "the natural attitude" one "puts in brackets the doubt that the world and its objects might be otherwise than it appears."²²

What is significant here is that in the various other worlds—cultural spheres, symbolic systems—in which Geertz was interested throughout his life, the brackets that the commonsense world of daily life puts on the idea that anything could be other than it appears have come off. In these other worlds, taken-for-granted assumptions no longer rule. In "Religion as a Cultural System" Geertz compares the religious perspective to two other

perspectives besides the commonsensical one in terms of which the world may be construed: the scientific and the aesthetic.²³ In the scientific perspective, he says, the givenness of daily life disappears: "Deliberate doubt and systematic inquiry, the suspension of the pragmatic motive in favor of disinterested observation, the attempt to analyze the world in terms of formal concepts whose relationships to the informal conceptions of common sense become increasingly problematic—here are the hallmarks of the attempt to grasp the world scientifically."²⁴ Rather than pursue Geertz's to me somewhat eccentric view of the aesthetic perspective, I will return to its distinctive features briefly toward the end of this Preface.

It is with his discussion of ritual that Geertz shows us most directly what is characteristic of religion as a cultural system and what makes it different from other spheres, for ritual is not just religious beliefs but religious action. Geertz sums up ritual in a way I could not improve on: "In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality to which Santayana refers in my epigraph . . . [It is] out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance that religious conviction emerges on the human plane. . . In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it."²⁵ The part of his epigraph to which he refers is this: "The vistas [that a religion] opens and the mysteries it propounds are another world to live in; and another world to live in—whether we expect ever to pass wholly over into it or no—is what we mean by having a religion" (George Santayana, *Reason in Religion*).

To illustrate his point, Geertz, as he always did, gave examples of how rituals create worlds. His most extensive example is from Bali—the ritual combat between Rangda, the queen of the witches, evil, terrifying, Fear itself, and Barong, a kind of farcical sheepdog dragon, who attempts to defend the villagers against Rangda, in a ritual that ends inevitably in a draw. In the course of his discussion, Geertz describes the many ways in which the combat between Rangda and Barong sums up central concerns of Balinese culture, but he concludes:

It is in the direct encounter with the two figures in the context of the actual performance that the villager comes to know them as, so far as he is concerned, genuine realities. They are, then, not representations of anything, but presences. And when the villagers go into trance they become—*nadi*—themselves part of the realm in which those presences

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But then Geertz's bolts may be to the world of religious moments. The world of daily life is entirely missing. Yet the world of daily life, Geertz says, "religious social order but

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exist. To ask, as I once did, a man who has *been* Rangda whether he thinks she is real is to leave oneself open to the suspicion of idiocy.²⁶

But then Geertz reminds us that however real the world of religious symbols may be to those who participate in it, no one, not even a saint, lives in the world of religious symbols all the time, and most of us live there only at moments. The ritual is over and fields have to be tended and children fed. The world of daily life returns with its brackets perhaps dented, but not entirely missing. Yet when enough people have entered that other world, then the world of daily life to which they return is never quite the same again. As Geertz says, "religion is sociologically interesting not because it describes the social order but because it shapes it."²⁷

How religion creates those other worlds and how those worlds interact with the world of daily life is the subject of this book. Like Geertz, I cannot imagine making an argument about symbolic forms and their enactment without illustrating them. If all that is necessary is the argument, this Preface might suffice, or come close to it. But if one wants to understand religious symbol systems in their variety and in their development, there will have to be extensive illustrations. Even in my first two general chapters there are many brief illustrations, but beginning with Chapter 3, on tribal religion, I will offer more extensive descriptions that will become progressively longer as I deal with religion in the chiefly archaic and axial societies. Even so, the long chapters on the four axial-age cases are hardly scratching the surface, as are the earlier ones as well. They tell just enough, I hope, to help the reader, if only for a moment, actually experience what living in those worlds might be like.

I can imagine that there will be readers who will like the cases and throw away the argument, and that is fine with me. I have even thought that might be the way Cliff Geertz would have read my book. But I cannot make the argument I want to make without the illustrations, and so the book is rather long. On the other hand it is not long enough: it leaves out the last 2,000 years. But if I tried to give the major religious developments of the last 2,000 years the same degree of attention that I gave to earlier religions, inadequate though that is, the detail I would have to master would overwhelm me. I would need another lifetime or a phalanx of collaborators. At most I can hope to write another book of modest size that will try to show some of the linkages from the axial age to the modern era, dipping only occasionally into deep detail. We will see.

I have given some idea, however preliminary and inadequate, of what I take evolution to be and what I take religion to be. Now, perhaps even more cryptically, I will try briefly to say how they come together. I agree with the opening sentence of Geertz's epigraph from Santayana: "Any attempt to speak without speaking any particular language is not more hopeless than the attempt to have a religion that shall be no religion in particular." My attempts to describe carefully a variety of religions in all their particularity should give evidence of my agreement, but I also believe that there are types of religion and that these types can be put in an evolutionary order, not in terms of better or worse, but in terms of the capacities upon which they draw.

In trying to describe such an evolutionary order, I have found Merlin Donald's scheme of the evolution of culture particularly convincing. Donald shows how, in the coevolution of biology and culture, three stages of human culture—mimetic, mythic, and theoretic—developed over the last 1 or 2 million years.²⁸ The evolutionary process starts from the baseline of episodic culture, which we share with other higher mammals—that is, the capacity to recognize what episode the individual is in and what happened before in similar episodes that might give a clue as to how to act now, even though lacking what is called autobiographical memory in which the episodes are strung together in a larger story. We then proceed to mimetic culture, possibly as long as 2 million years ago with such species as *Homo erectus*, in which we use our bodies to enact past and future events as well as gesture for communication. Mimetic culture, though primarily gestural, was by no means silent, and in all likelihood involved music as well as some beginnings of linguistic capacity, though very simple ones. Dance may be one of the earliest forms of such mimetic culture, and dance is basic to ritual in almost all tribal societies, so, though we can only imagine what it was like, some kind of religion may well begin in those early days. What is important to remember about Donald's scheme is that though he speaks of stages, earlier stages are not lost, but only reorganized under new conditions. Thus even in our highly verbal and, to a degree, abstract culture, gestural communication remains basic, not only, obviously, in intimate life, but in public, in our grand spectacles of sport or politics.

