TOWARDS A PROCEDURE FOR STUDYING RELIGION

by

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

In accordance with Regulation 2.4.15 (as set down in the Edinburgh University Postgraduate Study Programme) I hereby declare that the following pages are my own work,

Date 30/4/82
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with plotting out a possible course which could lead us through a situation of neutral multi-religious informedness to a point of decision concerning the different world-views voiced by the various religions. Attention is given, in the first instance, to illustrating the unsatisfactoriness of perpetual impartiality. Evaluation and judgment may usefully be postponed for methodological reasons, but if they are altogether cancelled then we risk fostering a serious misapprehension both of religion and of those who study it. We suggest that being acquainted with a wide range of descriptive data about diverse religious phenomena necessarily poses a dilemma of choice (though that it does so may not be realized immediately). Three key questions characterize this dilemma (which is referred to analogically by means of the image of a hall of mirrors where many different reflections offer purported likenesses of the human situation, each one claiming unique and ultimate accuracy):-

1. How can we discover which, if any, of the religious outlooks is true?
2. Why is there a diversity of outlooks rather than a single one?
3. To what extent are religions in fact accessible to study? (i.e. can the dilemma be resolved by study or is some other mode of approach required?).

The thesis is addressed specifically to these three questions. Thus we move on to survey the possible ways
in which the religionist could seek to resolve his state of "mesmerization" i.e. his indecision regarding the truth or falsity of the various religious outlooks on the world (about which he has been informed by the descriptive aspect of his studies). The next step is to select, from among these possibilities, what appears to be the best mode of resolution and, after developing it at some length (in the procedure which we term "interpolation"), to consider how far it would be able to proceed given the apparent inaccessibility of religion to inquiry, an inaccessibility which is constituted by its central element of ineffability/mysteriousness. Some light is shed on the nature of ineffability when our analysis of religious diversity suggests that it is the source of the perplexing plurality with which we are faced in the hall of mirrors. Further examination of it suggests that, if we are to accept it as intelligible, the ineffable must be taken as stemming from experience of radical unlikeness (which in turn must be taken as originating from some form of totality experience). However, at the end of the day, whether or not - or the extent to which - Religious Studies can in fact cope with the ineffability of its subject matter (through the procedure which we recommend) remains a point best settled from a standpoint of encounter rather than anticipation, where interpolation is employed in specific investigations rather than theoretically outlined.
NOTE

The reader ought to acquaint himself with the contents of Appendix One before progressing any further.
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TOWARDS A PROCEDURE FOR STUDYING RELIGION

No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being for ever on the alert.

Henry David Thoreau: Walden
INTRODUCTION: INTO THE HALL OF MIRRORS
(Or, Outlining and Justifying the Area of Concern)

The more we observe the play and interplay of thought, the less likely shall we be to think of confining religion itself, the study of religion, or any other subject of thought in a water-tight compartment.

Stanley A. Cook: The Study of Religion

Never learn anything until you find you have been made uncomfortable for a good long while by not knowing it.

Samuel Butler: The Way of All Flesh
(i) Religion and the Study of Religion

Since the first glimmer of consciousness appeared upon this planet, flickering like some magic golden serpent across that uncertain boundary which runs somewhere between man and ape, until the present moment, at which we have arrived after following its pied piper's zig-zag course, willing and unwilling, through the myriad of different thoughts and actions which make up our chequered racial history, a religious dimension has consistently occupied a uniquely important place in the life of the species _homo sapiens_. (1) Along with our ability to make fire and use language it is one of those features which characterizes (or brands) us as human rather than simian, and in the many turbulences which occur in the course of an individual's biography and throughout the development of our diverse societal existence (at local, national and international levels) it has been a powerful shaping force, both for what has subsequently been seen as good and for what is now seen as fundamentally wrong or misguided. If, long after we are all extinct, some anthropologically minded alien should one day happen on our ruined and deserted planet and determine to reconstruct a natural history of our kind, it would be lamentably incomplete were not substantial space given over to our preoccupation with the holy, for religion occupies a geographical and temporal territory virtually co-terminous with that of human existence, and a psychical centrality which ranks it with our other most basic concerns - the need for food, shelter and companionship. From the
anonymous cave paintings which throng the caverns at Altamira and Lascaux and still delight us (aesthetically if no longer religiously) with their graceful sinuousness and colour, to Mark Rothko's looming empty panels in the non-denominational chapel named after him in Houston; from the millions of Moslems who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, to the mass suicide (or massacre) of hundreds of the People's Temple sect in Guyana; from the bloodthirsty frenzied dancing of Kali, to Confucian mores of firm gentleness and poise; from the elaborate opulence of the Hindu temples at Khajaraoro, to the emptiness of a Zen garden; from Kurrichalpongo to Milton's Satan, mankind has marked out clearly in a multiplicity of different ways and in different mediums his deep concern with the sacred.

Outwith some imagined all embracing standpoint at the end of time, such sweeping claims about the universality of a religious element in human life are, of course, provisional, for only time, as Shakespeare puts it, "takes survey of all the world". But in the absence of such a complete, if terminal, viewpoint, it is interesting to note that in a recent study which attempts, not unsuccessfully, to "take survey" of the world to date, the writer clearly asserts this fundamental characteristic of humankind. Thus Arnold Toynbee, in Mankind and Mother Earth (1976), writes:

Religion is, in fact, an intrinsic and distinctive trait of human nature. It is a human being's necessary response to the challenge of the mysteriousness of the phenomena in virtue of his uniquely human faculty of consciousness.
And Mircea Eliade, in his *History of Religious Ideas*, a work first published in the same year as Toynbee's and similar to it in terms of its all inclusive historical span (though more specialized in its subject matter) supports this idea that wherever and whenever there are men and women there is also bound to be some form of religion. For, according to Eliade,

> The 'sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness. (4)

From the billions of unique episodes of human consciousness, of brief individual biographies which together comprise the phenomenon of mankind and whose scattered flickering existence across the globe and through the centuries blinks out so many different messages, a handful of basic common themes emerge, which, even though they may provide no clue as to the final meaning of this awesome and perplexing semaphore, may at least fill the human watcher (no matter how distant his vantage point in time or situation) with that sense of sympathy and shared concern which is the first step towards understanding others (and so, perhaps, to understanding self as well). Religion, it seems clear, is one such important unifying theme (5) which, despite the vast diversity of its various manifestations, quite simply constitutes a fundamentally important part of being human.

No such feelings are aroused by the study of religion, indeed set beside the psychical centrality and almost unbroken oecumenic distribution of its subject matter,
which spans the fifty or one hundred thousand years between
the first appearance of the higher hominids and now, such a
study can easily seem dwarfed into insignificance, appearing
as a mere dust speck of methodology scarcely yet developed
beyond the embryonic stage, having arisen as recently as the
last century and being largely the concern, initially at any
rate, of only a tiny specialized intellectual minority living
mostly in the western hemisphere. However, as will soon
become apparent, my interest here is focused precisely on
this activity of studying religions rather than on some
particular aspect of religion itself. I am going to deal
with the nature of this kind of study and the special
problems it encounters - methods of approach, the question
of the investigator's neutrality or commitment and so on,
not with, say, Buddhist mythology, the parables of Jesus,
the idea of judgment in the Qur'an or the religious signif-
icance of the cave paintings of early man (though hopefully
my conclusions will be relevant to all such investigations
into specific religious phenomena). Re-echoing Cook, whose
pioneering study of the subject still has much to recommend
it, it might be said that what I am concerned with in this
thesis are those questions "which come in between the
observer and the evidence" \(^{(6)}\), rather than with the evidence
itself, though as we shall see (and as Cook himself saw) such
distinctions must be carefully qualified if they are not to
mislead.

But is it not perverse to focus attention on such a
clearly secondary, if not somewhat artificial and parasitic
area of human concern and experience? Given even the immense disparity of simple temporal or geographical extent which would appear to exist between religion and the study of religion (let alone the difference in immediate personal interest and value), why should I choose to concentrate on the latter? What could it possibly tell me about any part of religious life which could not be better learned from actually looking at some aspect of religion itself? If what follows purports to be some kind of procedural manual or methodological prolegomenon, a study of the study of religion, is its value not then automatically queried at the very outset? Given the subject matter would the prospective reader not feel well justified in stopping here, explaining his abrupt halt simply by declaring that if we genuinely wish to learn anything, either about religion or the study of religion, then, instead of trying to consider such a study as a topic which can be dealt with by itself, we must go out and actually study some particular religious phenomenon and simply see what happens at first hand?

In trying to answer the question, "why focus attention on the study of religion?", it is important to realise that it is its implicit last clause, namely, "rather than on religion itself", which provides the question with its dismissive and condemnatory tone. The logically prior question, "why study religion at all?", is usually left unasked, since the obvious importance of such a study's subject matter, attested to by even the most cursory glance at history, renders any seriously doubtful or interrogatory feeling
redundant and absurd. We study religion because it addresses itself to the problem of the meaning of human existence and thus is of some interest to everyone, or because it is intrinsically interesting in terms of the vast corpus of art or literature or music which it has fostered, or because, without considering the religious dimension, human thought and behaviour over a wide area of their occurrence (at both racial and individual level) could not be fully understood. But, paradoxically, the existence of such indisputably sound reasons for studying religion can, in a sense, act to preclude any systematic self conscious reflection on that study itself. For in asking "why study the study of religion rather than actually studying it?" the clearly voiced (if not explicitly stated) disapproval of such a choice stems from the conviction that in doing so we are side-stepping something of great and obvious importance for something of lesser and clearly secondary concern.

This implicit condemnation would be well founded only if a relationship between religion and the study of religion existed such that the two were clearly separated and that to focus attention on the latter (as opposed to doing it) incurred some sort of refractive barrier through which the former appeared dimmer or distorted, if studying the study of religion somehow deflected concern to something of quite peripheral interest or if it in some more active way actually damaged our perception of religion. I want to argue against this view, which holds that focusing on the
activity of Religious Studies itself, rather than on its content, is in some way undesirable, or at least of purely secondary importance, by suggesting that the relationship which such a view assumes to exist between religion and the study of religion is mistaken, and that, moreover, such a choice of focus is given high priority by the demands of a certain (and currently quite common) religious situation. In short, I am suggesting that to the question which perhaps most immediately confronts this thesis, namely, "why study the study of religion rather than actually studying religion?", there are two answers, one logical and one environmental. In considering these in turn I hope to clarify more fully both the area of concern with which this three year period of research has been occupied and the reasons why I have considered it a worthwhile area of thought.

(ii) Why Study the Study of Religion? - The Logical Reply

The belief that studying the study of religion is an activity of the most dubious value is based upon an assumed and unexamined relationship thought to exist between it and its subject matter. This relationship is not mapped out in substantiating detail and stated directly, but occurs implicitly in a number of points of view. Perhaps one of the most common of these to be encountered by the religion¬ist is the notion which maintains that in his field of interest method and material are two independent and non-overlapping areas, religion constituting material which can never be adequately treated by the method of Religious Studies.
Instead, so the argument runs, if it is to be properly understood, religion must in some way be apprehended directly. It is against this particular (and persistent) manifestation of what might be called the "bisectionist fallacy" that the main thrust of my arguments in this chapter will be directed.

