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Building Blocks of Sacralities:

A new basis for comparison across cultures and religions

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Author Note

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### **Comparison in Religious Studies and the Psychology of Religion**

Both the psychology of religion and religious studies focus on religion and, as a result, have struggled albeit in different ways with the problems inherent in specifying a definition of religion and, more recently, spirituality. Although neither field is homogeneous, both fields have a strong empirical orientation and a growing interest in developing multilevel interdisciplinary approaches. The methods employed in the two fields differ, however, with religious studies favoring historical and qualitative ethnographic methods and psychology favoring quantitative methods, whether experimental, survey, or ethnographic. Perhaps most crucially, as psychologists, psychologists of religion are primarily interested in identifying the psychological processes that mediate “religion and spirituality,” while religious studies scholars have traditionally been concerned with the various ways that “religion and spirituality” are manifest across times, places, and cultures. Psychologists of religion, as a result, have been preoccupied with operationalizing “religion and spirituality” in order to pursue quantitative research, while religious studies scholars have been preoccupied with the question of whether the concept of religion translates across times, places, and cultures.

Although many scholars of religion would view a comparative-historical approach as constituting the traditional heart of the academic study of religion, skepticism about the translatability of the concept of religion across times, places, and cultures in recent decades has led scholars of religion to resist generalizations about “religion” (or by extension, “spirituality”) and to retreat from large scale comparisons to more focused studies of particular topics and themes (Burriss, 2005, p. 1871). Many in religious studies would agree with Burriss when he states: “The very breadth of the discipline makes comparative statements of any depth tenuous, and this would appear to be a legacy with which the field is destined to grapple. As a softer

discipline whose net is cast wide and which is poised between any number of epistemologies, a willingness to persist in asking the question of what religion is across daunting theoretical chasms may define the heart of its enterprise” (Burriss, 2005, p. 1872).

While scholars of religion have retreated from large-scale comparisons, psychologists of religion have sought to make their subfield, which has traditionally focused on data from U.S. and European subjects, more genuinely cross-cultural (Saroglou & Cohen, chapter 17, this volume; Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). In so far as psychologists of religion aspire to a *cross-culturally viable* multilevel interdisciplinary approach to the psychology of religion, some awareness of what has been learned by scholars of religion and other comparativists may be helpful in considering how we might best study this elusive, multi-faceted scholarly interest we call “religion and spirituality.”

The central problem we face in setting up comparisons is that the general terms that we use to depict our object of study (e.g., religion, spirituality) are abstractions implicated in webs of meaning (e.g., defined in relation to other concepts such as magic, superstition, the occult, folk beliefs) that do not map well from one culture or time period to another. Even within a single culture, the boundaries between linked terms (e.g., religion, spirituality, magic, superstition, the occult, folk beliefs) are unstable and highly contested, such that one person’s religion may be another’s superstition or folk belief. The traditional ways around this problem in religious studies and the psychology of religion are to stipulate a definition for the purposes of a given study, to risk over-generalization based on selected cultures, and/or to avoid cross-cultural generalizations altogether. Although scholars in the humanities can choose to focus on the particular cultures and avoid attempts at generalization, scientists seek to generalize wherever possible. Since over-generalization is obviously not an ideal solution, stipulating definitions for a particular study

tends to be the preferred option. Stipulated definitions, however, do not provide an adequate basis for generalization because they artificially stabilize our object of study. In so doing, they not only give the impression that we are all studying the same thing; they also obscure the processes whereby the things scholars loosely collect under the heading of religion and spirituality are generated and maintained on the ground (Taves, 2011).

If we consider the nature of comparisons, we can view the problem from another angle. All comparisons presuppose a point of analogy between two or more things that are being compared. When we use abstractions, such as “religion” or “spirituality,” as our point of analogy, we run into difficulties translating the concepts across cultures and then either give up the attempt or artificially stabilize our object of study. Rather than attempt to characterize the abstract nouns “religion” or “spirituality,” some theorists, this author included, have argued for a building block approach that conceives of religions and spiritualities as disparate wholes made up of parts, such as beliefs and practices. These composite definitions often go on to specify “the sacred” as the distinctive feature, whether attached to a part or the whole, which makes the whole “religious” or “spiritual.”

Most scholars of religion, however, would question whether there is any one, agreed upon definition of the sacred that we can use to set up comparisons across times or cultures. In light of this, I argue here that we should adopt a building block approach to sacralities in which we identify more basic elements and processes, which, while not uniquely specifying “the sacred,” are, nonetheless, typically mixed and matched by people to generate things they view as sacred. As will become apparent, the indeterminacy of that which people deem sacred is inherent in the processes of valuation that leads to the specification of sacrality in any particular instance. In so far as individuals or groups embrace different systems of valuation, that which

they deem sacred will differ as well. Still, identifying the basic elements and processes – building blocks of sacralities -- will allow us to set up more precise comparisons across times and places that will allow researchers to better understand how these basic elements and processes can be used to generate disparate cultural phenomena, some of which people view as sacred and, in some cases, to elaborate into the more complex systems that scholars and practitioners may characterize as religions and spiritualities.

What follows is divided into three parts. The first part uses the definitions proposed by Durkheim (1912/1995) and Pargament (1997) to illustrate the advantages of a building block approach to religions and spiritualities and the difficulties inherent in specifying “the sacred” as the distinctive feature that makes them religious or spiritual. The second part identifies four basic elements and processes, which are not unique to religions or spiritualities, that people mix and match to generate phenomena they deem sacred. The third part concludes with suggestions for further research.

### **A Building-Block Approach to Religions and Spiritualities**

#### **Religions and Spiritualities as Composites**

In both religious studies and the psychology of religion, some theorists have followed Durkheim in stressing the importance of viewing religions and spiritualities as wholes made up of parts and identified a relationship with “sacred things” as the feature that sets religious and spiritual systems apart from others. Durkheim (1912/1995, p. 38) explicitly conceived of a religion (not “religion” in the abstract) as a “system that has a certain coherence.” Such systems, in his view, were not constituted by a single idea or derived from a single principle, but were instead “whole[s] composed of separate and relatively distinct parts.” Durkheim, thus, characterized “a religion [as] a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things,

that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (p. 44).