Sometime between 250,000 and 100,000 years ago, full grammatical language developed, making complex narratives possible. Perhaps fully developed autobiographical memory depends on grammatical language and narrative and so emerged only then, or perhaps it was already foreshadowed in the mimetic stage. Donald calls the new stage mythic. Myth greatly ex-

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tends the capacities of mimetic ritual in terms of what it can enact, but it does not replace it. All cultures that we know of have narrative culture intertwined with mimetic culture. I have tried to illustrate religions that are primarily mimetic and mythic under the rubric of tribal religion, being fully aware of how treacherous the word "tribe" is. But even when religions move to include a theoretic dimension, mimetic and mythic culture in reformulated ways continue to be central; humans cannot function without them.

As society became more complex, religions followed suit, explicating, in their own way, the enormous differences between social strata that replaced the basic egalitarianism of forager tribes. Chiefdoms and then archaic kingdoms require new forms of symbolization and enactment to make sense of the increasing hierarchical division of social classes in terms of wealth and power. In the first millennium BCE, theoretic culture emerges in several places in the old world, questioning the old narratives as it reorganizes them and their mimetic bases, rejecting ritual and myth as it creates new rituals and myths, and calling all the old hierarchies into question in the name of ethical and spiritual universalism. The cultural effervescence of this period led to new developments in religion and ethics but also in the understanding of the natural world, the origins of science. For these reasons we call this period axial.²⁹

This brief picture of the evolution of religious symbol systems, which it will take the whole book to flesh out, provides one consolation about stopping where I do. I end with the axial age, the emergence of theoretic culture and the reorganization of the relation between mimetic, mythic, and theoretic elements that that requires. The last 2,000 years have seen an enormous development of all the resources from which religion draws. It is also the story of how the theoretic becomes—partially, never totally—disembedded from the mimetic and mythic. Though I cannot tell that story nor consider the achievements and predicaments to which it has led, I will at least have given an idea of all the dimensions in play. Some have suggested that we are in the midst of a second axial age, but if we are, there should be a new cultural form emerging. Maybe I am blind, but I don't see it. What I think we have is a crisis of incoherence and a need to integrate in new ways the dimensions we have had since the axial age. I will return to this issue in the Conclusion.

It is out of the series of evolutionary developments leading to the emergence of theoretic culture that the various worlds, the "cultural systems" of which Geertz speaks, became more clearly defined. But following his logic we can ask, what was the relation of these new developments, these new

capacities, to the world of daily life? If we see the world of daily life as the world of Darwinian survival—as to some extent we must—how, we might ask, could humans “afford” the luxury of spending time on alternative worlds, on dance and myth, even on theory, when there was hunger and danger all around them and the necessity to procreate if their lineages were to survive?

Just to suggest the kind of luxury I am referring to, how can people have created the aesthetic sphere, the nonutilitarian sphere *par excellence*? Let me take a passage from the poet and critic Mark Strand to illustrate the point:

Something beyond knowledge compels our interest and our ability to be moved by a poem . . . The poem is bound by a schema that is no less true for standing apart from what science tells us is true . . . A poem is a place where the conditions of beyondness and withinness are made palpable, where to imagine is to feel what it is like to be. It allows us to have the life we are denied because we are too busy living. Even more paradoxically, a poem permits us to live in ourselves as if we were just out of reach of ourselves.³⁰

Because we are too busy living? Exactly. How is it possible for us to have that life? It seems that there are a variety of ways in which evolution has allowed living creatures to outwit Darwinian pressures and “have a life” after all. Or maybe. As we will see, every attempt to avoid Darwinian selection can be co-opted; every effort to avoid function and adaptation, if it is at all successful, will be recaptured by what it was trying to escape, if I can speak anthropomorphically about large evolutionary tendencies. But maybe not entirely. It may even turn out that it is “functional” to have spheres of life that are not functional.

While reading a number of recent publications by biologists at work on things of interest to me, I have been interested to find them using the computer language of “online” and “offline.” Online is the world of daily life, of what is immediately before us, of Darwinian pressures with a vengeance. Online is the world of foraging, fighting, fleeing, procreating, and the other things that all creatures must do to survive. Offline is when those pressures are off and there are other things at work. I have often found that articles or books about offline things such as sleep or play begin with qualifying statements such as “Sleep is not well understood,” or “Play is not well understood, some people even argue it doesn’t exist.” No one begins a discussion of forag-

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ing techniques with such a disclaimer. Of course, when it comes to particular subjects, even in the world of grim survival, saying that something is not well understood is, to me reassuringly, common. But when applied to whole fields, it is mainly the offline fields that are so described.

Take sleep, for example. It seems to be close to universal among all organisms. In organisms without brains we cannot scan for brain waves that indicate sleep, but we can observe quiet withdrawal. So we all seem to need it. It is apparently necessary for survival: I have read that rats who are continuously kept awake die in about two weeks. But exactly what is going on isn't clear. And sleeping is expensive. Sleeping animals are more vulnerable to predators than wide-awake animals. We can't do any foraging or child care or procreating when we're asleep. Yet we need it and we do it.