As its name suggests, the bisectionist fallacy divides and separates what should be taken as a single (though not necessarily homogeneous) thing. Its splitting of the method-material continuum can most clearly be presented as two opposing responses to the question, "how do we see what is really there?" for although the two subsequent views are at odds over how this is to be done, there is no disputing that it is to be done, the question expresses a vital first step which both viewpoints consider it necessary to take in our progress towards understanding religion. That from a common base line they move in opposite linear directions towards the same goal provides our first clue that something is amiss. I wish to steer a therapeutic course between method and material viewed thus as estranged and unrelated positions, showing that far from being mutually exclusive alternatives they are in fact a complementary pair. But before any firm and binding sutures can be applied to knit together this mistaken separation it must first be shown that it is mistaken; the need for the operation must be realised before its results can be appreciated. So, to begin with, I will consider the inadequacies of these two positions taken at their logical extreme, where each tries to establish independence from and superiority to the other,
thereby suggesting that we take method and material as wholly separate and unrelated means of approach.

Let us first briefly characterize the point of view which suggests that in order to see things as they are we must approach them by the careful stages of a systematic and disciplined method, rather than by any impulsive leap into direct unmediated contact. Such a viewpoint might defend the procedure it recommends by arguing that the first step of any inquiry must be to define its subject matter, since otherwise the subsequent investigation will run the risk of being wholly misdirected, with its focus of attention aimed at some point which is in fact irrelevant and miles distant from the actual centre of concern. After all, how could we possibly claim to understand anything about religion unless we could first establish clearly what it was? Unless we carefully categorize and sub-categorize we can never hope to abstract from the mass of data with which the world presents us any units small enough for our reason to map intelligibly. We must methodically divide, separate and label the facts of the world, rather than confront them in their raw and uncatalogued state. If we wish to understand, we must pursue and net the objects of our interest with categories of a progressively finer mesh. Thus, after establishing a general definition of religion showing how it is separable from other aspects of life, we must then proceed to differentiate between various more specific categories within that general area - prayer, worship, sacrifice, and so on - ordering the broad area of interest cordoned off by
our initial definition of religion according to the dictates of these second stage concepts. Our focus becomes more finely tuned as we narrow down and magnify.

On the other hand, there is the point of view which advocates an immediate return to the data, arguing that such preliminaries as definition threaten to ensnare the investigator in an ascending spiral of ever more abstract methodology which will eventually take him to a meta-level of discussion so far removed from his subject matter that he can no longer be said to be engaged in a study of it. Religion is notoriously difficult to define, indeed it would be easy for the prospective student who deemed such an exercise to be the essential starting point of his inquiry to find himself endlessly engaged upon what he had taken simply to be the prologue to his task. Such a student, who bothers first about methods of inquiry, risks deserting the matter of real concern by following the tangent of interminable intellectual theorizing instead of keeping to the base line of immediate contact with his subject.

According to this viewpoint, any process of external categorization or control simply obtrudes itself between observer and observed and guarantees a distorted picture. In its eyes method is an inessential, largely decorative theoretical construct quite detached from the work in hand, which, if it has to be done at all, can be formulated as a kind of retrospective codification of what has already been done successfully without it. (7)

In brief, the argument for going directly to religion
itself rather than first considering how to study it, suggests that the only alternative leads not to understanding but to getting hopelessly tangled up in theories about method, whereas the argument for giving first attention to working out the principles of a disciplined and methodical investigation maintains that if its suggested programme is not followed then the student will find himself hopelessly enmeshed in a glut of unordered and often irrelevant material. It is the old dual between methodology and spontaneity, conducted largely via the exchange of their respective and not very helpful cat calls of "operating with a blunt knife" and "sharpening a knife but never using it". And it is arguable that the tension between these two basic viewpoints has been partly responsible for the "profound methodological confusion"(8) currently found in Religious Studies.

The desire to see what is there (as an essential preliminary to understanding it) is the fundamental desideratum which provides a common intention shared by studies orientated primarily towards direct contact with the material in question and those orientated primarily towards contact with it via some disciplined and orderly method. Establishing what is really there is indispensable for any inquiry which wishes to discourse upon religious phenomena with any degree of credibility, no matter what its original motive or eventual goal (and a large part of our inquiry will be concerned with just this issue). It is the apparently simple question: "How do you see what is there?" to which, in theory or in practice, much of present
day Religious Studies is addressed, and which marks the watershed on opposite sides of which the proponents and opponents of methodology fall. Or rather, to be more precise, the watershed runs between two different readings of the simple (and correct) answer to this initial question, namely: "look at the things themselves", one which considers that the best way to fulfil this directive is to go straight to the material, and one which considers that such a goal is best achieved by starting with working out a method. Rather than constituting a stark either/or decision concerning two mutually exclusive pathways which the religionist must choose between right at the very outset of his inquiry, I want to suggest that the two points of view which I have roughly characterized here create only an illusory dilemma, between whose horns we can safely pass on a mutually reconciling middle way. Anders Nygren points us in the right direction:

It is frequently assumed that there is an opposition between method and material, as if methodology were something external and peripheral, from which we need to move on to what is central and of substantive significance - the material. ... This idea must be said to be completely wrong. Far from being merely peripheral, methodology has to do precisely with what is central. There is no tension between material and method, but rightly understood they belong inseparably together, in a reciprocal relation to one another. (9)

But just how do we arrive at this sort of happy conclusion in which the tension between method and material disappears?

I will try to show the sort of reasoning needed here by reference to Nygren's analogical illustration of this ideal
point of view, an illustration which, though appropriate, can renew confusion about the delicate relationship which exists between method and material unless it is carefully qualified. Nygren suggests that this tensionless view of their mutual dependency may be illustrated

by the story of the famous huntsman who, when asked about the best way of trapping a fox, replied: 'start trapping, the fox will teach you.' (10)

Now of course with patience and persistence the fox might eventually teach a prospective hunter the elements of his desired trade, just as the car might teach the learner how to drive it, or the tiger teach the beginner how to stalk it, explosives offer lessons in their own handling, or the jungle give instruction in how best to survive its inclement conditions. But in all such endeavours it seems obvious that achieving whatever end is in mind will be far better served not by starting off de novo and confronting things without the benefit of any experience or reflection whatsoever, or by having a preconceived and inflexible modus operandi based on the accounts of others or on one's own imaginative anticipation, but with an awareness of how such situations have been met - successfully and unsuccessfully - in the past, coupled with an idea of how one wants to meet them oneself and a readiness to accept that the present situation may require both the revision or replacement of any hypothesized technique. Learning "the hard way" from first hand experience alone is all very well if there is no alternative (and of course this first hand experience can never be side-stepped in any learning process), but to
recommend it as the sole procedure when lessons are also available seems somewhat misguided, if not arrogant, in its systematic ignoring of the experience of others. Conversely, to learn only via lessons, rather than by the outcome of their practical application, seems to invest procedure with an unwarrantable certainty (by presupposing that events will always fit in with its design).

To trap a fox requires the application of a certain part of the hunter's skill, and trapping that fox offers an opportunity to add a small part to this corpus of specialized knowledge, either by confirming its recommendations by success or suggesting that they need revision by failure. Neither theory nor practice could be consistently successful in isolation from the other, a constant interaction between them is required if any kind of coherent and reliable action is to emerge, whether this be in the realm of fox hunting or jungle survival or studying religions. Although there is certainly a difference between catching particular foxes under certain specific sets of conditions, and learning all the diverse skills of the hunter so as to be competent to do so under any set of conditions, at the end of the day we cannot separate learning a skill (such as how to study religion) from discrete instances of work undertaken within its field (such as, say, a comparative study of eschatological thought in ancient Egyptian and Greek religion). But, in their divided state, the rift imagined to exist between method and material points precisely in the opposite direction to this point of view, suggesting that with method we are concerned only with learning about "x", whilst with material
we are concerned only with doing "x". To sunder education and action in this way is to render the former useless and the latter mindless. Moreover, to view things thus is to take up what amounts to a radically non-empirical view of man's pursuit of knowledge, at both a personal and historical level. As Newton said, "if I have been able to see farther it was because I stood on the shoulders of giants"(11). If we were to "start hunting" or "go directly to the things themselves" in the sense of starting de novo, our mind a complete tabula rasa, then we would have to ignore or attempt to systematically dismantle this human pyramid on which discoveries rely so much (a pyramid which for Newton consisted of such key figures as Kepler, Galileo and Descartes) leaving ourselves standing at ground level again. Even if such deliberate and destructive swimming against the history of ideas were possible, it is doubtful of what use such a backwards journey would be. Newton's comment is, I think, applicable to any field of thought and provides an interesting insight into the growth of knowledge in general. Transposing the argument to the study of religion: would anyone seriously recommend discounting the early giants of the subject - Frazer, Müller, Durkheim et. al. - and starting from scratch again? Similarly, would anyone really wish to recommend that we stand behind such figures, viewing things wholly through their eyes, not deviating in the smallest degree from their recorded outlooks? But precisely such absurd conclusions are reached if we divorce material and method and treat either one singly as our primary and
exclusive concern. We have been warned of the danger of the "omniscience of method" (12) when our concern with procedure becomes such as to render it wholly inflexible, dictating our understanding of events by the imposition of meanings in accordance with its structure, instead of helping us to understand what is already there. There is, I think, a similar danger from an "omniscience of material", when our concern for the data deludes us into thinking that they are intrinsically intelligible, that we may somehow understand them directly without the aid of any conceptual, historical or linguistic intermediary. The position is re-stated at the level of the individual taken apart from the intellectual tradition to which he is heir (in so far as this is an intelligible abstraction): if I concentrate wholly on material, to the exclusion of any method, I demolish or ignore by implication the "pyramid" of my own previous experiences, sacrificing the corpus of my accumulated understanding for a virginal immediacy which, I would argue, it is not possible to obtain. Likewise if I concentrate on method to the exclusion of material, I effectively prevent myself from having genuinely new experiences by uniformly imposing a presupposed interpretative structure upon all events which I subsequently encounter. In other words, the omniscience of method involves ignoring the present, the omniscience of material involves ignoring the past. Empiricism cannot function in either sphere alone but depends upon the cross fertilization between them which is effected by memory, and, without some kind of empirical
basis on which to ground our understanding, it would become impossible to establish any kind of meaning for the many phenomena with which we are surrounded. For meaning, as Nygren points out,

furnishes the link between material and method, and only the linking of material and method ... yields any meaning. (13)

So, to avoid advocating what is meaningless, we must understand Nygren's metaphorical statement of the relationship between method and material ("start trapping, the fox will teach you") not as an injunction to begin from some point of absolute zero, mind purged of all "contaminating" ideas, but to engage in an investigation where progress depends on the balanced reciprocity between experience and reflection, between the conception of some final goal and the various intermediary stages necessary to reach it.

When I say that in this thesis I am focusing my attention on the study of religion rather than on religion itself, or, to continue in analogical terms, that I am concerned with the art of trapping rather than with the fox, it must be understood that far from presupposing a clear cut division between the two such that studying or trapping may somehow be examined independently of what is studied or trapped, the legitimacy of such a focus depends rather on a view which sees theory and practice as more intertwined than divided, so that the method of Religious Studies and the material of religion are seen as an inter-related pair from whose inter-relationship alone meaning can emerge.