Leaving aside for the moment how Durkheim defined “sacred things,” we can note that a sacred thing or cluster of similar sacred things serves as “an organizational center” around which “a set of beliefs and rites” typically cluster to form a “cult” (p. 38). A religion is typically “a system of cults,” which may be “ranked and subordinated to some dominant cult” or “simply exist side by side in confederation” (p. 39). Durkheim’s definition relies on a number of metaphors and image schemas (Johnson, 2007; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, 1999), including: A SYSTEM is a WHOLE made up of PARTS. Sacred things are CENTERS around which beliefs and rites cluster to form cults. Cults are the PARTS that make up the WHOLE. Religions as whole SYSTEMS organize their PARTS by means of SCALES (ranking and subordinating) or LINKS (confederating).<sup>1</sup>

Although Durkheim acknowledges that religious phenomena can exist apart from a religious system, a religion for Durkheim is more than “a unified system of beliefs and practices”; it is a system of beliefs and practices that “unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, 1912/1995, p. 44). While Durkheim acknowledged that magic typically involves beliefs and practices, even beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, he differentiates magic from religion on the grounds that “the magician has a clientele, not a Church” (p. 42). Durkheim’s sociological theory of religion, thus, is built into his definition of religion in a way that allows him to distinguish between religion and magic.

Pargament and collaborators (Hill et al. 2000, pp. 65-72; Pargament, 1997, 1999a; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005) formulated definitions of religion and spirituality that have been highly

influential within the psychology of religion. Pargament (1999, pp. 11-12) defines “Religion [as] a search for significance in ways related to the sacred,” where significance refers to “whatever people value in their lives ... good or bad,” and defines spirituality simply as “a search for the sacred.” Searching refers “not only to [efforts] to find significance but to conserve... or transform” it. Searches have two dimensions: “a pathway and a destination.”

Where Durkheim relies on a PART-WHOLE image schema to conceptualize the relationship between the sacred and religion, Pargament relies on the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema to position the sacred at the center (“the most central religious function”) and religion at the periphery (1999, p. 13). In his conception, spirituality is closer to the center than religion, which, as he points out, makes religion the broader construct (1999, p. 13). The metaphor of a search relies on the PATH image schema, while significance, which implies greater or lesser value, draws on the SCALE image schema. The cognitive metaphors they use have different entailments. Durkheim’s definition draws our attention to the way in which parts (cults, that is, specific beliefs and practices related to sacred things) are prioritized and coordinated within an overarching system. Pargament’s use of a CENTER-PERIPHERY schema draws our attention to the center and the means people use to get there (PATHS).

Because each definition draws upon image schemas (PART-WHOLE, CENTER-PERIPHERY, PATH, SCALE), both researchers and subjects can readily recognize systems, centers, paths, and scales relatively easily both within and between cultures (Slingerland, 2004). Thus, to take PATHS as an example, all paths, whether literal or metaphorical, have (1) a starting point, (2) a goal, and (3) a means of moving from the starting point to the goal (Johnson, 1987, pp. 113-117). Hindu and Buddhist practitioners explicitly use the path concept (marga or pada in Sanskrit) to characterize particular means of reaching tradition specific goals, and scholars of Buddhism



(Buswell & Gimello, 1992) have encouraged the use of the path concept in the comparative study of religion. Even though use of the PATH schema is not as prominent in Western religious traditions, it is frequently invoked as a metaphor. As an image schema, both subjects and scholars can easily frame traditions of belief and practice in terms of a path concept (see, for example, Lindahl, 2011; Taves, 2009, pp. 46-48, 64-66).

### **Conceptions of the Sacred**

While we can easily recognize systems, centers, and paths across times and cultures, we cannot distinguish *specifically* religious or spiritual systems, centers, paths, or scales, as these theorists are well aware, without some additional defining factor. For these theorists, the distinguishing feature of the systems, paths, etc. is the sacred. Here, however, things get more complicated. Although references to the sacred have the rhetorical effect of grounding religion and spirituality in something unique, such references tacitly suggest two further claims, both of them problematic: (1) that the sacred is the basic building block from which religions and spiritualities are constructed, and (2) that researchers can use the sacred as a means of identifying religions and spiritualities across cultures.

The problem, as suggested earlier, is that regardless of whether we focus on scholars or their subjects, we do not find an agreed upon definition of the sacred that we can operationalize for the purposes of cross-cultural research. Among scholars, we see both focused definitions (e.g., Durkheim, 1912; Eliade, 1957; Otto, 1923), which provide alternatives long debated by scholars (e.g., Idinopulos & Yonan, 1996), and catchall definitions (e.g., Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, p. 34), which include everything and, thus, are impossible to operationalize. We can use the definitions offered by Durkheim and Pargament, in so far as the latter can be specified, to illustrate the range of views. Thus, Durkheim defines the sacred as marked by prohibitions and

taboos, while Pargament associates the sacred with the divine or divinity.

*The sacred as marked by prohibitions and taboos.* All religious systems, according to Durkheim (1912/1995, pp. 34-35), divide things into two classes that can be designated as sacred and profane. Because anything can be designated as sacred (“a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble ...”), the distinction cannot be specified in terms of content, but only in terms of the absolute disjunction between the two classes. Thus, he says, “the sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common.” While the form of the contrast varies from one religion to the next, the basic opposition is present, he holds, in all religions. The opposition is always marked by “a visible sign that permits ready recognition of this very special classification” (p. 37), typically prohibitions and taboos against touching or mingling, whether literal or figurative. Thus, sacred things are “things set apart and forbidden” (p. 44). Crucially, according to Durkheim, people often nest other oppositions, such as pure/impure or good/evil, *within the realm of the sacred* (pp. 412-415, emphasis added). In doing so, Durkheim created a doubly dichotomized conception of the sacred in which worlds could be nested within worlds (Pickering, 1984, ch. 7-8).

*The sacred as divine.* Pargament offers a catchall definition of the sacred that draws from many sources, including Durkheim’s “things set apart” and Eliade’s conception of the “real” (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005, pp. 180-182; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, 34). Still, for Pargament (p. 181), “the core of the sacred consists of concepts of God, the divine, and transcendence,” though he is quick to add that “sacred matters ... also encompass any object that takes on extraordinary character by virtue of its association with, or representation of, divinity.” Pargament’s definition turns on his understanding of “the divine,” “divinity,” and “divine-like qualities.” Although he doesn’t explicitly define these qualities, the divine or divinity is not limited

“beliefs in God” (Pargament, 1999b, pp. 38-39), but does apparently exclude the “demonic” (Pargament, 2005a, p. 183). In excising the demonic, Pargament breaks with Durkheim and others who make room for negative conceptions within the sacred.<sup>2</sup> In so far as Pargament’s definition is not simply circular, such that the sacred is the divine, the distinctive feature is the weight it gives to God, gods, and higher powers.