Then there is the further problem of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, only discovered in the 1950s, which seems to be the part of sleep in which dreams occur. Human babies need a lot of it. About 80 percent of their sleep is REM sleep, whereas for human adults it is only about 20 percent. But what are dreams about? There is no agreement that I have found, even though in a variety of cultures dreams have been taken very seriously and have influenced daily life, sometimes significantly. REM sleep seems to have to do with learning; with consolidating memories, sorting out important memories, and removing evanescent ones; or with creativity. So there are functions, yes, but exactly what functions is not so clear. Sleep is a luxury that turns out to be a necessity even if we still don't understand it too well.

What about play? Play is the luxury of luxuries. No daily-life concerns allowed. You can play-fight, but if you bite too hard, the game is over. You can play at sexual intercourse (with your own or the other sex), but if you really try to do it, the game is over. Play is not universal; it is especially well developed among mammals and birds, particularly among intelligent and social mammals and birds, though it is also found among fish and some reptiles, and even insects have something that might be considered play. Play is largely, but not exclusively, an activity of the young. It is commonest in species that continue child care for a long time so that the young of the species are not directly involved in the quest for survival: they are fed and protected and have the energy for just having a good time, or so it seems to us.

Play is, of course, expensive. It makes playing animals vulnerable to predators and keeps them from helping to forage. So we have many theories of the functions of play—it is exercising the muscles, it is learning to be social, it is learning to outwit the other players, and so on—yet few observers doubt

that it includes an element of sheer joy that is seldom seen in other things animals do. Johan Huizinga wrote a famous book, *Homo Ludens*, "The Playing Human," that still has a lot to teach us.³¹ He even saw play as involved in the origin of culture.

One final example. Derek Bickerton, the evolutionary linguist, has argued that the origin of language occurred offline.³² The cries of other primates are not words; they are commanding vocal gestures, which we can translate as "Danger! Predator!" or "Come here! Food!" but there are no words for danger, or predator, or food. There is no semantic content other than a terrified scream, on the one hand, or a joyous one, on the other, no words that could then be used to discuss the possibility of predators or food when there is no predator approaching nor any new discovery of food at hand, offline, so to speak. How did we ever get offline enough to invent language, which is talk *about* things, not an immediate intervention in the world, or not necessarily so? Bickerton has his own answer, but for now, just the idea that something as "functional," as "adaptive," as language originated offline, so to speak, boggles the mind.

What I am suggesting is that the capacity to go offline in a number of ways, which is present even in simple organisms but much more extensive in complex ones and especially so among humans, may be one of our greatest capacities of all, and that religion, along with science and art, may be the result of that capacity to go offline. I'm not denying function and adaptation. The ethologist Gordon Burghardt has a theory that there is primary play, which is just play, and then there is secondary play, which in a variety of ways has become adaptive.³³ Maybe some such distinction could be made in other spheres.

What all this means for religion, is that in this book the search is not to find the ways in which religion is adaptive, and thus a good thing, or maladaptive, and thus a bad thing, or even something that developed in a spandrel, a kind of empty evolutionary space, and is neutral with respect to adaptation. I want to understand what religion is and what religion does and then worry about its consequences for the world of daily life. The consequences are enormously important, and the question of whether they are adaptive or not cannot finally be avoided. But adaptations can be found for almost any phenomenon—biologists call them just-so stories. They are not the place to start; the reality of life in the religious mode is where I will begin.

There is one more point that, though I touched on it earlier, I need to emphasize in concluding: religious evolution does not mean a progression from

worse to better. We have had to "hinge" that worried Cliff idea of religious evolution terms.³⁴ Religious evolution about how those concepts J. Gould pointed out its charms. Some of the same form for human the briefer its life. more complex for several species of the may be partly responsible Neanderthals. The second law of and it takes more have more to say :

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worse to better. We have not gone from "primitive religion" that tribal peoples have had to "higher religions" that people like us have. I think it is that problem that worried Cliff Geertz when I talked about religious evolution, because the idea of religious evolution had in earlier days so often been couched in those terms.³⁴ Religious evolution does add new capacities, but it tells us nothing about how those capacities will be used. It is worth remembering, as Stephen J. Gould pointed out, that complexity is not the only good.³⁵ Simplicity has its charms. Some relatively simple organisms have survived in more or less the same form for hundreds of millions of years. The more complex the species, the briefer its life. In some cases this is because species have changed into even more complex forms, yet extinctions have been massive. There have been several species of the genus *Homo*; now there is one. The one remaining species may be partly responsible for the extinction of its last remaining relative, the Neanderthals. The more complex, the more fragile. Complexity goes against the second law of thermodynamics, that all complex entities tend to fall apart, and it takes more and more energy for complex systems to function. I will have more to say about all that in Chapter 2.

Genetic change is slow; cultural change is fast, at least in biological time. By now it is obvious that cultural change can be fast in any kind of time. Once the offline achievements of science get translated into technology, then, as they say, all hell breaks loose. Technology takes the possibilities of science and brings them to bear on the world of daily life, with dramatic consequences both for human beings and for the biosphere. For one thing, the sudden growth of the world's population, itself only possible because of technology, has, in my own lifetime, almost outstripped the population growth in all previous history, from the hypothetical "bottleneck" population of perhaps 10,000 humans at the end of the last ice age to well over 6 billion now and 12 billion before we hardly know it. The enormous need for energy, so long available apparently endlessly directly from the sun through photosynthesis, has driven us to tap the enormous but finite and nonrenewable resources of the sun stored in fossil fuels, all to maintain our ever-increasing complexity.