To the question "why study the study of religion rather
than actually studying it?" there are two answers: firstly, if by this is meant something like "why focus attention on a clearly separate area of purely derivative and secondary meaning rather than on one of self sufficient primacy?" then our answer (as "the logical reply" has tried to voice it) is that such a query is based on a logical fiction and, as such, must either be withdrawn or reformulated. If the relationship between religion and Religious Studies was such as it assumes then, granted, focus on Religious Studies would indeed be questionable. But, as I have attempted to show, such a relationship is incoherent, since, at the end of the day, bisecting method and material in this way and recommending one or the other as of primary and singular importance leaves us in a world where understanding is rendered impossible by the removal of those circumstances under which meaning is allowed expression. Secondly, if by this query is meant no more than something like "why focus attention on this particular area rather than on any other?" then the answer (to which "the environmental reply" is directed) points to the particular situation of religiously informed twentieth century man.

To take another analogy: I am concerned here with the art of reading rather than with actually reading some specific text, with discussing the nature of such an activity, its aims, how it is to be done most efficiently, how it affects the reader's outlook, what the dangers and benefits are both in engaging in and in refraining from doing it. Obviously it would not just be misguided to attempt to do this without
reference to the written word, it would simply be impossible, and to attempt to understand the written word "directly" without the methodological intermediary of reading would likewise be ridiculous.

The occurrence of what I have called "the bisectionist" fallacy" is by no means confined to this erroneous view of method and material alone, it also finds expression in a number of other similarly divisive assumptions which run the whole gamut of the religionist's concern, seeking to separate commitment and neutrality; belief and understanding; subjectivity and objectivity; essence and manifestation, and so on. Left uncorrected, such assumptions can erode all the links between religion and the study of religion until they are split apart entirely and we are left with an unhappy divorce in which religion is given exclusive charge of commitment, belief, subjectivity and essence, and Religious Studies is given charge of neutrality, understanding, objectivity and manifestation. Such polarization of subject and subject matter is, I think, mistaken, and although clearly there will not be time to systematically expose each of its contributory fallacies in turn, it will be one of the aims of this thesis to show the incoherence of such a view. Whilst there are, of course, distinctions between these various contrasting pairs, it would seem to be more accurate to see the lines between them as ill-defined, meandering, blurred, and often invisible, rather than as straight, definite and clear cut. The bisectionist fallacy may be removed either by working from the bottom up, by
tackling its various component parts (i.e. the views which suggest that material and method, neutrality and commitment etc. are clearly distinct and easily separable categories) or from the top down, attacking the cumulative illusion wrought by such mistaken assumptions (i.e. by showing how religion and the study of religion are two sides of the same coin rather than two separate coins of vastly unequal value, that a relationship of symbiosis rather than parasitism obtains between them). In the course of the chapters which follow I will periodically employ both of these strategies.

(iii) Beyond the Bisectionist Fallacy: The Religionist as Everyman

"Why study the study of religion rather than actually studying it?". The logical answer is complete. Before moving on to the environmental reply, it remains only to point out that to encourage this question to be asked in its logically deficient (though still instructive) form in the first place, I paved the way by a distinctly misleading, but by no means uncommon, historical presentation of the relationship between religion and Religious Studies. For in portraying the study of religion as a tiny dust speck of methodology dwarfed by the monolithic immensity, both geographical and temporal, of its subject matter, it is, of course, already tacitly assumed that a clear distinction between them as method and material exists. I cannot attempt to trace the history of the study of religion here, such an undertaking, though interesting and relevant, would require a thesis of its own. Suffice it to note that the "dust speck"
view of Religious Studies fails to take into account that
"in one sense the study of religion is as old as human
thought", (14) since,

the moment that man in a self conscious
spirit ponders over the religious beliefs
which he holds, or which have been handed
down to him as a legacy, he is engaged in
the study of religion. (15)

However, this fundamental sense of the study of religion is
all too easily glossed over in our eagerness to see it
established as a strictly academic subject.

According to George W. Gilmore (16), two conditions are
necessary before the study of religion (on a comparative,
scientific basis) can come into being. Firstly, the
existence of many different faiths must simply become known,
and, secondly, there must be a clear sighted intellectual
integrity in confronting this recognized diversity, an
unshrinking honesty and sincerity in approach. In short,
"lack of information and prejudice" (17) constitute the two
fundamental barriers which block the genesis of Religious
Studies. Views concerning how, when and by whom these
barriers were first surmounted vary in detail, with names
as diverse as those of Proclus, Xenophanes, Akbar, Bacon
and Müller being put forward as possible progenitors. (18)
But I think it is now generally agreed that the search for
some single figure as founding father is a fruitless one,
and that the situation is better expressed by drawing atten-
tion to the many and varied adumbrations of what we now
recognize as Religious Studies, which occurred over the long
period of what Gilmore has dubbed "the gestation of the
science of religion"\(^{(19)}\). Thus, whilst noting Müller's contribution to the development of this area of thought, he proceeds to draw our attention to the essential role of general world travel and discovery from the fifteenth century onwards, naming Alexander Ross's *The Religions of the World* (London, 1653) as "a prophecy of the coming interest in the non-christian faiths"\(^{(20)}\).

Similarly, whilst seeing no trace of a mature science of religion before the nineteenth century, Louis H. Jordan compiles an astonishingly varied list of "the most noteworthy prophets and pioneers of comparative religion"\(^{(21)}\) who, though they cannot strictly speaking be admitted within the fold of the science of comparative religion,

> nevertheless must be admitted to hold an important relation to its history, in that they constitute a distinct preparation for it. \(^{(22)}\)

In like vein E.O. James notes that although thinkers would have been compelled to compare their beliefs in relation to those of others "from the time when the religions mingled in the Graeco-Roman world", yet it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century of our era that a serious attempt was made to apply scientific principles to the comparative and historical study of the subject. \(^{(23)}\)

Most recent surveys, such as those of Waardenburg (1973a) and Sharpe (1975), tend to follow this pattern, giving some brief mention to the early precursors of Comparative Religion and then devoting their main energies to the period 1870 to the present day, when it became established as a university subject\(^{(24)}\).
Viewed thus as "an autonomous discipline"(25), in its consciously codified (or rather, still codifying) form, Religious Studies is bound to appear as a dust speck of methodology alongside a massive subject matter. Such a self awareness of its own activity is, of course, quite recent, but it comes from a very ancient area of human thought rather than suddenly emerging, as if out of nowhere, by itself. The dust speck perspective comes from viewing the tip of the iceberg only and ignoring the rest. But if we follow it beneath the water line of recent history we will find that it merges with the massiveness of its subject matter. For we can, I think, trace the antecedents of the study of religion back even further (both historically and philosophically) than those series of disparate and unrelated figures suggested in the various lists of its pioneers and adumbrators. If we wish to make our catalogue of pre-natal characteristics complete then we must start at the point of conception, not at some arbitrary stage of embryonic development. We must return to Jastrow's sense of Religious Studies as something "as old as human thought" or to Sharpe's idea of the original comparative religionist as

the first worshipper of a god or gods who asked himself, having first discovered the facts of the case, why his neighbour should be a worshipper of some other god or gods. (26)

The study of religion taken in the sense of an academic discipline has tended to overshadow and obscure its equally legitimate sense as a basic point of concern for Everyman,
as a path of thought (albeit often twisted, abortive or untrodden beyond the first few steps without the guidelines of a discipline) which comes automatically with reflection on the varieties of religious experience. In the pages which follow I want to restore this more basic and compelling sense of Religious Studies as a natural endeavour demanded of reflective man set amidst a perceived diversity of belief, and in this way, by re-awakening and allowing full expression of the need to make sense of our religious situation, to attempt to progress beyond that point where we simply collect information about religions but endlessly postpone doing anything with it. For, in a sense, where once the barriers to the study of religion were, to re-iterate Gilmore, "a lack of information and prejudice", they have now become a glut of information and a lack of any kind of inclination of opinion towards the making of conclusions. We are faced with a situation where there is accumulation of, without decision concerning, religious facts, where the natural concerns of the religious man\(^{(27)}\) are subordinated to those of the academic (though of course to separate \textit{homo religiosus} and \textit{homo academicus} in this way is yet another manifestation of the bisectionist fallacy). But this brings us into the area covered by the environmental answer, so I must not further anticipate here.

Gilmore's identification of a double barrier to Religious Studies constituted by lack of information and prejudice is, I think, largely accurate. But does it apply only to the academic man viewing the various religions from
Surely it is precisely these same barriers which operate within the religious traditions themselves to prevent theological development, advocating instead a blind clinging to the status quo of already established outlook which takes no account of new information and ideas or increased intellectual tolerance. To go back to our iceberg analogy, it is only in the last century or so that Religious Studies and religion give the impression of having parted company, and even now there seems to be a network of threads running between the two peaks. I am not suggesting that there is no distinction between religion and the study of it, obviously there is, but there is all the difference in the world between a clear cut separation and a blurred and flexible boundary line, and I am suggesting that the distinction is by no means as clear cut as some would assume. Is it reasonable, for example, to argue that the book of Job or the speculative hymns of the tenth book of the Rig Veda or the Upanishads or the writings of Eckhart are purely religious and contain no elements whatsoever of the study of religion, or that The Idea of the Holy or The Sword and the Flute or Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban\(^{(28)}\) can be described exhaustively as examples of Religious Studies, containing no religious element at all? Such a view would surely involve an unacceptable compartmentalizing of the mind in which reflection and belief would be - quite artificially - sundered. Be this as it may, this is not the place to embark on a detailed argument against the bisectionist fallacy "from the top down". The question of the relationship between
religion and Religious Studies will be examined in more
detail in chapter six, here I simply pose some questions
in a preliminary attempt to shake and unsettle any neatly
divisive assumptions which the reader might have concerning
this relationship.

(iv) Why Study the Study of Religion? –
The Environmental Reply

The environmental reply is directed to the question,
"why, in this subject area, should we want to focus our
attention on the study of religion, why should this
particular topic merit attention over and above all others?"
For there seems to be no immediately obvious reason why the
study of the study of religion should not be dismissed as a
subject of somewhat peripheral interest on which time which
could have been devoted to the surely more urgent questions
of the problem of evil, the existence or non-existence of
deity, the truth of eschatological teachings, and so on, is
being squandered. Given the immense range of possible
areas of study in this field(29) and the obviously immediate
existential interest of many of them, this is by no means an
idle or merely trivially curious question. Rather it is
one which leads the religionist to review his own motives in
regard to his chosen specialization, an exercise which is
seldom enough performed. Too often introductions tell the
reader what the author is going to do without any real
indication of why he is going to do it or why he considers
that it might be of interest for others to read. In a sub-
ject in which we are assailed on all sides by the written
word, by a vast corpus of ever increasing print, it seems
somewhat overconfident to assume that simply by adding to it we will have automatically established a good reason for our work, and thus need not bother to tell potential readers why we have thought it necessary to break silence (often at such great length) or why we should expect anyone to listen to our noise, but only to inform them of its structural composition. Some form of initial clarifying apology and confession of motive, as well as design of content, is surely called for. (30)

Like Smart, I am not claiming that the study of religion (or the study of the study of religion) "is the most important thing to be undertaken in connection with religion" (31), to repeat the example he gives, it seems clear that "being a saint is more important". (32) The reason why I consider my particular choice of focus to be of value is because of a particular milieu in which it seems to constitute a problem, if not of absolute, then certainly of fundamental importance. It is a milieu in which I am situated, with which I must deal, to which I must in some way react, "I" being taken here as representative of the religiously informed man of this century (and thus used with the intention of imparting a sense of the situation's urgency and immediacy rather than out of any conceit). Arguably, the particular problems which arise out of this situation could be seen as logically prior to belief, saintliness, atheism or indifference, in as much as such positions are seen as conclusions reached regarding religion, and as such, necessitating a clear view of it if they wish to be considered
well founded. Equally, it could be argued that these problems are artificially created, arising out of the intellectual's incessant and unnecessary mental ferreting and fretting, thus merely constituting his just desserts and being of no concern to the ordinary man. If the broadening of an individual's outlook beyond what is directly inherited from his past and immediately perceived in his present is in some way unnatural, then indeed such problems might be dubbed artificial. It would, however, seem more reasonable to suggest that a state of affairs in which the attempt to discover an adequate picture of things was completely circumscribed by the already existing situation (as is appealed to for the criterion of unnaturalness used here) is itself chronically artificial and contrived.