These are just two definitions of the sacred. We could also consider Eliade’s definition of the sacred as “hierophany” or a powerful manifestation of “the real” (Eliade, 1957/1987, pp. 12-13), Rudolf Otto’s definition of the holy as the “numinous” or “mysterium tremendum et facinans” (1923/1976), or Marcel Mauss’s conception of the sacred as “a species of the genus *mana*,” where *mana* is a force that infuses both “religion” and “magic” (Mauss, 1975, 7-8, 119). If we expand our purview to include definitions of “religion” (i.e., non-building block definitions of the abstract concept), we can add other even more distinctive features to our list of possibilities, including the British anthropologist Edmund Tylor’s definition of religion in terms of “the belief in Spiritual Beings” (1873/1970, p. 8) or the American theologian Paul Tillich’s (1957) definition of religion as “ultimate concern.” In light of the diversity of definitions of the sacred and religion-in-the-abstract (see Oman, chapter 2, this volume), our ability to work across cultures would be enhanced if we did not attempt to specify the distinctive feature of religions and spiritualities, but rather sought to identify the more basic elements and processes, which are not unique to religions or spiritualities, that people mix and match to create them.<sup>3</sup>

### **Basic Elements and Processes**

If we abandon the quest for unique features and instead focus on basic elements and processes that people mix and match, the scholarly debates over the definition of religion(s) over the past century are remarkably suggestive. Taking our cue from Durkheim’s definition of

sacred things as “things set apart and forbidden,” we can identify the most basic process as one of setting things (anything) apart from the ordinary or everyday. From the debates over defining the most elementary form of religion, we can identify two broad classes of things that people set apart: non-ordinary powers, including deities, and non-ordinary realities or worlds. Finally, building on Tillich’s definition of religion as ultimate concern, we can identify processes of valuation as the means whereby people rank and order that which they set apart. We will take up each in turn, considering how they might be mixed and matched as we proceed.

### **Setting Things Apart**

Building on Durkheim’s definition of sacred things as “things set apart and forbidden,” Kopytoff (1986, pp. 73-74) recasts sacralization as an example of a more general process of “singularization.” Taves (2009, pp. 29-44; 2010, pp. 176-180) extends this point, suggesting that we consider “sacred things” as a subset of “special things,” where specialness is understood to fall along a continuum from ordinary to singular. Specialness as a scalar quality partakes of more or less. People can consider things to be special without viewing them as full-blown singularities. In this view, singularities, whether people label them as sacred or not, are things that people claim are discontinuous, that they mark as such by setting them apart and protect as such by means of prohibitions against mixing or comparing them with other things.

This understanding of specialness is congruent with Dissanayake’s (1990, pp. 92-101; 2008) understanding of art as a behavior, which she views, at its most basic, as an instance of “making special,” that is, making “ordinary experience (e.g., ordinary objects, movements, sounds, utterances, surroundings) ... *extraordinary*” (2008, p. 252). We can transform psychologists Graham and Haidt’s (2011) definition of sacredness, which they specify as “*the human tendency to invest people, places, times, and ideas with importance far beyond the utility*

*they possess,*” into a compatible understanding of specialness by reformulating it as “the human tendency to invest particular things with importance far beyond that of other – more ordinary – things in their class.” Replacing “sacrality” with “specialness” is crucial, however, as it allows us to consider a wide range of things that are set apart, e.g., a mammalian mother’s bond with her own particular infants, behaviors that set playing apart from “reality,” tokens (such as coins) that we invest with exchange value, and objects that we designate as disgusting or as art, without worrying about whether scholars or anyone else considers them sacred.

In identifying the most basic process as one of setting things apart from the ordinary or everyday, I am breaking with Durkheim in several important ways. First, and most crucially, “setting apart” is not a definition of the sacred; it is merely a process that people use to designate things that they perceive as non-ordinary. Second, setting something apart need not entail prohibitions or radical breaks between the thing set apart and other things in its class. People may view things they set apart on a continuum, conceiving of things as more or less special depending on the context in which it is placed, the use to which they want to put it, its history, and their relationship to the thing in question (Taves, 2009, 2010). Third, we can distinguish between the basic process of setting things apart and Durkheim’s idea of the sacred and profane as “two worlds with nothing in common.” If we consider the latter as one particular way in which things can be set apart, we can consider other ways in which people set things apart that Durkheim subordinated or excluded in adopting a “two worlds” approach.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, we can also consider powers that people perceive as non-ordinary and ascribe to various things – animate, inanimate, seen and unseen – that they may set apart in “this world” without necessarily postulating another one. The idea of non-ordinary powers is central to the animistic and pre-animistic approaches to defining religion that Durkheim rejected.

### **Non-ordinary Powers**

In so far as Pargament's definition highlights deities and higher powers, it follows in the footsteps of Tylor's animistic definition of religion as "the belief in Spiritual Beings." The idea of "spiritual beings" as the distinctive feature of religion-in-the-abstract has a robust history and many scholars in religious studies, anthropology, and sociology continue to adopt an animistic style definition, stipulating what they mean by religion in terms of spiritual beings or some variant thereof (Atran, 2002; Barrett, 1999, 2004; Boyer, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 2005; McCauley, 2011; Pyysiäinen, 2009; Spiro, 1966). Despite its continued popularity, the idea that religion at its most basic should be defined in terms of gods and higher powers was widely rejected by early twentieth-century anthropologists and sociologists who felt that Tylor's (1873) minimal definition of religion as "the belief in spiritual beings" was not minimal enough. Thus, the British anthropologist R. R. Marett (1914), the French sociologists Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1904), the German sociologist Max Weber (1922), and the Dutch phenomenologist Gerhard van der Leeuw (1937) all argued that a belief in spiritual beings was premised on and, thus, could be derived from a more fundamental pre-animistic belief in impersonal power, which they variously labeled as "mana" (Marett, Hubert & Mauss), "charisma" (Weber), or simply "Power" (van der Leeuw). Though they recognized that this sort of impersonal power was often characterized as magical, they nonetheless argued that religion (Marett, Weber, van der Leeuw) or the sacred (Hubert & Mauss) in its most basic form was rooted in power of this sort.

As with Durkheim's conception of the sacred, they all thought that people could ascribe this power to anything, which suggests that it is not the thing to which the power is ascribed per se but that which the power adds to the thing that is crucial. Weber suggested that the belief in spirits, demons, and the soul was the result of a process of abstraction from this magico-religious

matrix that “crystallized in the notion that certain beings are concealed ‘behind’ and responsible for the activity of the charismatically endowed natural objects, artifacts, animals, or persons” (Weber, 1922/1978, p. 401). Van der Leeuw (1937/1986) provides an extended phenomenological description the way conceptions of Power have been elaborated across times and cultures, including how, by adding “will” and “form” to “power,” people can generate a panoply of entities from souls, deceased ancestors, and spirits to deities.