We have proven to be enormously successful at adapting. We are now adapting so fast that we can hardly adapt to our own adaptations. Our technological progress is geometric. It would be hard to argue that our moral progress is even arithmetic. As one who has lived through one horrifying decade after another for eighty years, I confess that I cannot see much in the way of moral advance. There is an irony here, as moral sensitivity has grown

steadily in the last hundred years. We are far more sensitive to the needs of whole categories of people that were previously despised and repressed. Yet our growing moral sensitivity seems to have occurred in a world of widespread and undiminished moral horror. Yes, there are the bad guys to blame, and Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and so on were very bad. But it was not they who invented and used the atomic bomb to kill hundreds of thousands of civilians, most of them women and children. No one's hands are clean if we look at the recent history of the world with any seriousness.

Religion is part of this whole picture, a very complex part, leading sometimes to great moral advances and sometimes to deep moral failures. But that religious evolution is simply the rise, onward and upward, of ever more compassionate, more righteous, more enlightened religions could hardly be farther from the truth. No serious reader of this book can think it is a paean to any kind of religious triumphalism. Or any other triumphalism. Technological advance at high speed combined with moral blindness about what we are doing to the world's societies and to the biosphere is a recipe for rapid extinction. The burden of proof lies on anyone who would say it is not so. We can hope for and work for new directions that could change our course, but self-satisfied we cannot be.

This book asks what our deep past can tell us about the kind of life human beings have imagined was worth living. It is an effort to live again those moments that belong to us in the depths of our present, to draw living water from the well of the past, to find friends in history who can help us understand where we are. It is not a book about modernity. But surely, as Leszek Kolakowski has eloquently put it, modernity is on trial.³⁶ I cannot in this book give an account of that trial. All I can do is call up some very important witnesses.

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Religion and Reality

Many scholars ask whether the very word "religion" is too culture-bound to be used in historical and cross-cultural comparison today. I cannot avoid the question, but for practical purposes I will use the term, because for the philosophical and sociological traditions upon which this book draws, the idea of religion has been central. The justification for its use will depend more on the persuasiveness of the argument of the book as a whole than on a definition; nonetheless definitions help to get things started. In the Preface I offered a simplified version of Geertz's definition; here I will begin again with a simplified Durkheimian definition, not incompatible with Geertz's but opening up somewhat different dimensions: Religion is a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unite those who adhere to them in a moral community.¹ Even this simple definition raises immediately a second definitional issue: What is the sacred?

Durkheim defined the sacred as something set apart or forbidden. Durkheim's definition might be widened to define the sacred as a realm of non-ordinary reality. The notion of non-ordinary reality, though widely held among a variety of peoples, might appear to be ruled out for modern consciousness. Do we not believe that there is no non-ordinary reality, that ordinary reality is all there is? If so, then cannot both the sacred and religion be relegated to the historic past, to the mistaken beliefs of earlier cultures? But we can draw on Alfred Schutz's analysis of multiple realities, developing more fully what was sketched in the Preface, to indicate that today we operate all the time in a series of non-ordinary realities as well as in ordinary reality.²

Multiple Realities

Schutz argues that, methodologically speaking, the paramount reality in which we live is the world of daily life, what Max Weber called the everyday.³ We assume that the world of daily life is natural. Schutz characterizes the world of daily life as the world of *wide awake, grown up men*. We face the world of daily life with a *practical* or *pragmatic* interest. In the world of daily life, the primary activity is to "bring about [a] projected state of affairs by bodily movements," which Schutz calls *working*. The world of working is governed by the means/ends schema: we could also define it as a world of *striving*. The world of daily life operates in *standard time* and *standard space*.

Further, according to Schutz, the world of daily life is based on a *fundamental anxiety*, ultimately, though not necessarily consciously, arising from the knowledge and fear of death. Finally, according to Schutz, the world of daily life involves what he calls the epoché of the natural attitude—the suspension of disbelief in the world as it appears. In the natural attitude, one "puts in brackets the doubt that the world and its objects might be otherwise than it appears to him."⁴

At this point we have a clear contrast between the world of daily life and the world of religion, where doubt about the world as it appears is often fundamental. For example, the Daoist teacher Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), speaking of himself, wrote:

Once Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou.⁵

But we do not have to become so fanciful to see that even in the modern world we do not spend all our time in the world of daily life.

For example, most of us spend up to a third or more of our life asleep. Not only does sleep rather dramatically suspend our involvement in the world of daily life, but it is also the time when we dream, and dreams clearly do not follow the logic of daily life.⁶ Dreams, for example, do not operate in standard time and space: they can bring together persons from different times and places in a single interaction.

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We are often involved in activities that deliberately alter the conditions of the world of daily life, sometimes in a way that emphasizes some features of it while ignoring others. Games such as football artificially create a separate reality. Football operates not with standard time and space but with the bounded time and space of the game. Football events occur only on the football field. If, for example, a pass is caught out of bounds, it doesn't count as a catch, for it did not occur in game space. Game time is one hour, but it is suspended for a variety of reasons and usually lasts about three hours of standard time. Most centrally, football plays with the anxieties of the world of working, the striving for pragmatic advantage. Unlike the world of daily life, one hour of game time produces a clear result: someone wins and someone loses, or occasionally there is a tie. We may borrow a metaphor from football in daily life when we speak in an economic or political context of a "game plan" or a "winning quarterback." Indeed, for highly paid professional football players the world of the game *is* the world of daily life. But for the rest of us it is "only a metaphor."