But what is so special about the environment of the religiously informed man in the twentieth century (western) world, and how are its problems different from those of other times and cultures? In one sense, of course, present day homo religiosus still looks out on exactly the same view which confronted Neanderthal man and which has not changed substantially since this ancient spark of consciousness was moved to put flowers and food in the graves of his fellows some one hundred thousand years ago. What might be called "the human situation", that is, the basic facts of sapient existence shorn of all the outgrowths of specific cultures (which on occasion may threaten to obscure them) remain unchanged, providing an underlying foundation of spiritual continuity in our confrontation with the experience of birth, joy, suffering, death and being itself. It is to
this confrontation with finitude that the teachings of the world's religions are addressed. But whereas in previous ages an awareness of these facts was dealt with and nurtured within the interpretative structures of a specific religion, supported by an environing culture singly and without alternative, present day man is faced with a great diversity of religious forms. His awareness of the human situation is, by and large, undimmed, but when such awareness seeks comfort or expression religiously it is faced not with a cradling tradition within which all his hopes and fears and speculations may find firm - if routine - support and expression (or against which he may clearly formulate his opposition), but with an immense panorama of possible religious stages upon which he might act out his meaning. The very existence of the religions themselves has become problematic as the extent of possible informedness in this field has increased.

The existence of a huge body of information about religion is the common denominator which provides the seedbed for most of the problems I wish to consider in this thesis. In a sense the work is addressed specifically to those who are in some measure acquainted with the extent and variety of this massive collection of information, who have, so to speak, glimpsed some portion of the vast, and still incomplete, aerial photograph which the study of religion provides over and above the confines of their own indigenous beliefs. (Though of course within such indigenous belief systems, whether these be theistic, atheistic, or agnostic, the variety of interpretations of the same phenomena, the
existence of different sects, or conflicting points of view, may already be seen as problematic, for precisely the same kind of difficulties arise here - but at a much less critical level - as occur within an awareness of the much greater diversity brought to light by Religious Studies.)

That such an accumulation of facts has occurred (and is still occurring) was noted as early as 1905 by Louis Henry Jordan in his survey of a then fledgling discipline:

The accumulation of information, indeed, has never slackened for a moment; and the special embarrassment of today is the overwhelming mass of detail, still rapidly increasing, which confronts every earnest investigator. (34)

Seventy years later, Eric Sharpe suggests that the history of the subject might well be seen as "rapidly increasing accumulations of material in search of a method". (35) His comment neatly links our logical and environmental replies, pointing out how the bisectionist fallacy has been fostered by an imbalance in outlook over the last few decades, in which the study of religion as embodying a basic concern of man has been overshadowed by its sense as an academic discipline faced only with the cataloguing and recording of facts. That the increase in information has been swift to the point of being uncontrollable, and that it constitutes a serious - even violent - challenge to any of our existing religious ideas has been increasingly realised. Woods has described the situation graphically, taking into account the similarly vast increase in the scope and content of other areas of thought as well:
We are standing, as it were, near to an explosion of knowledge and, until the dust settles, we hardly know what, buildings remain standing and how many of us have survived to undertake the burden of reconstruction. (36)

More specifically as regards Religious Studies, Streng has suggested that

The easy access to information about, and direct experience in, religious life that was until thirty years ago for most people restricted to the 'mysterious east' or 'darkest Africa', breaks open boundaries that were at the same time barriers and comfortable protective guards. (37)

That the approach to Religious Studies has been imbalanced, devoting more energy to the collection than to the correlation, assimilation and evaluation of facts, is shown by such remarks as that of Haydon's, when, summarizing his review of the study of religion in the first quarter of this century, he says,

the work of twenty five years seen ever so superficially, is impressive. (But) valuable as it has been, great areas of facts, patiently won, remain mere dead materials without a soul. (38)

Likewise Bleeker notes that although

our knowledge of the religions of the world yearly increases in extent and refinement ... this does not mean that our understanding of the innermost of these religions is proceeding in the same proportion. There are still many blind spots on the map of our insight. (39)

And the cause of such deadness, of such blind spots on the map, can be identified as the absence of due attention to method, to a lack of procedure which would give point to the mere collecting of data.

Maguire talks of the "paralyzing but sometimes lurid
amount of detail which has been accumulated in the past century" (40) and goes on to note that although there is no doubt that one could browse endlessly and with great interest in these huge mounds of unclassified information (41) the question is,

as Cardinal Newman once remarked about 'stuffing birds' and 'playing string instruments', 'these may be elegant pastimes, but are they education?' Are there any significant conclusions or valuable insights to be gained from delving into this part of the human record? (42)

According to Maguire, the answer is "a resounding yes". (43) Our own reply would be more cautious and qualified, a "yes" providing that we do not let the sheer extent of the information paralyze our ability to reach conclusions about it, so long as we do not let the facts of religion forever postpone attempts to establish its truth or falsity and how its teachings might affect our own lives, so long as we do not render understanding subordinate to accumulation. I would suggest that for the religionist to circumnavigate such questions of truth and relevance to his own life would be like a desert explorer who studies a fantastic oasis from a distance, but, although aware of both possibilities, refuses to move forward to see whether it is real or a mirage. Sooner or later he is bound to get thirsty. Moreover, seeing he is an explorer, others are likely to come and ask him if there is water at the oasis or if it is just an illusion. If all he can do is endlessly describe it, then surely he has in some way seriously failed in his chosen
profession. Just as philosophy, which was once seen as "the soul's search for salvation"\(^{(44)}\) or as a way "to find release from the torments and perplexities of life"\(^{(45)}\) can "never quite divest itself of these aboriginal claims" despite "the historical fate of specialization"\(^{(46)}\) which has befallen it, so the study of religion, no matter how academic and specialized it becomes, can never escape from the fact that, at the end of the day, it is dealing with an area to which many look to find answers to the fundamental question of the meaning of life.

Unless the bombardment with religious information is carefully controlled and directed, a feeling of over exposure can result, leaving one intellectually shell shocked and uncertain how to proceed. Faced with all the movements and voices which claim to be acting out his (and the world's) story upon the various stages of the great religions, it would be strange indeed if the twentieth century man aware of this diversity were not to be shaken and perplexed by the bewildering variety of possible religious outlooks with which his time presents him. Somehow he must make sense of the myriad of different reflections staring back at him from the hall of mirrors which his study of religions has unearthed, flickering and numinous, beyond the increasingly inadequate single-tradition outlook. The need for stabilizing guidelines, for some sort of procedure which can suggest how sense can be made of this immensely problematic cache of religious data, is clear. It is the aim of this thesis to provide such guidelines, showing how we may at least begin to see clearly in this complex and confusing spiritual
environment. And since the problems implicit in this environment can be observed at their most obviously problematic and intense within that stream of thought which has been largely responsible for creating it, for bringing it clearly and pressingly to the surface of our consciousness, it is on it, namely on the self conscious and deliberate study of religion, that I will chiefly focus here. But at the same time we must bear in mind throughout that the problems we are dealing with are often logically and historically prior to any systematized academic gathering of religious information, such an activity simply brings them into sharper focus.

(v) World Uncertainty and World Certainty in the Hall of Mirrors

I have suggested that the situation in which I am depicting the religionist might be concisely illustrated by comparing it to that of the man who finds himself in a hall of mirrors. In this section I want to consider this analogy more closely, attempting to bring to the surface the assumptions which underlie the view it expresses and the questions which automatically arise from such a perspective as it gives.

To begin with, though, let us sketch out the analogy in a little more detail:

Imagine a man in search of his true reflection walking into a hall of mirrors. At first, fascinated by the colourful variety of the images which he sees, he concentrates all his efforts on making an accurate descriptive catalogue
of them. But after a while he becomes dissatisfied and confused by such an activity, for the knowledge of a diversity of pictures renders increasingly problematic that search for his true reflection with which he is so fundamentally concerned (whether or not this was the motivating reason behind his entering the hall of mirrors in the first place). He does not simply want to know how his existence might be viewed, although becoming acquainted with the possibilities here is an essential accompaniment to his central — if not originally recognized — desideratum (in fact discovering the extent of the possibilities is an important way in which he may become aware of his central concern), he wants rather to discover which, if any, of the identities confronting him reflects a true picture. Thus, unless he can find some means of evaluation and decision, he risks becoming so dazzled and mesmerized by the sheer variety of the images which surround him that he will be unsure whether to go further forward into the hall of mirrors, uncomfortable with his present position and unable simply to go back and leave by the way in which he came (unless he is prepared to adopt a policy of deliberate ignorance and just closes his eyes). Even supposing that he entered the hall of mirrors with a clear idea of who and where he was, continued exposure to alternative ideas is bound to make him review — and perhaps doubt — his original opinion. It is not as if he were surrounded by a repeating series of agreements with his own outlook which might act as a cumulative reinforcement of his self image. Rather he is confronted with what, at first sight anyway, appear to be widely
differing views which automatically place a question mark against the correctness of any particular view he may happen to espouse.

In such a situation of unsettling diversity, a paralyzing uncertainty - occasioned by the existence of so many "unresolved" alternatives - may begin seriously to threaten his sense of identity, rendering him progressively less sure just who or where he is and for what (if any) reason he is there. Each mirror tells a different story, which one is he to believe? (Or are they all just misleading fictions?). Thus, in a profound and disturbing way, the man in the hall of mirrors may come to doubt how he ought to conduct his life (beyond the most rudimentary level of acts geared to his animal comfort and survival). At the same time, however, supposing he were able to discover some reliable means of evaluation, there is the possibility that his sense of meaning and certainty (his picture of self and situation) would be vastly strengthened, being rendered more cogent and comprehensive - through the very process of intense reflection needed to abstract, or perhaps construct, it from the multiple "options" available - than an uncontestable (and thus to some extent inevitably unexamined) outlook could claim to be. The hall of mirrors increases the potential both for uncertainty and for certainty.