Crucially, however, they all recognize that the power in question is not just ordinary power. Thus, Marett (1914), relying on an Anglican missionary’s account of the beliefs of the Melanesians, describes mana as a power that is “*beyond the ordinary* power of men, *outside the common* processes of nature” (p. 104). Hubert and Mauss (Mauss, 1904/1972) view “the quality of mana — and of the sacred — [as] appertain[ing] to things ... considered to exist *outside the normal* world and normal practices” (p. 119). Weber (1922/1978, pp. 400-401) characterizes charisma in terms of “*extra-ordinary*” powers and van der Leeuw (1937/1986, p. 28) indicates that people perceive the power in question as “extraordinary” or “markedly unusual.” They all refer, in other words, to powers that people perceive as non-ordinary, extra-ordinary, or special. These thinkers, thus, agreed on several key points: (1) what we think of as religion and magic are derived from a religio-magical matrix of impersonal power; (2) this power can be attributed to anything animate and inanimate, natural and human-made; and (3) the power or powers in question are not ordinary powers, but powers that people perceive as non-ordinary, extraordinary, or special and, thus, as adding something unusual to the thing in question.<sup>5</sup>

Across a wide range of fields – sociology, anthropology, and psychology – scholars have tended to shy away from the idea of a pre-animistic religio-magical matrix, not wanting, I suspect, to conflate religion and magic. Thus, for example, in elaborating Weber’s notion of

charisma, most sociologists and anthropologists have focused their attention on charismatic agents, relegating the discussion of charismatic objects to the seemingly unrelated literature on “fetishes” and religious relics and amulets (Taves, in press), though Riesebrodt (2009, pp. 74-79) stands as a notable exception in this regard. As noted above, many scholars identified with the cognitive science of religion have taken a Tylorian definition of religion as their starting point and concentrated on explaining the naturalness of beliefs in unseen agents, giving little or no attention to objects. Even Sorensen’s (2007) cognitive theory of magic, which argues that “magic plays a pivotal role in the development of all religious institutions and traditions” (3-4), nonetheless argues for the value of the distinction between religion and magic.

Rather than shy away from the idea of an underlying magico-religious matrix, I think we should embrace it. Following the lead of theorists who positioned “animism” within a larger framework of (pre-animistic) impersonal powers, we can locate contemporary research on the detection of agency and the attribution non-ordinary powers to (unseen) animates within a larger field of powers (ordinary and non-ordinary) that people attribute to objects, artifacts, animals, and persons. If we position the tendency to over-attribute agency within the larger framework of detecting and evaluating the powers at play in a given field, we can view it not simply as a means of detecting threats but also as a means of identifying the resources at hand. This allows us to conceive of things to which persons attribute non-ordinary powers not only as potential threats or signs of danger, but also as potential *resources*, that is, means of overcoming danger, whether in the form of “magical” objects, “sacred” places, or “supernatural” beings. This broader framework allows for a more integrated approach and raises new questions for research in at least three interrelated areas: the relationship between non-ordinary powers and folk biological “kinds” (i.e., animates, objects, artifacts), the measurable (placebo-like) effects of believing in



non-ordinary powers, and the role of non-ordinary powers in the emergence of new beliefs and novel practices.

Arguments for the naturalness of popular religion are premised on an animistic definition of religion, a cross-culturally reliable distinction between animates and non-animates, and an evolved tendency to over-detect and over-attribute agency (Barrett, 2004; Boyer, 2001; McCauley, 2011). Research along this line has focused on the developing theory of mind in children and explored when and under what conditions they attribute qualities of mind to unseen agents (Barrett, chapter 12, this volume). The animistic definition of religion employed in this body of research has obscured the intriguing overlap between arguments for the naturalness of popular religion and arguments for the naturalness of magic (Bloom 2010; Hood, 2008; Subbotsky, 2010). Although research on popular religion focuses on animates and by extension unseen agents and research on magic takes more account of objects (contaminated objects, transitional objects), there is a striking overlap in the way they conceptualize their object of study and the research they cite (e.g., on theory of mind, disgust and contamination).<sup>6</sup>

A more integrated approach to the things to which people attribute non-ordinary power -- whether persons, animates, artifacts, or objects -- requires more nuanced distinctions between types of power and the capacities that inform them. We can distinguish between at least three different kinds. (1) *The capacity to act intentionally*, which presupposes an awareness of awareness, and, thus, the ability to give reasons for why one acts. Entities with the capacity to act intentionally don't always use it, however, and are responsible for many unintended actions for which they cannot give reasons. (2) *The capacity to act*, which presupposes at least some primitive level of awareness or animation on the part of the entity, but not conscious intentionality. (3) *The capacity to produce an effect*, which does not require awareness or

animation. We need to know more about how these distinctions emerge developmentally and the degree to which they correlate with distinctions between (unseen) animates and non-animates, whether natural objects, artifacts, or places, in different cultural contexts. What difference inheres, if any, in the attribution of non-ordinary powers to unseen deities, statues that have been blessed (and thus “animated”), eucharistic wafers, sacred mountains, relics, and lucky charms? What if any difference does belief in these non-ordinary powers make for people in the context of goal directed action?<sup>7</sup>

A more integrated approach also allows us to consider the effects of calling upon things to which we ascribe non-ordinary powers in the context of goal directed action. Specifically, it allows us to compare the effects of calling upon the non-ordinary powers that people ascribe to unseen agents, special places, and believed in objects with the non-ordinary powers that patients ascribe to placebos, i.e., fake drugs and simulated medical procedures. Clinical trials of drugs use placebos as controls in order to determine whether pharmacologically active ingredients are producing the desired effect as opposed the *belief* that such ingredients are present and having an effect.<sup>8</sup> While clinical trials are designed to test the effects of pharmacologically active ingredients, the emerging interest in placebos (or simulated drugs) *as such* is leading researchers to examine the effect of “words and rituals, symbols, and meanings ... in shaping the patient’s brain” (Benedetti et al., 2011). Following Moerman (2002), a number of studies have recast the placebo response as a “meaning response,” including a study (Kohls et al., 2011) that examines “spirituality” as a predictor of placebo effects. Concluding that “meaningfulness seems to be both a hallmark of spirituality and placebo reactions,” they suggest that “a research agenda addressing responses and effects of both placebo and spirituality could therefore be (i) synergistic, (ii) valuable to each phenomenon on its own, and (iii) contributory to an extended

placebo paradigm that is centered around the concept of meaningfulness” (p. 1838).

Research across domains is becoming increasingly common in placebo research, most notably across the domains of medicine and sports performance (Beedie, 2007; Pollo et al., 2011) where, in the latter case, the goal of the procedure is not health but high performance.

Researchers are also comparing modern bio-medical treatment with alternative practices such as acupuncture and traditional healing rituals. Such comparisons allow researchers to identify the quasi-ritualized aspects of modern medicine that play a role in placebo effects and the role of placebo effects in traditional healing practices (Kaptchuk, 2011). Such research can be extended to religious healing in other contexts.