What is true of football is true of many other common experiences. When we watch television, or a movie, or a play, or listen to music, we become absorbed in the activities we are watching or listening to. We are diverted from the world of daily life, and that is a major reason we spend so much time at these activities. However, in our society these activities tend to be viewed as "less real" than the world of daily life, as fictional, and ultimately as less important than the world of working. They can be switched off like a TV set and we will be back in the "real world," the world of daily life. Yet one of the first things to be noticed about the world of daily life is that *nobody can stand to live in it all the time*. Some people can't stand to live in it at all—they used to be sent to mental institutions, but today in the United States they can be found wandering in the city streets. All of us leave the world of daily life with considerable frequency—not only when we are sleeping and dreaming (the structure of dreams is almost completely antithetical to the structure of the world of working), but when we daydream, travel, go to a concert, turn on the television. We do these things often for the sheer pleasure of getting out of the world of daily life. Even so we may feel guilty that we are shirking our responsibilities to the real world.

However, if we follow the analysis of Alfred Schutz, the notion that the world of daily life is uniquely real is itself a fiction that is maintained only with effort. The world of daily life, like all the other multiple realities, is socially constructed. Each culture, each era, constructs its own world of daily

life, never entirely identical with any other. Even the meaning of "standard" time and space differs subtly between cultures, and fundamental conceptions of person, family, and nation are all culturally variable. By this I do not mean that the world of daily life even in its cultural variability is not real—it is real enough. But it lacks the unique ontological reality, the claim to be perfectly natural, that it seeks to secure when it puts in brackets the doubt that it could be other. It is one of the functions of other realities to remind us that that bracketing is finally insecure and unwarranted. Occasionally a work of art will break its bounds, will deeply unsettle us, will even issue us the command "Change your life"—that is, it will claim not a subordinate reality but a higher reality than the world of daily life.

The world of daily life is challenged by another reality much more sober than art, namely science. However closely science may seem to approximate the features of the world of daily life, there is one fundamental difference: science does not accept the world of daily life as it appears; science is premised on a permanent lifting of the epoché of the natural attitude. As William James pointed out in his original discussion of multiple realities, the physicist understands heat in terms not of "felt warmth" but of the "molecular vibrations" that cause that bodily warmth and are the truth of its appearance.⁷

It is religion, however, that traditionally directed the most frontal assault on the world of working. As Zhuangzi put it:

He who dreams of drinking wine may weep when morning comes; he who dreams of weeping may in the morning go to hunt. While he is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in this dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he wakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things, calling this man ruler, that one herdsman—how dense!⁸

The Buddha proclaimed that the world is a lie, a burning house from which we must escape. Early Christians believed that the world was in the grip of sin and death and would soon come to an end to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. Zhuangzi's metaphor of awakening, as though the world of daily life is really a dream, can be found in many traditions, including Buddhism and Christianity.

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Religious Reality

How can we characterize the religious reality that calls the world of daily life into question? Certainly religious worlds are as variable as the worlds of daily life, and we will have occasion to comment on that variability throughout this book, but as an initial effort to characterize the religious experience of reality I will borrow from the psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow in his *Toward a Psychology of Being* and other works has distinguished between what he calls Being cognition (or B-cognition) and Deficiency cognition (or D-cognition).⁹ His characterization of D-cognition is remarkably parallel to Schutz's notion of the world of daily life, for D-cognition is the recognition of what is lacking and what must be made up for through striving. D-cognition is motivated by a fundamental anxiety that propels us toward practical and pragmatic action in the world of working. When we are controlled by Deficiency motives, we operate under the means/ends schema, we have a clear sense of difference between subject and object, and our attitude toward objects (even human objects) is manipulative. We concentrate on partial aspects of reality that are most germane to our needs and ignore the rest, both of ourselves and of the world, but we operate with scrupulous attention to the constraints of standard time and space.

Being cognition is defined in sharpest contrast to Deficiency cognition on every dimension. When we are propelled by B-motives, we relate to the world by participation, not manipulation; we experience a union of subject and object, a wholeness that overcomes all partiality. The B-cognition is an end in itself, not a means to anything else, and it tends to transcend our ordinary experience of time and space. Maslow does not identify B-experiences exclusively with religion—they may occur in nature, in relation to art, in intense interpersonal relations, even in sports.¹⁰ But because B-experiences are so frequently reported in religious literature, they may provide an initial mode of entry into the particular way that people experience the world religiously, even though it is certainly not the only way and we will have to broaden our phenomenological description of religious worlds as we encounter particular religions in more detail.

Herbert Richardson, drawing on such writers as Charles Peirce and Friedrich Schleiermacher, describes something similar to Maslow's B-cognition when he points out the cognitive aspect of feeling. Feeling, he says, "perceives by participation. Just as feeling is a perception of a whole, so a whole is that which is perceived through participation."¹¹ According to Richardson,

aesthetic and some other kinds of knowing involve a feeling of a finite whole, whereas religious knowing involves the feeling of an infinite Whole. He gives as examples of our "affectual communion" with a finite whole the feeling of "the immensity of the ocean," or "the presence of another." Jonathan Edwards, as quoted by Richardson, describes the feeling of an infinite Whole:

There came into my soul, and was, as it were, diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before . . . I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him forever!¹²

Edwards's feeling of union with the infinite Whole, which he experienced as participation in the life of God, was accompanied by two other feelings that both Richardson and Maslow argue often accompany such experiences: the general rightness of all things, and personal well-being.