In a like manner the religionist finds that a purely descriptive approach to his subject matter, whilst absorbing for a while simply in terms of the intrinsic interest of the phenomena with which it deals, cannot in the end bear the full burden of his natural concern with religion, and if
relied on exclusively to do so will eventually result in a situation of perplexity concerning which religious outlook, if any, offers a true account of human existence. Even if he begins his studies with a clear commitment to one particular religious outlook, the confrontation with diverse plurality is bound to call such singularity in question. He may, of course, continue to hold to it, but to do so in such a situation with any degree of intellectual credibility demands a careful clarification of its relationship to - and/or merits over and above - all other religious points of view. We might consider the mono-religiously informed individual to be a man who has looked at his reflection in one mirror only, whereas the poly-religiously informed individual has seen himself - and the world he lives in - in the various mirrors constituted by the religions of the world. (Though at the same time we must remember that even within what we label single "mirrors" - Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, etc. many images can usually be seen.) From either of these informational backgrounds (i.e. from mono or poly religious informedness) a commitment may arise - whether to some specific tradition (Islam, Judaism, Jainism, etc.) or to some non-religious stance (atheism, Marxism, etc.). I would suggest that the religiously responsible individual must seek to found his commitment (whatever form it may take) upon a basis of poly rather than mono religious informedness. If he does not, it is difficult to see how it could survive in a situation of many alternative possibilities.
Let us neither exaggerate or minimize the extent and consequences of a situation of perceived religious plurality where the individual finds a series of mirrors reflecting diverse pictures of himself and the world in which he finds himself.

As to its extent: I have already suggested that Religious Studies may be considered as a concern of Everyman rather than simply as an academic discipline, though clearly in its academic manifestations it will tend to operate at a level of specialization which may obscure this fundamental grounding(47). This does not mean, however, that the hall of mirrors situation is one which everyone will encounter. For many people today commitment (whether in terms of acceptance or rejection) still stems from the mono-religiousness inherent in their culture. Relatively few are brought into seriously detailed contact with a situation of religious optionality. Moreover, an awareness of diversity, a state of poly-religious informedness, is something which tends to be intellectual in emphasis. No matter how wide our knowledge of a perplexing diversity may be, we still live in cultures (or in social groups within cultures) which are predominantly singular in terms of weltanschauung. At the same time, however, there does seem to be a growing inevitability, at both an intellectual and a lived level, about encountering a diversity of belief. Intellectually, simply because it seems inadequate to deliberate about the ultimate end and destiny of man from a standpoint which holds only two basic options (that of advocating or rejecting the
predominant indigenous world outlook) when we are learning increasingly more about other outlooks. Whilst at the level of day to day life (at least in the Western world) there is a growing tendency towards racial and religious variation in populations. Thus in the general context of "modernity" Peter Berger has drawn attention to "the multiplication of options" facing man today. Indeed he suggests that "modern consciousness entails a movement from fate to choice." More specifically as regards the British context, John Hick has recently identified a "new Pluralism" which he suggests will be "a permanent aspect of Britain's future" so that, especially in urban areas, we are going to have to live in a society which numbers Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Jews among its already Christian and post-Christian members.

As for its consequences: I have suggested that in the hall of mirrors, in a state of perceived religious diversity, the potential both for uncertainty and for certainty is increased. We might, perhaps, say that the religionist's work involves him in a situation where the possibilities of encountering danger and of achieving safety are heightened at the same time. Turning first to the dangers, it is quite possible that the religionist may find that his acquaintance with a series of religious outlooks may lead to a situation where he comes to doubt all that he once took for granted. If this doubt involves rejection of his original views, without any replacement of them, then clearly he will be subject to a definite sense of insecurity and vulnerability, his sense of meaning will be challenged by the possibility of
utter meaninglessness. Such an individual may become "spiritually dispossessed" (54) and in that case may be spoken of as having "lost his world" (55). As Anselm Strauss has pointed out,

> this is tantamount to saying that his commitments - to significant others and to himself - have been tremendously weakened. When a man questions his central purposes, he is asking himself: to what, for what, to whom am I committed. (56)

And it is precisely such "central purposes" which a poly-religious informedness may call in doubt. On the other hand (turning now to the increased possibility of achieving safety) the religionist may of course maintain his original outlook or adopt a new "world" of meaning. But in either case, supposing this commitment is made with a full awareness of - and as an adequate response to - the relevant options, his central purposes will be rendered clearer and more cogent than before, since selecting and/or defending a specifiable option necessitates a subtle and extensive process of clarifying apologetic which could not be expected to accompany a commitment made from a standpoint of mono-religiousness (57). Looked at in these terms it becomes clear that our nomenclature of danger/safety is simplistic, if not actually misleading, for without the investigative process demanded by the hall of mirrors our religious outlooks are not so much endangered as unexamined. Perhaps it would be more accurate to envisage the ideal course of a religious biography as that which moves from naivete through educating doubt and reflection to a standpoint of informed certainty.
The view of things summarized in the hall of mirrors analogy rests on two important assumptions. Firstly, that the religionist is in search of a meaning for his life, and, secondly, that the religions offer to provide such a meaning. Since these assumptions are the main points of reference according to which the whole orientation of this thesis has been set, and since the first one at least seems somewhat open to question, it will be worth our while to examine them more closely. It is not my intention to attempt to justify them in any sort of absolute sense as exclusively definitive, as the only terms in which religion and religionist may be properly considered. However, I hope that in the course of the chapters which follow it will become clear that they do offer an accurate and insightful perspective on which to base our inquiry.

The assumption that the religionist is in search of a meaning for his life does not necessarily entail any of the following presuppositions:

- That the conscious reason behind his choice of Religious Studies as a discipline was determined by his desire to find a meaning for life.

- That in order to embark on Religious Studies he must have been without any firm commitment to a scheme of meaning, i.e. that he cannot set out as a Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, atheist etc. but only as one who has as yet made no commitment to any world of meaning.

- That Religious Studies is the best way to look for the meaning of life.
- That there is in fact some meaning to be found.

What it does entail is that the religionist (like everyone else) is subject to that state of mind which feels the need for some sort of overall sense-giving account of things and that such a need is affected (or awakened) by an acquaintance with a diversity of those accounts which it seeks. As Victor Frankl has put it,

man is dominated neither by the will-to-pleasure nor by the will-to-power, but by the will-to-meaning, (by) his deep seated striving and struggle for a meaning to his existence. (58)

And, in similar vein, William Sheldon has suggested that

deeper and more fundamental than sexuality, deeper than the craving for social power, deeper even than the desire for possessions, there is still a more generalized and universal craving for knowledge of the right direction — for orientation. (59)

At one level such a state of mind might be said to satisfy its desire for orientation and meaning by scientific endeavour, but at the level with which we are concerned the desire is pitched at an ultimate level, seeking guiding and comforting certitude for human existence as such, whose sense will hold firm in any situation however extreme or nonsensical it may appear to be. Such sense-giving certitude will, for example, be able to include without strain the facts of death, loneliness, suffering etc. within its scheme of meaning. (60). As Kolakowski says,

This search has little to do with the progress of science or technology. Its background is religious rather than intellectual......it is a desire to live in a world out of which contingency is banned, where sense (and this means purpose) is given to everything.
Science is incapable of providing us with that kind of certitude, and it is unlikely that people could ever give up their attempts to go beyond scientific rationality. (61)

The assumption that the religionist is in search of a meaning for his life involves seeing him as susceptible to the needs of this kind of certitude and, moreover, seeing such susceptibility as endemic to the human situation and liable to find expression throughout an individual's life, as opposed to taking it as something which may be completely and finally satisfied in a once and for all fashion. There are, however, importantly different levels for the frequency and intensity of its expression according to the presence or absence in a life of a decision of commitment regarding ultimate purpose. Thus (saving some sort of crisis of faith) the sense that there is something pervasively perplexing and challenging to any notion of meaning about the world will arise in a less critical way for the Hindu, Buddhist or Christian (or indeed for the atheist or Marxist) than for the reflective individual outwith any such specific scheme of meaning (62).

But to suggest that for the self confessed believer such a sense does not arise at all would be to rob such outlooks of all sense of wonder and mystery, which, whether or not consistent with the doctrinal certitudes they might hold to, would do violence to an important and irreducible element of the human psyche.

This thesis is addressed primarily to (and written from the standpoint of) the religionist for whom the knowledge of a range of diverse ultimate meanings constitutes
a serious problem and creates an acute sense of "spiritual
dispossession", a sense for whose occurrence the academic
study of religions may have been responsible in whole or in
part. However, given the range of a feeling of pervasive
perplexity about religion, it is to be hoped that what
follows will be of more widespread interest than that which
could be claimed solely by the specific point of view of its
author(63). I will refer to that state of mind in which it
is felt that the nature and meaning of existence is
seriously problematic as "world uncertainty", to the
effective (but not total or irreversible) resolution of
this sense as the discovery of "world certainty", and to
the movement between former and latter states as making a
"world decision". Whether or not all world certainties
must be considered religious is not a matter I wish to go
into here, suffice it to say that I will restrict my
attention to world certainties which are expressed in those
systems traditionally thought of as such. Moreover,
although acknowledging that even from a standpoint of having
made a world decision an awareness of perplexity still
exists (though not in so critical a fashion as for the world
uncertain man) I will assume, in the interests of brevity,
that this qualification is taken as read. Thus in the
following pages I will present world uncertainty and world
certainty as if they were simply attitudes of question and
answer (in an ultimate sense) taken about human existence.
It is also important to bear in mind throughout that making
a "world decision" may involve the rejection rather than the
acceptance of a religious scheme of meaning. Such a decision
has to do with the act of commitment, not with the content of the point of view decisively adopted.

The second basic assumption made by the hall of mirrors analogy is that the religions offer to provide a meaning for life. This is, I think, much less controversial than the claim that the religionist is in search of a meaning. Without at this stage wishing to suggest any strict definition, we might nonetheless offer as a straightforward and general rejoinder to any objection voiced against this assumption the simple question, "If religions do not offer purposive designs for living then what do they do?" We ought, however, to point out that such an assumption does not entail presupposing that any of the meanings offered by the various religions is in fact the "correct" meaning, or that human existence admits of any purpose or explanation outside of a purely mundane and everyday context, or that religion is exhaustively defined by pointing to its provision of world certainties (this is a fundamentally important feature of religion, but its stress on the ontological must not be allowed to obscure other "dimensions" - mythological, social, etc. - which are also displayed).

A further assumption implicit in the analogy is that the religions offer different schemes of meaning or world certainty. Whether or not (or to what extent) they do in fact differ from each other is not a matter which can be decided at the outset of our studies. The assumption of difference is one made on first entering the hall of mirrors (or on our first perceiving its existence), whether or not
it will remain at the end of our deliberations remains to be seen.

As to the questions which automatically arise from the perspective offered by the hall of mirrors analogy, these are three in number:

1. How is the religionist to go about deciding which, if any, of the world certainties offered by the various religions is true?

2. What causes this situation of religious diversity in the first place? Why are there many world certainties rather than one? (For not only is the religionist faced with a knowledge of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic etc. outlooks and a consequent intellectual/spiritual obligation to arrive at some sort of evaluative conclusion regarding the world certainties which they proclaim, but he is also faced with the question of why there is a range rather than a concurrence of opinion.)