In light of the measurable effects of belief in the non-ordinary powers of drugs when fake drugs are substituted for real ones, we can hypothesize that belief in non-ordinary powers attributed to other things will have measurable effects as well. To test this, we can set up comparisons between real and fake drugs, acknowledged placebos, good-luck charms, and deities using subjects’ belief in their non-ordinary powers as the point of analogy. In setting up such studies, identification of subjects who attribute non-ordinary powers to the thing in question is critical. Thus, in considering whether good-luck-charms had a measurable effect on performance, Damisch et al. (2010) preselected subjects who believed in the efficacy of good-luck-charms. Such procedures can also be used to test the effects of belief in the efficacy of a deity or any other entity to whom people attribute non-ordinary powers.

In the end, this research will most likely allow us to consider a variety of powers, some more widely culturally sanctioned than others, that, when believed in, will produce measurable effects. In addition to simulated bio-medical practices, these will most likely include alternative healing practices, beloved objects, occult powers, and supernatural deities, to name just a few.

Recognition of this range of powers, ordinary and extraordinary, that can produce measurable effects will require us to locate them within a more environmentally oriented psychology in which such powers are conceived as affording, that is, enabling, various goal directed actions (Johnson, 2007, pp. 45-49; Taves, in press). Such actions could involve healing, coping, performing, or achieving in relation to either this worldly or otherworldly objectives.

Finally, while both psychologists and cognitive scientists have attended to the role of non-ordinary powers in contexts where the claims regarding such powers are fairly well established (see, for example, Pargament et al. [chapter 28, this volume] in the context of coping and McCauley and Lawson [2002], Sorensen [2007], and Whitehouse [2004] in the context of ritual), far less attention has been devoted to contexts where new things are emerging and claims regarding non-ordinary powers are highly contested. Additional focus on fields in flux where people are proposing new beliefs and novel practices would allow us to consider how people ascertain what powers are at play in a field, how they characterize them, and how they draw upon them in the context of goal directed action.

### **Non-Ordinary Worlds**

Durkheim's conception of the sacred and profane as "two worlds with nothing in common" highlights an alternative approach to defining religion that downplays the role of spiritual beings and non-ordinary powers. In this definitional tradition, the distinctive feature is the presence of alternative, non-ordinary, non-everyday worlds or realities. Although non-ordinary worlds are frequently populated with spiritual beings, here I will heighten the contrast between the two approaches by focusing on two lines of development that downplay the role of spiritual beings. The first, illustrated by the anthropologists Robert Hertz and Louis Dumont, elaborates on Durkheim's doubly dichotomous conception of the sacred in which worlds are

nested within worlds. The second, illustrated by Clifford Geertz and Robert Bellah, illustrates the interaction between alternate, competing cultural worlds within a given society.

Consideration of Hertz and Dumont allows us to see how Durkheim's conception of the sacred and profane as "distinct worlds" can generate oppositions within oppositions or, more graphically, worlds within worlds, where one is ranked higher or valued more than the other. Thus, almost in passing, Durkheim commented on the "ambiguity of the sacred," noting that oppositions, such as good/evil, auspicious/ inauspicious, and pure/impure, were "religious forces," at once opposed to each other and to the profane. He, thus, located these oppositions within the realm of the sacred, because their existence and opposition was apparent only within that "world" or frame of reference. In Christianity, for example, God/Satan and Heaven/Hell are "religious oppositions" that only make sense or are apparent only to those who have entered into a Christian theological cosmos. Hertz, a student of Durkheim's, elaborated on the negative or "darker" side of the sacred, which Durkheim left relatively untheorized. In a still widely cited paper, Hertz (1909/1973) argued that across a wide range of cultures, perhaps most cultures with Indo-European languages, the left hand was metaphorically linked with the "dark side" of the sacred, thus launching the discussion of what later scholars came to call "the left hand of the sacred" (Burnside, 1991; Parkin, 1996; Knott, 2005, 2006).

Picking up on Hertz's work later in the twentieth century, Louis Dumont analyzed the pure/impure opposition that structured the Hindu caste system, arguing that opposition and asymmetry were inherently connected within the system to generate what he referred to as "hierarchical oppositions" (Parkin, 1996, pp. 79-85). A closer look at how opposition and asymmetry were connected in this case illustrates the way in which substances with non-ordinary power, in this case the power to defile, can structure an entire cultural system.

If we look at the pure/impure opposition, it is evident that while this opposition is always

marked, it is marked because the negative pole – the impure -- is always marked. Purity, as the absence of any admixture, is in itself premised on the ontologically unmarked distinction between mixed/unmixed. As long as mixing is conceptualized neutrally, mixtures such as blends, alloys, and hybrids can be perceived as positive, negative, or neutral depending on the circumstances. We can conceive of impurity, however, as a blending of two oppositions -- mixed/unmixed and defiled/undefiled – such that impurity is inherently marked because defilement is marked.

Defilement is an intriguing concept that is notoriously resistant to definition. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1967) characterized it as "a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works *in the manner of a force in the field of our undividedly psychic and corporeal existence*" (pp. 25-26, emphasis added).

Linguistically, it is a non-ordinary power that generates an ontological distinction between purity and impurity, such that purity is always valued over impurity. The sense of defilement is closely linked to the feeling of disgust, an evolved food-related emotion that psychologists Rozin and Fallon (1987) define as revulsion toward the incorporation of offensive objects. They suggest it develops in childhood in relation to feces as a "universal disgust object" and generally follows the "laws of sympathetic magic," but varies both in intensity and type between individuals and cultural groups. Thus, purity/impurity links a non-ordinary negative power (disgust) with a felt sense of defilement to generate an inherently value-laden opposition.

While the opposition between purity and impurity plays a central role in both Hinduism and Judaism and an important role in many other traditions, research on purity/impurity in psychology has been carried out primarily by psychologists interested in morality (Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Haidt et al., 1997; Rozin et al., 1999; Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009; Graham et al., 2011), not psychologists of religion. An building block approach to sacralities that focuses

on basic elements and processes allows us to analyze the way the pure/impure opposition structures worlds without having to label concepts such as purity and defilement as moral emotions, (proto)-religious concepts, or magic.

We can use this analysis of hierarchical oppositions to deepen our analysis of things set apart and at the same time identify the mechanism required to distinguish non-ordinary and ordinary powers. Linguistically, setting apart is a method of separating things by splitting or dividing them. Although we can separate things into two or more parts without marking them, referring to something as “set apart” draws our attention *to* the thing set apart and *away from* a larger whole from which it is being distinguished. In simultaneously implying and obscuring the larger whole, setting apart marks the thing set apart as salient or special. If the boundary between the thing set apart and the remainder is then protected by prohibitions against recombining them, the distinction between them is reinforced. This suggests two important points. First, setting things apart is a very basic means of establishing value. Second, setting things apart does this by drawing attention to the thing that is set apart, rather than the class of things from which it is distinguished, thus marking the thing set apart as more salient.