Václav Havel in his letters written from prison describes such an experience in entirely nontheistic terms:

Again, I call to mind that distant moment in [the prison at] Hermanice when on a hot, cloudless summer day, I sat on a pile of rusty iron and gazed into the crown of an enormous tree that stretched, with dignified repose, up and over all the fences, wires, bars and watchtowers that separated me from it. As I watched the imperceptible trembling of its leaves against an endless sky, I was overcome by a sensation that is difficult to describe: all at once, I seemed to rise above all the coordinates of my momentary existence in the world into a kind of state outside time in which all the beautiful things I had ever seen and experienced existed in a total "co-present"; I felt a sense of reconciliation, indeed of an almost gentle consent to the inevitable course of things as revealed to me now, and this combined with a carefree determination to face what had to be faced. A profound amazement at the sovereignty of Being became a dizzying sensation of tumbling endlessly into the abyss of its mystery; an unbounded joy at being alive, at having been given the chance to live through all I have lived through, and at the fact that everything has a deep and obvious meaning—this joy formed a strange alliance in me with a vague horror at the inapprehensibility and unattainability of everything I was so close to in that moment, standing at the very "edge

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of the finite"; I was flooded with a sense of ultimate happiness and harmony with the world and with myself, with that moment, with all the moments I could call up, and with everything invisible that lies behind it and has meaning. I would even say that I was somehow "struck by love," though I don't know precisely for whom or what.¹³

Here we find experiences of participation, of the rightness of things, and of personal well-being, similar to those we found in Edwards. Wallace Stevens has put such experiences in poetic form on several occasions. The following resonates particularly with Havel, though it brings in the idea of awakening, common in religious writing, but not explicit in either Edwards or Havel:

Perhaps

The truth depends on a walk around a lake,
A composing as the body tires, a stop
To see hepatica, a stop to watch
A definition growing certain and

A wait within that certainty, a rest
In the swags of pine-trees bordering the lake.
Perhaps there are times of inherent excellence,

As when the cock crows on the left and all
Is well, incalculable balances,
At which a kind of Swiss perfection comes

And a familiar music of the machine
Sets up its Schwärmerei, not balances
That we achieve but balances that happen,

As a man and woman meet and love forthwith.
Perhaps there are moments of awakening,
Extreme, fortuitous, personal, in which

We more than awaken, sit on the edge of sleep,
As on an elevation and behold
The academies like structures in a mist.¹⁴

In the ecstatic language of poetry, Stevens evokes the sense of participation instead of describing it as Edwards and Havel attempt to do. In any case, the

elements of the rightness of things and of personal well-being are particularly evident.

Overlapping Realities

So far I have treated the multiple realities as largely serial: so much time for sleep, so much for work, so much for television, for socializing, for contemplation, and so forth. But we can also see the various realms of reality as going on at the same time, and occasionally cutting into one another. Objects in the world of daily life may carry more than one meaning, and we may not be conscious of all the meanings. We may relate to our boss in the world of working, perhaps unconsciously, as if he were our father. As psychotherapists know, such a meaning can distort our behavior to the extent that it disrupts our ability to function in the work situation. Many objects that we encounter in the world of everyday have, at least potentially, religious meanings. The tree shimmering in the sunlight that Havel observed could have been hardly noticed as the background of the daily walk in the prison yard, but, for whatever reason, it served at that particular moment to break through the everyday: it was the world-tree that concentrated the whole meaning of the cosmos in its shimmering presence.

In other words, it is always possible that an object, a person, or an event in the world of daily life may have a meaning in another reality that transcends the world of working. If so we may call it a symbol, following Alfred Schutz's usage with respect to that term.¹⁵ We will have much more to say about symbols, but here we may only note that we are surrounded by symbols, or potential symbols, all the time. A tree, water, the sun are all multivalent symbols, but a room is a symbol, a door is a symbol, a book is a symbol, a teacher is a symbol, a student is a symbol. Most of the time in daily life we are operating with a narrowly pragmatic consciousness, with what Maslow calls D-cognition, and we don't see symbols, or at least we don't consciously see them. At times, however, even in the midst of daily life, we may experience a B-cognition when something ordinary becomes extraordinary, becomes symbolic.

Abraham Maslow once in my presence told of such a B-cognition. He was serving as chair of the Department of Psychology at Brandeis and was expected to attend the graduation ceremony in full academic regalia. He had avoided such events previously, considering them silly rituals. But, he said, as the procession began to move he suddenly "saw" it as an endless procession. Far, far, ahead, at the very beginning of the procession, was Socrates. Quite a way back but still well ahead of Maslow was Spinoza. Then just ahead of him

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was Freud followed by his own teachers and himself. Behind him stretching endlessly were his students and his students' students, generation after generation as yet unborn. Maslow assured us that what he experienced was not a hallucination: rather it was a particular kind of insight, an example of B-cognition. It was also, I would suggest, the apprehension of the academic procession as a symbol, standing for the true university as a sacred community of learning, transcending time and space. He was in a sense apprehending the "real" basis of any actual university. One could say that if we can no longer glimpse that sacred foundation, the actual university would collapse. For the real university is neither a wholesale knowledge outlet for the consumer society nor an instrument in the class struggle, though the actual university is a bit of both. But if the university does not have a fundamental symbolic reference point that transcends the pragmatic considerations of the world of working and is in tension with those considerations, then it has lost its *raison d'être*.

Without the capacity for symbolic transcendence, for seeing the realm of daily life *in terms of* a realm beyond it, without the capacity for "beyonding," as Kenneth Burke put it, one would be trapped in a world of what has been called dreadful immanence.¹⁶ For the world of daily life seen solely as a world of rational response to anxiety and need is a world of mechanical necessity, not radical autonomy. It is through pointing to other realities, through beyonding, that religion and poetry, and science too in its own way, break the dreadful fatalities of this world of appearances.