3. To what extent are religions accessible to study? (His third question does not occur immediately, but arises as a result of his attempts to answer the other two\(^{(65)}\).

These three queries I refer to as the "primary questions" of the religionist and it is to them that the following chapters are addressed\(^{(66)}\).

(vi) Summary

In a sense this introduction begins and ends with a summary, for the two chapter epigraphs which I quoted at the outset sum up the two main points I have tried to make, and now, in conclusion, I want to clarify the connection
between them and the foregoing discussion. Firstly, I tried to show how the question "why study the study of religion rather than actually studying it?" can arise from a mistaken view of religion and Religious Studies as wholly separate activities, a view which fosters and is fostered by the "bisectionist" reading of the relationship between method and material, neutrality and commitment, belief and understanding, and so on. By concentrating on an attack of this view, specifically as regards its reading of the method/material relationship, I hope to have demonstrated why (in Cook's words) we ought not "to think of confining religion itself, the study of religion, or any other subject of thought in a watertight compartment", and thus to have established that in focusing on method or procedure I am not simply dealing with a distant theoretical meta-subject. Secondly, in answering the question "why study this particular aspect in the field of religion rather than any other?" I pointed to a common contemporary religious environment (one in which the religionist is almost inevitably placed) and suggested that it is characterized by a glut of unmapped and unordered information, which, left in this state, threatens to paralyze our thinking about religion. The endeavour to discover guidelines and establish a "way through", to find a method of approach which does not simply add to the accumulation of data but suggests how it is to be explored and evaluated with minimal confusion, thus satisfies Butler's criterion of academic necessity ("never learn anything until you find you have been made uncomfortable for a good long while by not knowing it").
the subject as a whole (and I as an individual religionist) have been made intellectually uncomfortable quite long enough by the decision-less accumulation of information.

To sum up in more specific terms: taking "world certainty" as an important characteristic of all religions (meaning by this term a comprehensive and prescriptive view which claims knowledge of the ultimate nature of the world and suggests the way in which human life should be lived in accordance with that knowledge), and taking "world uncertainty" (i.e. an unsureness about these issues) as a natural and recurring condition of homo religiosus, I suggest that the traditional non-judgmental approach which subordinates evaluation to impartiality, and which has been favoured by the History and Phenomenology of Religions, must not be continued indefinitely. If it is to take seriously such fundamental features of its subject matter and its students as I argue world certainty and world uncertainty are, then the study of religions cannot be adequately defined by a "neutral" methodology which preaches personal non-involvement in its own findings. The History and Phenomenology of Religions type approach provides an indispensable descriptive prolegomena by means of which the central problems of Religious Studies as a whole may be staked out, but its work constitutes an initial stage rather than the final goal of the religionist's inquiry. Although not wishing to suggest that they state without remainder these central problems of the study of religion, I would suggest that in dealing with the three primary questions facing the multi-religiously informed man we at least begin to sketch out the sort of
territory which such problems occupy.

I am not, then, concerned with making a direct contribution to the straightforwardly factual and descriptive side of the subject. Rather, my discussion assumes sufficient acquaintance with the vast collection of data about religions (mostly accumulated over the last century or so) for the religionist to feel more concerned with the implications of his multi-religious informedness than with simply adding further to it\(^{(67)}\). Given his nature as \textit{homo religiosus} susceptible to world uncertainty and desirous of world certainty, and given the nature of his subject as providing various suggestions concerning that world certainty which he desires, the religionist seems to be precariously poised between doubt and certainty, between the risk of a complete loss of meaning (or a clinging to some ill-examined meaning) and the security of a creatively reflective world decision. It is towards effecting this latter outcome that we must strive.
The hardest thing of all is to see what is really there.

J.A. Baker: *The Peregrine*

To remain immune in the presence of dominant philosophies is especially difficult for the student of religions.

A.E. Haydon: *Twenty Five Years of History of Religion*
The Plan of This Chapter

Faced with information about the vast range of world certainties offered by the religious experience of mankind, the religionist must begin his search for answers to those primary questions which such a situation poses, by deciding how he can see clearly what is there, or how, in other words, he can establish exactly what each of these world certainties involves. Until he finds some such means he cannot hope to tell whether his dilemma, as presented in the hall of mirrors analogy, is real or illusory - for perhaps beneath their cultural and linguistic forms the religions are essentially the same and in fact offer only a single world certainty - nor can he hope to shift his intellectual/spiritual position from one of mere informedness about a situation of religious optionality to one of effective critical assessment concerning which, if any, option it is best for him to take - since no reliable evaluation can be reached until we have a clear picture of just what we are evaluating. He must look again at the accumulated data of his discipline, but this time with a more self-conscious, critical and reflective gaze than that which was used in collecting it. This is by no means an easy undertaking, indeed it is with a view to stressing its difficulty that I preface the chapter with a quotation from Baker's The Peregrine, a statement based on a ten year period of observing something much less complex and elusive than religion.

In this chapter I want to consider what possible directions of sight are open to the religionist in terms of
discovering a potential route by following which he may initiate the required move from a situation of mesmerization to one of evaluation and decision. My consideration of the possible directions which plot out the available orientations which the religionist's inquiries could follow, will proceed by way of a discussion of the phenomenology of religion, since this stream of thought seems to suggest itself as the most obvious methodological candidate for the task in hand. Although we will in fact end up by sidestepping the paths it offers (or following them in a different guise) because of the considerable terminological confusion endemic in this whole area of discourse, phenomenology of religion is nonetheless a good starting point for our inquiries, since it helps us to identify clearly those basic methodological directions along which our endeavours could map out their course. (This chapter is concerned merely with enumerating those basic possibilities, it is not until Chapter Three that we suggest which of these directions our inquiries should take if we are to escape from the hall of mirrors.)

Given this strategy of looking at possible methodological orientations via the phenomenology of religion, the question naturally arises: "If we are looking for a way of seeing what is there (this being taken as the first step in any methodology) then why are we going to consider phenomenology of religion in particular"? (for, as we will soon see, it is still a somewhat unclear area and one from which, moreover, much of the descriptive/factual (i.e. mesmerizing) data of Religious Studies seems to have come).
Why not examine theology or philosophy of religion instead, for are they too not attempts to do just this – to see clearly what is there – and much better and more clearly established attempts than phenomenology?

In answer to this objection I would point again to the general focus of this thesis: I am interested in the religionist as man in search of meaning rather than as philosopher, theologian etc. and, quite simply, phenomenology – despite all its confusion – seems compatible with this very basic level of inquiry, whereas philosophy of religion, theology, and so on, do not. Now this may seem an eccentric (if not erroneous) claim to make given the level of intellectual subtlety and linguistic technicality reached by many phenomenologists. Surely, one might argue, far from operating at a level of fundamentality, their work is done at the furthest and most abstract theoretical pitch of abstruse specialization. Undoubtedly the results of phenomenology often issue in accounts of the most complex and difficult nature, but this does not take away from the fact that phenomenology seems to be designed to be methodologically simple, to operate at a level of pre-theoretical naivete which precedes the other disciplinary approaches. For phenomenology (and by extension phenomenology of religion) is concerned with beginnings in a much more thoroughgoing and radical sense than any of the other modes of research, and it is this sense of beginnings which makes it of particular interest to the pre-philosophical, pre-theological world uncertain man⁽¹⁾.
This is an important theme which will recur again in the course of our reflections, and, even at the cost of appearing to digress, it is worth noting some of its more basic features now.

The need to return to beginnings, to somehow start again, to discover the source, the origin, to get back to some utterly simple and initial level where there is no possible confusion, doubt or falsehood, at which we may remain in (or from which we may progress to) a state of being which is clear, authentic, true - which satisfies us in some way that our existence before such a return failed to do - is, I would argue, a basic human impulse.

Such a need can find expression on a variety of planes. Indeed it would make an interesting study to trace the different forms in which it has appeared in the course of history. On the intellectual level, for example, Descartes determined to rid himself of all the uncertain opinions and beliefs he had formerly held, and then to start out again from a foundation of incorrigible knowledge. While, on a more practically tangible level, Henry David Thoreau shed the conventional material luxuries and burdens of human society and went to live in a simple wooden hut which he had built himself in the woods at Walden - this because he wished to concern himself only with the fundamental essentials of life as he thought they occurred in nature. Combining both physical and mental aspects of this need for renewal, for a return to (or a discovery of) some absolutely real and essential source, is the Hindu concept of the sannyasin, who divests himself of all material goods,
and then, hopefully aided by this practical parallel, engages in rigorous meditative exercises in an attempt to slough off all the superficial layers of personality, so, eventually, to arrive at the real self, the Atman. Doubtless parallels to such an endeavour could be found in most religions (though probably in less explicitly codified forms), for the need for new beginnings, to be in some sense "born again", often finds expression in an explicitly religious sense.

Of course this type of procedure suggests a prior state of confusion or dissatisfaction. With Descartes it was the realization that his whole structure of knowledge was susceptible to radical doubt; with Thoreau it was a disenchantment with the concerns of ordinary mundane life in a middle class urban setting, a conviction that such concerns were peripheral, in some sense of only superficial value; with the sannyasin it is the belief that this world and our empirical selves are of only secondary reality, and that in order to discover what is really real we must penetrate through the mayic illusion of ultimacy with which, through our ignorance, they surround us.

The state of discontentment and confusion which prompts the feeling that a return to beginnings is needed in the study of religions (a feeling to which this thesis is a response) is constituted by that situation which I have characterized in Chapter One as similar to being within a mesmerizing hall of mirrors where the sheer diversity of religious information threatens to dazzle and confound the
observer, eventually making him want to take a step back and view things afresh before he formulates any response. Although in one sense the phenomenological trend in Religious Studies has been responsible for much of the confounding information now available about religions, in another sense phenomenology would seem to offer ways of "breaking the spell" and allowing us to see clearly, where theology, philosophy of religion, and so on, seem to offer no such option of radical review. They are concerned more with discussing problems inherent in the data, rather than with reconsidering the data and our means of collecting it in the first place. (This is, of course, a very rough and ready division of disciplinary labour and in fact we will often be heavily dependent on insights derived from work done in philosophy, theology and other relevant disciplines. However, at the outset, our focus would seem to be most appropriately set on phenomenology.)

Bearing in mind that our basic concern is now with the religionist's first primary question, i.e. to discover how he might go about deciding which image in the hall of mirrors (if any) shows his and the world's true reflection - and that our first step towards an answer is to identify ways in which he could see clearly what is there - the chapter will proceed as follows:

Section (ii) will give a bird's eye view of the current state of phenomenology of religion, drawing attention in particular to two somewhat incongruous characteristics which it displays - namely, confusion concerning what precisely is
meant by phenomenology of religion and the belief that in it (whatever it may be) lies a vitally important element for the religionist's methodology.

Section (iii) will attempt to resolve the confusion surrounding phenomenology of religion by seeking (via a consideration of its historical development) a single normative sense to show what it really means and thus to establish what is and what is not phenomenology of religion.

Section (iv) will try to bring order to the confusion by identifying different senses of what phenomenology of religion could be considered to be. It is here that the three senses of "see" (i.e. possible methodological orientations according to which the religionist might seek to direct his inquiries) will first emerge.