These distinctions allow us to distinguish two steps involved in generating what Dumont referred to as hierarchical oppositions (Dumont, 1966/1970). First, people must single out something (e.g., something perceived as disgusting), setting it apart from other things in its class and marking it as non-ordinary. In doing so, people generate a distinction between ordinary/non-ordinary, in which the non-ordinary is marked. To generate what Dumont referred to as a hierarchical opposition, we have to take the further step of nesting a second opposition within one side of the first marked opposition. Thus, we can nest the opposition between pure/impure within the non-ordinary portion of the ordinary/non-ordinary opposition generated by the feeling of

disgust to create a hierarchical opposition. Because the structure of a hierarchical opposition is parallel to Durkheim's doubly dichotomized conception of the sacred, many of Dumont's followers read Durkheim's concept of the sacred as exemplifying what Dumont meant by a hierarchical opposition (Parkin, 2003, pp. 70, 138-142).

In this conception, oppositions are subordinated to an ultimate value (or values) that informs the whole. This not only combines opposition and valuation, but places the emphasis on the latter. In the hierarchical opposition created by the marked opposition between purity and impurity, it is the opposition between purity and defilement that allows purity to be conceptualized as an ultimate or encompassing value rather than something inherent in purity alone. In this case, the difference in value between the two poles, which allows the pure to encompass the impure and ensures that we will value the pure over the impure, lies in the structure of the impure.

A focus on non-ordinary worlds instead of non-ordinary powers allows us to set up comparisons for purposes of research. Although researchers sometimes make sharp distinctions between entering into religious and imaginary worlds based on the distinctions subjects make between them, there are obvious etic similarities. Entering into religious worlds via believed-in rituals and entering into imaginary worlds via play and other simulations (e.g., literature, drama, film, or computer) are all premised etically – if not emically -- on the willing suspension of disbelief. If we set aside the question of the relationship between the imaginary and the real and (for now) the question of how subjects decide if something is real or imagined, we can consider the possibility that play has a foundational role in the generation of alternative realities or worlds, some of which people "believe-in" more than others.

Two factors make this seem plausible. First, play has the structure of an alternate world.



It, too, is premised on a distinction between two realms, one of which is marked as more valuable than the other, at least as long as participants consider it safe to play. Though the boundaries of what counts as play are disputed, it is clear that a wide range of animal species are able to make a distinction between playing and regular, ordinary behavior. Animals signal to one another that their actions are 'play' not 'reality' by means of various cues, tail wagging, mock bows, and so on (Burghardt, 2005). Second, the distinction is expressed behaviorally, not linguistically. Animals do not need to "believe in" play, they just need to agree to play. The fact that many animal species learn to make this distinction suggests that this ability has deep evolutionary roots.

When we add in some more specifically human abilities, we get pretend play, that is, the ability to enter into a specially marked space in which we co-create alternative realms and bind ourselves by agreed-upon rules specific to that space (Leslie, 1994). Some researchers speculate that pretend play is the context in which children first practice the skills that prepare them to negotiate complex cultural institutions (Rakoczy, 2008). In making up the rules that govern pretend play, young humans learn that specific rules govern particular spheres of activity and, by extension, how to enter into the culturally specific systems of valuation that govern particular cultural activities and institutions.<sup>9</sup>

If Rakoczy is right, then we can turn to developmental psychology to find out more about how children learn to distinguish fantasy from reality, pretend alternative worlds from "real" believed-in alternative worlds, and how under some circumstances pretending something is real (as-if) can lead to the belief that it really is (O'Connor & Aardema, 2005; Rosengren, Johnson, & Harris, 2000). In terms of measurable effects, we can then ask what difference the distinction between two realms (e.g., this world and another world) makes when (1) goal directed actions are oriented toward ends valued in this realm or an alternative realm, and (2) when the alternative

realm is considered real versus imaginary.

These questions point to an underlying issue that has been bedeviling renewed efforts to coordinate the insights of evolutionary theories of religion. Not only have most theorists been starting with definitions of religion, rather than the underlying elements and processes used to construct religion-like things, they have been defining religion in terms of different elements – some starting with non-ordinary powers and some with non-ordinary worlds – and coming to very different conclusions. Thus, Atran (2002), Boyer (2001), and Kirkpatrick (2005) start with Tylorian spiritual beings (or counter-intuitive agents), while Wilson (2002) starts with the Durkheimian social group. As discussions between theorists are starting to make clear (see Kirkpatrick, chapter 6, this volume), theories of the first sort are grounded in genetic theories of evolution and focus more on the survival of the individual, while Wilson's is grounded in cultural theories of evolution (or co-evolution of genes and culture) and focuses more on the survival of the group. The most recent contribution to this discussion – Robert Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011) -- adopts an alternate worlds approach to defining religion, which he derives from Durkheim as read through the work of Clifford Geertz and Alfred Schultz. He grounds the creation of alternate worlds in play, which as he indicates, takes place in a “relaxed field” – offline as it were. He suggests that the capacity to go offline “may be one of our greatest capacities ... and that religion, along with science and art, may be the result of that capacity to go offline” (Bellah, 2011, p. xx).

Bellah's work allows us to ask not only what is set apart, but where it is set apart. Thus, we have considered the setting apart of non-ordinary powers within the everyday world, the setting apart of alternative worlds from the everyday world, and the setting apart of non-ordinary powers within alternative worlds. In grounding religion, defined in terms of the creation of alternative

worlds, in the “relaxed field” of play, Bellah tacitly contrasts the alternate world of play with an everyday world that requires vigilance and the constant assessment of the threats and resources at hand. Evolutionary theories that focus on the detection of threats and resources, whether ordinary or non-ordinary, in the everyday world highlight basic survival mechanisms, such as predator detection and attachment to caregivers, while evolutionary theories that focus on the creation and elaboration of alternate worlds highlight specifically human capacities for joint intentional action, symbolic representation and abstract reflection. While theories of the first type generally argue that religion is a “spandrel” or by-product of evolved capacities with no particular survival benefit, research on the placebo effect suggests that the attribution of non-ordinary powers to things may trigger capacities that are otherwise unavailable to people, thus providing an evolutionary advantage.

Finally, distinguishing approaches that focus on non-ordinary powers in the everyday world from those that focus on the creation of alternative worlds raises the question of their relationship. Under what conditions, if any, can alternative worlds become the everyday world? When, if ever, does play become reality? The way people conceive of the relationship becomes most evident, I would suggest, when matters of life and death are at stake. What people do at that point – which world they inhabit – can tell us a great deal about how they relate them. Do the powers and priorities that characterize alternative worlds recede in the face of threats in the everyday world or do people mobilize them in the everyday world to combat threats and reshape priorities? However the relationship is handled, it points to the need for processes of valuation.