We can begin to see why taking the world of daily life as the paramount reality is dangerous if it is anything more than a methodological assumption. We have noted that no one can stand to live in the world of daily life all the time. Its governing anxiety derives from two of its features: the fact that it is a world of lack, of Deficiency motives that must be made up; and the fact that the manipulations in which it is engaged have no guaranteed success—they might fail in the attempt to overcome some deficiency. The world of daily life must then be punctuated with periods that are more inherently gratifying: with sleep, with common meals, with activities that are not means to any ends. Alasdair MacIntyre has used the term "practices" to apply to activities whose goods are internal to them.¹⁷ The kind of B-cognition that we have used to characterize religious experience is not a practice, because, to paraphrase Stevens, it is not something we achieve but something that happens. Ritual, however, is a form of practice that is broader than religion but of which religion provides important examples. Regularly recurring activities, such as meals, sports, concerts, can take on the quality of ritual. The

notion of the Sabbath, the day of rest, is intimately connected with ritual, because traditionally it has involved participation in religious ritual, in worship. In any case the notion that the Sabbath is different from the other six days of the week implies that it is time, in part at least, set aside from the world of daily life, time in which the anxieties of the world of daily life are temporarily allayed, time out of time. If today many people allay those anxieties with sports or other recreation instead of or in addition to worship, this does not change the significance of time that breaks with the rhythm of the world of daily life.

However, the fact that the world of daily life cannot consume the whole of our lives is not the only reason why we may hesitate to characterize it as the paramount reality. In its own citadel it is not always sovereign. The world of working as the world of the manipulation of objects in order to satisfy needs is inadequate to the understanding even of the world of working. The world of working as a world of the satisfaction of marginal utility is devoid of culturally specific subjective meaning. Weber, in describing instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*), which he did indeed take to be a kind of paramount reality, felt that it could be read off by the observer from purely objective observations. Given the external situation of need, the meaning of the instrumentally rational action would be obvious. There would be no necessity for the interpretation (*Verstehen*) of subjective meaning.

Yet, I believe, there is a pull, even in the very center of the world of working, toward the understanding of work as practice, as intrinsically meaningful and valuable, rather than as means to an end. The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has described the phenomenon of what he calls flow, a kind of optimal experience of full engagement with the world and full realization of one's own potentialities, as frequently occurring among ordinary Americans at work.¹⁸ The anthropologist Victor Turner has used the notion of flow to understand ritual, and it is perhaps not stretching things too much to suggest that it is when work becomes (in the positive sense) ritual that it approximates flow.¹⁹

We may take, for example, the Zen Buddhist notion of practice, which in its primary sense means meditation, preferably in the lotus posture for definite periods in a meditation hall with other Zen devotees. The notion of Zen practice is then extrapolated to all activities, so that sweeping becomes practice, doing the dishes becomes practice, and so would any kind of work. What makes work into practice from the Zen point of view would be the attitude of mindfulness, a particular form of religious attention. Mindful-

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ness does not mean concern for outcome but openness to the reality of what is actually happening, a kind of B-cognition. Perhaps I can suggest that ritual, in the extended meaning I have given to it, may rival the world of daily life as the paramount reality. Such an assertion bears on the widely shared religious idea that the world of daily life is a world of illusion.

Modes of Religious Representation

Religious reality is a realm of experience, to be sure, but it is also a realm of representation. In fact, experience and representation belong inexorably together. George Lindbeck has described the current major alternative theories of religion in ways that will be helpful to our exposition.²⁰ The first theory of religion he describes is what he calls propositional. It sees religion as consisting of a series of propositional truth claims, stated conceptually. I will have more to say about concepts below, as they are of great importance in religious discourse, but I believe that Lindbeck is right in arguing that the propositional theory of religion is inadequate as a major approach to religion and largely abandoned by scholars today. To identify religion with a set of propositions whose truth can be argued would be to make it into what more accurately should be called philosophy. Religion and philosophy are intimately related, as we will explore in later chapters, but they are not identical.

Lindbeck's second theory of religion is the widely influential experiential-expressive approach. This view assumes that there is a general human capacity for religious experience that is actualized differently in different religious traditions. The experiential-expressive view in its modern form Lindbeck traces to Friedrich Schleiermacher, and in recent times it was widely propagated by Paul Tillich. The emphasis on B-cognition and the felt-whole in the discussion so far largely belongs in the category of the experiential-expressive theory of religion. In one understanding the deep structure of religious experience exists generically in the human psyche. Particular religions are the surface manifestations of this deep panhuman experiential potentiality.

Lindbeck, however, opts for a third theory as most promising, what he calls the cultural-linguistic theory. The cultural-linguistic theory, which derives from cultural anthropology, particularly from Clifford Geertz, takes symbolic forms as primary, seeing them not so much as expressions of underlying religious emotions, but as themselves shaping religious experiences and emotions. I would agree that the cultural-linguistic approach is a valuable

corrective to the experiential-expressive approach, but I don't think we have to choose between them. It seems to me that we can view them as coordinate approaches and that we need to move back and forth between them to understand the phenomenon of religion. Thus when I characterize widely different expressions as examples of Being cognition, I am not arguing that there is a subsistent reality of Being experience that simply comes out in different forms on different occasions. Rather, I am recognizing that there are some common human experiential potentialities that have recognizable similarities, but are inchoate until given shape by symbolic form. Once so shaped, their similarities are always qualified: the differences may be crucial. I am also fully in agreement with Lindbeck that cultural traditions not only shape, they even call forth, emotional experiences. In short, we cannot disentangle raw experience from cultural form. Nevertheless we can see them as equally essential, like the Aristotelian notions of matter and form, and do not have to choose one approach as primary.

As an example of why we need both theoretical approaches, we may consider the experience of the felt-whole. It is true that many who have had such an experience speak of it in terms of ineffability, of the inability of words to express the experience, and so forth. The experience of the felt-whole, a radical form of Maslow's Being cognition, provides a valuable point of entry (by no means the only one) into the realm of religious reality, but it is problematic with respect to an analysis of religious representations, a central concern of the cultural-linguistic approach. For what we can perhaps best call unitive experience, all representation must be inadequate. Representation implies a duality between the representative form and the reality it represents, but it is just this duality that the unitive experience transcends. Perhaps it is even dangerous to speak of unitive *experience*, because in terms of modern Western cultural categories, experience implies subjectivity or innerness as opposed to objectivity, again imposing a false dualism. With this consideration in mind it might be well to speak of unitive events as well as unitive experiences.