Section (v) will consider various specific exercises in phenomenology of religion according to which of these possible orientations they might be considered to "enact".

Section (vi) will list some alternative categorizations which also seek to bring ordering sense to the confusion in this area.

Section (vii) will sum up the findings of this chapter.

(ii) The Phenomenology of Religion:
a (Promising) Confusion Observed

Anyone who desires to find out what a phenomenology of religion is, and how it is applied, will find the search a frustrating experience. (2)

Thus Hans Penner ominously remarks at the outset of his discussion on whether or not such an activity can be said to constitute a method for the study of religion. His
comment draws our attention to one of the few points of general agreement within an area where opinion tends otherwise to vary enormously, for the frustration stems simply from the difficulty in pinning down precisely what the phenomenology of religion is, and it is almost unanimously agreed that this is indeed a highly problematic task. Not that we are without statements in the literature purporting to tell us exactly what it is. To take a selective sample, we are variously told that:

The phenomenology of religion is ... the systematic study of forms of religion, that part of religious research which classifies and systematically investigates religious conceptions, rites and myth traditions from comparative morphological typological points of view. In principle the phenomenology of religion is identical with the older term "comparative religion". (3)

Phenomenology of religion is the systematic treatment of history of religion. That is to say, its task is to classify and group the numerous and widely divergent data in such a way that an over all view can be obtained of their religious content and the religious values they contain. (4)

The phenomenology of religion attempts to obtain a view over all the statements on the religious significance of man, in order to get an insight into the religious problems which are connected with the nature and destiny of man in general. (5)

Phenomenology studies religion through the unprejudiced and accurate analysis of the manner in which the religious consciousness manifests itself subjectively in each individual. (6)

Rather than any embarrassing silence, it is the sheer number of conflicting voices and consequently incompatible exercises
carried out under the same heading which so perplexes us. (Exercises as various as investigating the religious problems of man's nature and destiny, analyzing the subjective manifestations of a religious sense in consciousness, conducting a systematic treatment of the history of religion in an attempt to arrive at an overview, and simply doing comparative religion under a new - and equally unclear - name). As Sharpe has remarked, sometimes it seems that even the scholars who use this term and claim to apply this method to their work, are not always sure as to its precise definition. (7)

Perhaps, considering the wide variety of settings within which it is used, we might agree with his contention that "in potential scope and ambiguity"(8) the term "phenomenology of religion" now equals the position once held by "comparative religion". Indeed, like Klostermaier, we may begin to suspect that the phenomenology of religion is no more than "a cover up for methodological confusion"(9). Or we might even want to go as far as Davis and conclude that

the term "phenomenology of religion" has no clear meaning and is better dropped because of misleading associations. It could be kept simply to refer historically to a number of writers who have used it. (10)

Interestingly, though, despite the realization that phenomenology of religion is currently in a somewhat nebulous and confused state, many scholars advocate it as the method for Religious Studies. Thus, for example, we find Hultkrantz confessing in one breath that "the
term 'phenomenology of religion' is not... entirely clear" (11), indeed that "interpretations of what we ought to understand by this term differ at the very root" (12) and that "off hand it is difficult to give a general acceptable definition of what the phenomenology of religion really is" (13), yet in the next assuring us that "in the long run it must be the phenomenological religious comprehension of the world of religions to which all empirical religious research will endeavour to aspire" (14). Uncharitably, we might query the intelligibility of advocating as the best mode of future empirical religious research a method about whose meaning we are as yet far from clear. Taking a more charitable, and, I think, a more reasonable view, we might note that there does seem to be a fairly widespread feeling that, although as yet insufficiently codified, phenomenology looks potentially promising for the study of religion. Promising enough for a scholar of Raffaele Pettazzoni's standing to suggest that

phenomenology represents the most important innovation which has come about in the realm of our studies during the last half century. (15)

Of course it may be that this feeling of promise arises simply because of phenomenology's being overtly methodological in what is overwise very largely a methodological wilderness. Whether such an optimistic feeling is simply due to methodological starvation or can be traced to something in the actual content of phenomenology of religion, I will endeavour to establish here. Unfortunately the mixture of present confusion with high valuation and future
hopes, results in a strange combination of actual practice (such and such is a concrete example of the phenomenology of religion in action); description (the phenomenology of religion is such and such); prophecy (the phenomenology of religion will be such and such); and programmatic proposals (the phenomenology of religion should be such and such).

This varied focus on what the phenomenology of religion is, will or ought to be, serves to multiply our confusion and makes it somewhat difficult to predict just what will be contained within a work which has "phenomenology of religion" as, or incorporated in, the title.

In the face of such widespread uncertainty about the nature of phenomenological research, how are we to assess its suitability as a means of studying religion? Can it provide us with a reliable mode of intellectual seeing which could help us out of the perplexity of the hall of mirrors, or does it perhaps stand in the way of religious phenomena, distracting our view from them by demanding that we attend to the problems of its own methodological structure, rather than being able actually to use that structure to good effect (like the telescope we pick up and find we need to work out some complicated puzzle before its lens ceases to be opaque)? Why is there such confusion about the phenomenology of religion, and how, despite this, can it nonetheless appear to many religionists to be an appealing method of research?

If we encounter a disagreement in the use of some unfamiliar word, our first step might reasonably be to consult a dictionary in the hope either that a sufficiently
clear cut single meaning might emerge as normative, or that we might find a spectrum of possible meanings which granted each conflicting use a sense of its own, thus removing the original disagreement by showing it to be only apparent, not real. For example, suppose we were unfamiliar with the meaning of the word "sun" and heard one person talking about the sun as the gravitational centre of our planetary system, another about the wooden sun he keeps in his living room, and a third using it as a verb (saying something like "He suns books in the library"), then if we consulted a dictionary we would discover that only the first speaker was giving us an example of the word's proper use and that the others were talking nonsense, for no figurative or metaphorical sense could account for their absurd divergence from the literal meaning. If, on the other hand, we were unfamiliar with the meaning of the word "bat" and heard three different people using it in three apparently incompatible ways, one talking about cricket bats, another about small night flying mammals called bats, and the third talking about someone not batting an eyelid, then if we consulted a dictionary on the matter it would become clear that there are three quite different senses of the word and that the use of "bat" in either the context of cricket or mammology or eyelids was equally intelligible.

Similarly, if we are uncertain about the nature of an intellectual movement such as the phenomenology of religion, we might well expect to find clarifying information by looking at the course of its development, in the hope of discovering either that some clear original sense emerges
which may be used as a standard against which all later claimed manifestations can be measured, or that several quite different senses have emerged, each with their own independent set of characteristics. In other words we can attempt to resolve the confusion surrounding phenomenology of religion by taking a single or plural focus and looking either for one standard meaning or for several different but equally legitimate senses. I will employ these two strategies of resolving the confusion in turn.

(iii) Resolving the Confusion About Phenomenology of Religion (a) Single Focus

Little direct light is cast on the "true nature" either of phenomenology or phenomenology of religion, in terms of establishing a single veridical focus, by an examination of their history. Obviously I cannot hope to trace out any exhaustive historical picture of them here. Such an exercise, though undoubtedly valuable, would simply not serve my present purpose. I will instead give just the barest outline (16) in an attempt to show how such an exercise cannot really resolve the current situation, since no single, normative, original sense of "phenomenology" can be found which would be capable of serving as the standard against which all subsequent phenomenologies could be measured.

The first recorded use of the term "phenomenology" seems to have been in Johann Heinrich Lambert's Neues Organon, published in 1764, where it meant the theory of illusion, "phenomenon" being taken as referring to the illusory features of human existence. Kant used the word only twice,
but nonetheless, as Schmitt points out, he gave it a new and broader sense in the distinction he made between noumena (things as they are in themselves) and phenomena (things as we perceive them). In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel argued against Kant's contention that in a world viewed according to his twofold distinction we can only know phenomena, suggesting instead that the mind can in fact be aware of itself as noumenon. Hegel used "phenomenology" to refer to the process by which such an awareness was reached. By the mid nineteenth century "phenomenon" was widely understood as being simply synonymous with "fact", and it was in this sense that, for example, Von Hartmann used it in his *Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness* (1878), "phenomenology" here simply indicating a descriptive approach to his topic.

However, with Husserl's appropriation of the term in the early 1900s, we can, I think, discount earlier usages as irrelevant in any search for a standard meaning of "phenomenology" from which the various versions of "phenomenology of religion" currently in use derive their meaning. For, as Dorian Cairns has, I think rightly, observed, Husserl's use of "phenomenology" has "largely determined the senses commonly attached to it and cognate words in the twentieth century". And it is for this reason also that the early pedigree of the term "phenomenology of religion" (in as much as it has a history which is separable from that of phenomenology) is today of little more than antiquarian interest. For the record, we might
note that it is now generally agreed that the term "phenomenology of religion" was first used by Chantepie de la Saussaye in his Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte (1887) where he suggests that

the phenomenology of religion is most clearly connected with psychology, in so far as it deals with facts of human consciousness. (19)

Van der Leeuw's assertion that de Brosses rather than de la Saussaye may be considered the starting point here is, as Sharpe points out, "a little far fetched"(20).

That the term "phenomenology" pre-dates Husserl is not disputed, but in its early history it "seems to have been invented several times independently"(21), so that it is difficult to locate any single founder or fundamentally authoritative original sense, and, taken alone, the term "phenomenology", as Ricoeur points out, is "not very illuminating"(22), for, since the word simply means "science of appearances or of appearings"(23),

any inquiry or work devoted to the way anything whatsoever appears is already phenomenology. (24)

However, Bochenski draws our attention to the fact that none of the early writers used "phenomenology" to denote a method of thought as did Husserl(25), and it is in this sense that it is pertinent to Religious Studies, for the various phenomenologies of religion which we encounter are - in spite of their differences - attempting to formulate a clear cut method for the study of religion. For the modern mind, then, it would appear that "phenomenology" is primarily
connected not with Johann Heinrich Lambert or Chantepie de la Saussaye but with Edmund Husserl, and the methodological sense which he gave the term is that which has most influenced current usage.

Having identified in the thought of Husserl what appears to be the locus of the originative (if not original) meaning of phenomenology, our task of resolving the confusion now current about it in Religious Studies would seem to be relatively straightforward. For surely all that remains to be done, in our attempt to establish what the phenomenology of religion really is, is to embark on a process of "match and mis-match" between Husserl's concept of phenomenology and how various scholars have applied it to the study of religion, accepting as true phenomenologists those who adhere to a strictly Husserlian programme, rejecting those who do not. The situation is not, however, so easily straightforward as this programme envisages. In fact the attempt to establish some kind of Husserlian norm as a reference point by which we may establish the nature of phenomenology of religion is thwarted by at least three important considerations.

Firstly, and quite simply, some phenomenologists of religion clearly disassociate their work from anything to do with Husserl. Bleeker is perhaps the best example here, stating quite explicitly that when he speaks of "phenomenology" he has in mind something "which differs totally from the well known philosophy of Husserl" (26). (And he represents a large section of opinion in Religious Studies here rather than expressing an isolated idiosyncracy. Thus
in his painstaking review of a century of phenomenology of religion in the Netherlands, Waardenburg claims that there is no real connection between the work of the scholars involved - he lists Tiele, de la Saussaye, Kristensen, Van der Leeuw, Hidding and Van Baaren, as well as Bleeker - and philosophical or Husserlian phenomenology, "at most some philosophical notions were taken over in an eclectic way" (27).