### **Processes of Valuation**

Theologians (Tillich, 1957), scholars of religion (Baird, 1971; Ferré, 1979; Rennie, 1996), and psychologists of religion (Leuba, 1912, pp. 45-52; Emmons, 1999) have all argued that

religion is centrally concerned with matters of significance and value. Tillich's (1957) definition of religion in terms of "ultimate concern" is often viewed as emblematic of this approach. While scholars (Baird, 1971; Ferré, 1979) have adapted his definition for the study of religion, their efforts have been resisted within religious studies largely on the grounds of its generality (Smith, 1998, p. 281). In terms of basic elements and processes, however, we can locate claims regarding ultimate significance, meaning, and/or value within the context of more general processes of valuation.

This is not the first time we have considered processes of valuation, however. In the previous section, we analyzed the process of setting apart as a basic means of establishing value and thus as a basic component of larger systems of valuation. In examining the steps needed to generate a hierarchical opposition, in which oppositions are subordinated to values that govern the whole, we considered a more complex process of valuation. In this section I want to suggest that religions, philosophies, ideologies, worldviews, etc., can be construed as systems of valuation. In their more highly elaborated instances, we can conceive them as systems or frameworks for assessing, ranking, manipulating, and sometimes transcending things that matter. Whether people consider a special thing as (say) religious, mystical, magical, superstitious, spiritual, ideological, or secular will depend in part on preexisting systems of belief and practice, the web of concepts related to specialness, and the way that people position themselves in a given context. Things that seem special may be caught up in preexisting systems of belief and practice and assessed in light of them. Relative to such systems people may decide that something is more or less special than they originally thought. Assessed in light of such a system, people may conclude that something that seemed special at first actually was not, such that the thing loses its specialness in their eyes and becomes ordinary. In other instances, a person may value the thing

more highly than does the system of valuation, leading them to question or challenge the system's assessment. In such cases, individuals may position themselves in opposition to the extant system of valuation, challenging established beliefs and practices and perhaps generating new or modified ones.<sup>10</sup>

Within a system, the value ascribed to things can also be manipulated. In light of systemic rankings, people may attempt to subordinate their initial valuation of something (e.g., wealth, leisure, pleasure) to something deemed higher by the system (e.g., service to others, charity, compassion). Monotheistic traditions devalue "other gods" by labeling them as "idols." The biblical story of Abraham and Isaac ranks attachment to a deity over attachment to one's child. Finally, some systems culminate in a paradox that undercuts or calls on people to let go of (and in that sense transcend) that which the system itself taught them to value, as in the case of paths that wind up saying there is no path or paths that ask followers to sacrifice or abandon all that the path initially taught them to value.

Spiritualities, in so far as they partake of a PATH schema mark routes through various systems, religious and otherwise. PATHS set apart some goals relative to other goals, thus marking them as special. They identify routes to goals, thus offering means or methods for achieving the goals. Following a path presupposes that we have chosen it as a means to a particular goal. Choosing it sets it apart from other paths, placing more value on it than the others and marking it as more or less special. Following a path, like setting things apart, presupposes someone — an actor — who chooses an option (a path) and, in choosing it, sets it apart from other options (other paths). Where systems express values through ranking and ordering them and paths chart routes through systems, choosing something sets it apart and thus creates and enacts value.

Conceiving what we think of as religions as systems of valuation allows us to compare the ways in which various systems, whether deemed religious or not, assess, rank, and manipulate value. Considering spiritualities as PATHS allows us to compare the ways in which particular paths specify goals (and vice versa) and in so doing designate value, whether those paths are viewed as spiritual or not. Finally, and most basically, we can compare the setting apart of things as acts of choice and enactments of value, albeit not always conscious choices or enactments.

Although what we as scholars think of as religions, philosophies, etc. can be construed as more or less formalized, more or less coherent systems of valuation, they are not the only systems of valuation that people draw upon in making choices. Nor are highly elaborated, formalized, and coherent systems required for people to make choices. Indeed, as discussions of “theological incorrectness” in the cognitive science of religion literature make evident (Barrett, 1999; Slone, 2004), the more formalized and coherent systems often stand in explicit tension with less coherent, but more pragmatic, more automatic, seemingly intuitive processes of valuation.<sup>11</sup>

While Durkheim, Eliade, and van der Leeuw all stress that anything can be set apart as special or singularized, this does not preclude the possibility that there are species-wide tendencies to set a few things apart as special, culturally specific tendencies with respect to others, and random or idiosyncratic variation with respect to the remainder. Indeed, researchers in the emergent field of neuroeconomics are developing a common lexicon to bridge natural and social science disciplines interested in a biologically grounded understanding of value-based decision-making. In a review of the literature in this area, Rangel et al. (2008) provide a computational model of value-based decision-making and discuss three different types of valuation systems, which they refer to as pavlovian, habit, and goal-directed systems.

If, as previously suggested, we consider the wide range of things that people set apart as

special without limiting ourselves to those they explicitly characterize as "sacred," we can consider the possibility that some processes of valuation are more deeply rooted in our evolutionary history than others and, thus, more automatic. We could hypothesize and test whether the level at which a behavior is rooted makes us statistically more likely to set some things apart than others (Taves, 2011, p. 305). Thus, for example, people might set apart their own infants, dangerous substances, and anomalous objects through mechanisms of attachment, disgust, or attention that are deeply rooted in our evolutionary history. If this is the case, then so far as religions and others systems of valuation attempt to subordinate deeply rooted valuations to what they posit as higher goals, we would expect that such systems would devalue the more deeply rooted valuations with terms, such as "idolatrous," "superstitious," "illusory" or "unreal."

### **Further Research**

Focusing on the way people identify and engage non-ordinary powers, create and enter into alternate worlds, and orient themselves in relation to what they think matters most does not allow us to clearly delimit the sacred, the religious, or the spiritual. Nonetheless, finding more generic ways to characterize the processes and elements that people mix and match to create sacralities does allow us to do two things: (1) to set up comparisons between particular processes and/or elements across historical, cultural, and intellectual divides based on specific points of analogy that we identify as researchers, regardless of how people characterize and evaluate them and (2) consider how people embed and mobilize these processes and elements within different cultural contexts and the meaning and value they attribute to them in those contexts. These are questions that both psychologists of religion and religious studies scholars can explore using their own distinctive methods.

The focus on basic processes and elements has allowed us to make a number of comparisons that cut across subspecialties and disciplines and has raised a number of questions

for further research that can be addressed by both psychologists and scholars of religion.