Without ourselves experiencing them, we would not know anything about unitive events except through representations. The unitive event, then, is a kind of ground zero with respect to religious representations. It transcends them yet it requires them if it is to be communicable at all. Christian negative theology and the Buddhist teaching of emptiness (*sunyata*) attempt to express this paradoxically by speaking of nothingness, the void, silence, or emptiness. Yet the very negative terms themselves are symbolic forms, are representations, and therefore introduce an element of dualism into the unitive event even when they are trying to overcome the dualism of representa-

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tion. This is not a paradox to be solved but one to be pointed to as we survey a variety of expressions of the unitive event in the world's religions.

So in developing a typology of religious representations, we must start with the null category of unitive representation—that is, representations that attempt to point to the unitive event or experience. As I develop the typology in the following sections, I will ground the modes of experience and representation in their earliest forms in children and in the modes of apprehension of reality that are more general than religion, but from which religious modes of representation draw. My interest in grounding the modes of representation in the earliest experiences of reality is not only psychological. I don't want to reduce such modes to childhood levels. They may involve, however, what psychoanalysts call "regression in the service of the ego." If so, they also involve regression in the service of the world, in its earliest apprehensions.

Because I will be locating the modes of religious representation in stages of the cognitive development of the child, it is worth pointing out that there is a certain affinity between unitive experience and what Piaget, borrowing from J. M. Baldwin, calls the "adualism" of the child. Piaget says that in this adualism of the early months of life "there does not yet exist any consciousness of self; that is, any boundary between the internal or experienced world and the world of external realities. Freud talked about narcissism but did not sufficiently stress the fact that this was narcissism without a Narcissus."²¹ I do not mean to imply that unitive experiences are in any simple sense a "return" to early infantile experience, but it may be that possibilities existing then, as in other kinds of early experiences, are never lost but can be reappropriated in much more complex form later on. The view that "nothing is ever lost" can, as we shall see, also be brought to bear on religious history.

The second mode of religious representation is what I shall call enactive representation, adapting from what Jerome Bruner sees as the earliest form of true representation in the child.²² Religious enactive representation is the bodily acting out of religious meaning, as in bowing, kneeling, eating, dancing. That the modes are not watertight categories but constantly cross each other is indicated by the fact that the unitive event is very much enactive. It is an event in which the whole body participates, along with mind and spirit, again without a sense of bifurcation. Yet the enactive mode does not have to have the same radical quality as the unitive event. It may be a simple gesture, almost unconscious, like crossing oneself for those for whom that gesture has become second nature. Such a gesture may put one in tune with religious reality only slightly and peripherally and may entirely lack any radical implications. Yet even so it also raises the question of the adequacy of

such terms as representation or meaning. The gesture *is* the meaning—it enacts it—it doesn't, or doesn't necessarily, point to anything else. The enactive mode therefore partakes of the unitive even in its partiality.

The word "symbol" is at least as dangerous as the words "meaning" and "representation," not the least because of its numerous, often contradictory usages, yet it is unavoidable in speaking of modes of religious representation. Symbols, in the sense of material or verbal representations, more obviously "stand for" something else than do unitive events or bodily gestures, though unitive events and bodily gestures can be both symbolic and symbolized. Symbols can be, consciously or unconsciously, perceived as such in the very midst of the stream of consciousness of the world of daily life, as we have already seen in the examples of the tree, or water, or a door. But symbols can also be consciously created in drawings, statues, even buildings, in sounds and, of course, in words. When symbols are primarily visual in their appeal, we can speak of iconic symbolization; when they involve sound, they are or verge upon musical symbolization; when they involve words, we can speak of poetic symbolization. A critically important mode of verbal symbolization is narrative, the story or myth (we should remember that *mythos* is simply the Greek for "story"), which is important in almost all kinds of religion. To show again how the various modes of representation overlap, we can point to dramatic representation where narratives are bodily enacted, often with the accompaniment of visual symbols, such as masks, and of music, vocal and/or instrumental.

Finally we can speak of the conceptual mode of representation, a form of abstract verbal reflection and argument that follows on and criticizes primary religious actions and representations. Conceptual reflection is present in all religions to some degree but becomes particularly significant in the axial religions, where theory, though still related to ritual and narrative, has to some degree become disembedded. In that there is a cognitive moment, a knowing, in the very heart of the unitive event, we can say that conceptual representation is incipiently present even there, and all symbolic representation gives food for conceptual reflection. But even though conceptual representation is an indelible element in religious reality, it does not, as we have argued, define it.

Unitive Representation

Although unitive representation in the pure sense is a null category, the unitive event is of such importance in religion that we need to inquire further

how, with the help of the symbols we have discussed so far, we can move from the modern Western perspective to the unitive. I want to consider how subjectivity is either normally expected or not.

Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* account of a unitive experience is a good example. Scipio envisions himself, and Scipio's father, occurring in a dream. This dream is common to many of the other fathers and grandfathers.

When I gazed in wonder at the wonderfully beautiful things that were there and they were as if spheres were moving in the air, I felt to me so small that I was like a single point, as it

Scipio's vision relates to the political and military world. Scipio might immediately tell him that the other world is to do so with the very same symbols. The relative significance of the vision is most midway in the lights, the mind at that he reveals and just see; he hears a music that is the music of the spheres.

Cicero's overwhelming sense of the relative insignificance of the human condition, the relation between the subjective reaction and the objective vision, the heavenly sphere, even more the empirical vision, a vision that is so important about Scipio's vision.