Setting things apart: While acknowledging that anything can be set apart or singularized, we need to use cross-species and cross-cultural comparisons to investigate whether people are more likely to set some things apart than others. We also need to further integrate setting things apart with potentially related research on topics such as salience and the minimal group effect. In the latter case, for example, Tajfel et al.'s (1971) finding that subjects valorize groups to which they know they have been randomly assigned in an experimental context suggests a tendency to view "my group," however constituted, as special.

Non-ordinary powers: We need to integrate the research on the naturalness of popular religiosity, magic, and superstition within a common framework. In so far as the powers associated with persons and other animates differ from those associated with objects, places, and artifacts, doing so will require a clearer understanding of how the capacities associated with folk biological "kinds" (persons, animates, objects, artifacts) interconnect developmentally with children's understanding of different types of power. We need not only a developmentally grounded theory of mind, but also a developmentally grounded "theory of powers." We also need to integrate research on placebo effects with research on the effects of practices variously deemed religious, magical, and/or superstitious. In so doing, we arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of how words and rituals, symbols and meanings influence neural processes and in some cases, under some circumstances, produce measurable behavioral effects.

Non-ordinary worlds: We need to know more about how children learn to distinguish reality from fantasy and, in particular, how they learn to distinguish "pretend" alternative worlds from "real" believed-in alternative worlds and how these distinctions play out in cultural distinctions between (say) the arts, sports, and religion. We need to know more about the



interactions between everyday and alternative worlds under different kinds of conditions, including those that threaten life (e.g., war, conquest, disease, and famine) and those that may threaten cultures (e.g., contact, competition, and exchange).

Processes of valuation: Building on the research on “theological incorrectness,” as well as research in disciplines such as neuroeconomics, we need to explore how, if at all, and under what conditions people use the more elaborated systems of valuation to prioritize alternative worlds and shape behavior in the world they view as everyday. At what point do people decide to break with such systems, either intentionally or in practice, and what happens if and when they do so?

It has also become evident that these basic processes and elements build upon one another. In considering the setting apart of non-ordinary powers within the everyday world, the setting apart of alternative worlds from the everyday world, and the setting apart of non-ordinary powers within non-ordinary worlds, we have seen how people can use the process of setting things apart to construct increasingly complex formations and generate more formalized processes of valuation through systematic reflection on the whole. Moreover, people bring elements of these complex alternate worlds into relationship with the everyday world, in some cases, privileging the alternate world over the everyday to the point where it becomes the everyday world. Investigating how individuals and groups assemble the basic elements and processes discussed here into larger complexes is a crucial task, albeit beyond the scope of this essay. For those who are interested, the appendix provides a brief thought experiment to help readers envision how people can use these basic elements and processes to generate religions and spiritualities.

### **Appendix: Generating Models from the Basic Building Blocks**

We can extend the building block metaphor quite literally to imagine a set of “kits” that designers could use to construct religions and other things. We could start two basic kits: a

Powers Kit and an Alternative Worlds Kit. The Powers Kit would supply designers with methods for creating or discovering powers they can set apart and assign to various things (objects, people, places, abstractions) and then involve in experiences and events of their choosing. The Alternative Worlds Kit would allow designers to generate alternative realms or worlds, mark boundaries and control movement between the realms, and provide the realms with internal organization and structure. The two kits could be used separately or combined to create different effects.

While means of interacting with powers and moving between realms would emerge in conjunction with the two basic kits, a supplementary “Paths Kit” would allow designers to create formal routes, including “alternate,” “higher,” or “esoteric” paths. Designers could also use a more advanced “Codification Kit” to systematize the rules, procedures, and paths developed using the other kits. There is no “Values Kit,” because processes of valuation are inherent in setting apart powers, generating non-ordinary realms, and constructing paths. Systematizing a design makes the valuation process more explicit. Values would become most apparent, however, if we added a “Meta Kit” that asked designers to compare what they have created from various standpoints and discuss whether what they have created could be captured under one rubric and, if not, what should be excluded and why.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cognitive linguists use SMALL CAPS to denote image schemas and basic (or conceptual) metaphors. The analysis in this section is premised on the idea that comparisons grounded in image schemas and basic metaphors that emerge through the interaction of our bodies with the physical environment provide a promising basis for setting up comparisons across times and cultures (Slingerland, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Just as Durkheim's excision of magic (as non-congregational) reflected his interest in social explanations, so Pargament's excision of the demonic may reflect his interest in positive measurable effects. Both elisions seem arbitrary, however.

<sup>3</sup> In earlier drafts, this chapter attempted to ground the basic elements and processes discussed in the next section in image schemas (e.g., FORCE, SCALE, and bodily orientation [RIGHT/LEFT, UP/DOWN, etc.]), but due to space constraints this will be elaborated in forthcoming work.

<sup>4</sup> In adopting a "two worlds" definition of the sacred, Durkheim (1912/1995) discounted spiritual beings (because, he argued, animism was not the most elementary form of religion [pp. 45-67]), magic (because he viewed magicians as having clients rather than generating a "moral community" [p. 42]), and individualistic forms of religiosity (because he did not view them as distinct and autonomous systems [p. 43]).

<sup>5</sup> Minimally, what is added can be characterized in terms of the additional layers of meaning that Bellah (2011, p. 8) and others attribute to symbols, such that "even in the midst of daily life ... something ordinary becomes extraordinary." In the context of Weber's action oriented sociology, this added dimension also *affords* something beyond the ordinary in a behavioral sense. For an attempt to specify this in terms of an ecological psychology of affordances, see Taves (in press). In a seminar paper, Chris Morales characterized "extraordinary affordances [as] ... affordances a thing has which are beyond what the thing can afford on the basis of its physical properties." Such affordances, he argues, do "metaphysical work" that is highly observer dependent but not bound by physical constraints.

<sup>6</sup> Gelman's (2003: 296-325) discussion of unresolved issues surrounding the human tendency to essentialize gets at a parallel issue. She notes (pp. 306-307) the difficulties surrounding the "folk biological" understanding of essences (which informs the "animist" view of religion) in so far as the "properties [that essences share] are [also] shared by a set of other phenomena quite distinct from the realm of biology, including contamination, fetishes, and blessings" and suggests an alternate approach that she thinks would account for a wider range of phenomena.

<sup>7</sup> This section to this point is adapted from Taves, in press.

<sup>8</sup> If, in an effort to avoid deception, patients are told that they are being given a placebo, the placebo may still work if the patient is told that there is scientific evidence to suggest that placebos are effective. In this case, the patient ascribes non-ordinary power to an acknowledged placebo rather than ascribing non-ordinary power to what is, in fact, a "fake drug" (Kaptchuk et al., 2010).

<sup>9</sup> This paragraph is taken from Taves, 2011, 306-307.

<sup>10</sup> This paragraph and the next are adapted from Taves, 2010, pp. 181-182.

<sup>11</sup> This paragraph and a portion of the next are taken from Taves, 2011, p. 292.