It is all very well setting up a standard of what phenomenology means and trying to decide according to it what counts as phenomenology of religion and what does not. But what do we do when a second standard appears which does not agree with our own? Given that in this case our suggested standard points back to Husserl, all we can say, when a second and apparently quite independent point of reference appears, is that it does not qualify as Husserlian phenomenology of religion, we cannot say that it does not qualify as phenomenology of religion altogether. For, if someone decides to call a particular mode of thought "phenomenology of religion", then unless there is some obvious linguistic absurdity in their choice of title (such as, for example, calling a comparative study of Eastern and Western mysticism "Exercises in Chemical Analysis") we have no real grounds for objection. And in the case of phenomenology, which, as we have already noted, has, simply as a word, a somewhat general (almost omni-applicable) meaning(28), it is difficult to incur such obvious linguistic absurdity. Certainly Bleeker cannot be accused of it, he has as perfect a right to call his mode of study "phenomenology of religion"
as we have so to call any Husserlian derived model. (Though whether or not he is entitled to use a distinctly Husserlian vocabulary in such a non-Husserlian phenomenology is another matter).

Secondly, Husserl himself did not provide us with a phenomenology of religion, so it is difficult to determine precisely what an Husserlian approach in this field would consist of. Hultkrantz, for example, suggests that it was more such figures as Scheler and Grundler who "founded a phenomenological philosophy of religion" (29) and it was this rather than direct influence from Husserl which provided the basis for modern phenomenology of religion with Van der Leeuw as its fountainhead and such names as Pettazzoni and Kristensen among its more illustrious representatives. But given a variety of interpretative recensions based on Husserl, which one should we choose as standard? The obvious answer, to go back to Husserl and see to what extent Scheler, Grundler et. al. "match up" to his suggestions, will not work, for there is simply no clear canon of appeal evident in Husserl's writings. There is still much dispute as to what Husserl himself meant by phenomenology, let alone what he considered phenomenology of religion to be. Some idea of his thinking here may perhaps be gleaned from a letter dated March 5th 1919 which he wrote to Rudolf Otto soon after the publication of the latter's Idea of The Holy:

> Your book on the holy has affected me more powerfully than scarcely any book in years... It is a first beginning for a phenomenology of religiousness, at least in so far as it does not go beyond a pure description and analysis of the phenomenon itself. It seems
to me that the study of phenomenology and its analysis of essence must be much further advanced before a theory of religious consciousness, as philosophical theory, can be instituted... The metaphysician (theologian) in Mr. Otto, it seems to me, has carried the phenomenologist Otto on his wings; and with results similar to the angels who cover their eyes with their wings. (30)

But it must be remembered that despite such praises, Otto makes no mention of the work of Husserl and to deduce any finalized phenomenology of religion from a "first beginning" would be a somewhat speculative undertaking.

Thirdly, it is commonly stated that there is something intrinsic in (Husserlian) phenomenology which prevents the establishment of any kind of normative reference point of the sort for which we have been looking. There is the sense that phenomenology seriously undertaken is an exercise in perpetual beginning (31) which precludes the whole notion of establishing a strictly normative schema which all must follow. As Spiegelberg notes at the outset of his extensive study of the phenomenological movement, one of the main misconceptions which his work is intended to rectify

is the idea that there is such a thing as a system or school called 'phenomenology' with a solid body of teachings which would permit one to give a precise answer to the question 'what is phenomenology?' ... the underlying assumption of a unified philosophy subscribed to by all so called phenomenologists is an illusion. (32)

Not only did Husserl's own thinking change so much that it cannot be presented adequately "except by showing how it
developed" (33), but after his death (in 1938) we do not, and should not expect to, find "anything like an apostolic succession" (34). Such a thing is rendered impossible by the very nature of the phenomenological quest.

So, our attempt to resolve the confusion surrounding the phenomenology of religion by attempting to seek out a single normative standard of reference has failed. Clearly Husserl is a vital and indispensable figure in any consideration of phenomenology, but his thought cannot be treated as providing some sort of paradigm embodying what phenomenology (and by extension phenomenology of religion) really is. Rather than trying to establish a single meaning for phenomenology of religion, we must now turn our attention to the possibility of various different senses operating behind the undifferentiated use of the same term.

(iv) Resolving the Confusion About Phenomenology of Religion (b) Plural Focus

Having rejected the idea of establishing what the phenomenology of religion really is (or what it should be) by means of setting up a single normative standard, I want now to consider if it might be understood as having more than one sense. But rather than launching straight away into an examination of the work of particular phenomenologists of religion and attempting to abstract from them as we go along some sort of codification according to type, I want first to examine the possible senses in which the religionist's opening move (seeing what is there) might be understood. This done, we will be able to kill two birds with one stone. For the possible methodological directions available to the
religionist (i.e. those modes of sight by which he might seek to see what is there) may then be used as a means of approaching phenomenology of religion, and in considering it according to the categorization thus provided we will also be in a good position to discover whether phenomenology provides an existing methodology which we might confidently adopt in following whatever particular orientation is finally chosen as the one most likely to lead to our escaping from the hall of mirrors (escaping, that is, in terms of resolving a feeling of mesmerization in the face of a multiplicity of world certainties).

Our concern in this section is thus to tease out the possible meanings of "seeing what is there" (this being taken as a vital first step in any methodology) and I will do this by elucidating the two key elements which are involved (i.e. by asking what can be meant by "see" and what can be meant by "there"). Moreover, lest it be objected that the argument is becoming too abstract, I will focus on a specific example and consider in what ways we might see what is there with regard to that central symbol of Shaivite Hinduism, the Shiva Nataraja. So, in an overall sense, I am going to look at the various possible readings of "seeing what is there" and then consider to what extent such readings may be found embodied in the phenomenology of religion - with a view eventually to choosing that reading (or "mode of sight") which best suits the mesmerized religionist in the hall of mirrors. Once we have isolated in what sense of seeing what is there the religionist wants to see, we may then go on to consider the
sort of methodological requirements he will need to effect his choice (and determine whether or not any existing methodology already contains those requirements).

**WHAT CAN BE MEANT BY "SEE"?**

In what way does the religionist want to see the phenomena which form the subject matter of his study and which confront him in the hall of mirrors? Obviously as clearly and accurately as possible, but it is, I think, important to realise that there are various different senses of seeing, and if we are to avoid confusion we must try to identify precisely which sense of seeing he wishes to perfect. It is important to remember that I am not concerned with providing some sort of descriptive account of actual ocular seeing, my intention being to clarify the possible directions along which the religionist might orientate his inquiries rather than to construct some sort of natural history of sight.

To begin with, at what we might, for convenience, call level one, there is straightforward and untempered physiological sight, the actual physical process of seeing, sheared of all discursive evaluation, whereby the visual aspect of the world enters our brain. This basic mechanical and non-cognitive sense of seeing might be best represented by analogical comparison to a deserted cinema where a reel of film is playing to an empty house. It is pre-verbal, pre-reflective, and necessarily silent. I stress again that I am not suggesting that there actually is such a mode of sight as is expressed by "level one seeing"
which we can reach and practice at will. In fact, as I will argue later, even leaving aside the question of whether or not (in biological terms) such a mode of sight can be said to exist, it is still, in logical terms, very doubtful if we could descend to it from our current cognitive situation, and, if we could, it would certainly be impossible to offer any intelligible verbal report of what was there. Let me stress again that, rather than depicting biologically existing modes of ocular sight, I am exploring possible meanings of "see" in order to establish the range of methodological orientations which the religionist could adopt, this prior to a consideration, firstly, of phenomenology of religion undertaken in terms of this typology (the concern of section v) and, secondly, of which type of seeing would be best suited to the religionist's desiderata (the concern of Chapter Three).

At level two occurs what could be called basic descriptive sight. This is a post-linguistic phenomenon and consists of seeing categorized and articulated by whatever vocabulary we happen to have learned. It allows us to witness and report accurately on the nature of things as they appear to us and other users of our language system (visually or intellectually). The expression of this mode of basic descriptive sight might be represented by the sort of accounts we find in standard field guides for the identification of animals, vegetation, rock types or other features of the environment, or in history "text books". It is sight provided with and disciplined by a vocabulary,
a mode which is self consciously neutral and unprejudiced to the extent that this is possible given the tacit assumptions inherent in any linguistic system. Ideally, level two seeing would issue in accounts of phenomena which everyone could agree with. It is that mode of sight which is most clearly objective.

Seeing at level three is primarily an intellectual process whereby, via information about some subject (whether it can be seen in a straightforwardly visual way or not) we come to understand it, we arrive at a point where we see what it means. Within this general tertiary strata of seeing there are three possible loci of concern:-

The first (iii a) is concerned with seeing phenomena through one's own understanding, with clarifying how I see them, how they appear, what their meaning is for me.

The second (iii b) is concerned with seeing phenomena through someone else's (or through some group of people's understanding) learning how they see them, how they appear, what their meaning is for them.

The third (iii c) is concerned with seeing what, in some sense, phenomena really mean.

Straight away some careful qualifications must be made if this threefold division of level three seeing is not to appear seriously flawed.

To begin with, it must be remembered that I am not presenting these divisions as step by step stages which are followed progressively one at a time or which can be undertaken singly, in isolation from each other. They are,
rather, of the nature of integral parts of one endeavour (i.e. level three seeing) and are presented separately here only by way of a closer examination of that endeavour (in much the same sort of way as dissection is meant to further our understanding of anatomy, but is not meant to suggest that heart, lungs, kidneys etc. function independently as discrete and unrelated systems). For clearly when I try to understand how someone else sees some aspect of the world, I will at the same time often know what my own evaluation of such a viewpoint is in terms of its relationship to my own conclusions concerning that particular aspect, i.e. I will know whether I agree or disagree with the other point of view. My view and that someone else's view will, so to speak, appear side by side. It is neither possible nor desirable (as I will argue later in greater length) to so submerge or "bracket out" our own thoughts and feelings in the course of investigating "foreign" points of view, that we cease to be aware of our own reaction to them. To do this would be to lose or negate our personalities by adopting a deadening form of neutrality, a step which would hinder rather than help the accuracy of the investigation. Similarly, if we focus our concern on seeing what is there in some ultimate sense, then (leaving aside the problems involved in defining what such a sense would consist of) it is difficult to see how we could avoid taking the whole range of possible viewpoints into account (if only to show how they were in fact subsumed as secondary beneath our suggested ultimate view) without seriously minimizing our
chances of arriving at a genuinely final, all-encompassing outlook. Likewise, if we are serious in our attempt to clarify and rationalize how we ourselves see something, then alternative outlooks must be taken into account (if only as a heuristic exercise in self-confirmation) otherwise our worldview risks becoming absurdly self-centred.

That the attempt to see how things appear to us and how things really are are closely related endeavours should be clear. Obviously it would be somewhat eccentric if we were to conclude that how we saw or understood some phenomenon was different from how it really was, for this would be to impeach our own outlook as mistaken. But equally, to equate the two as completely parallel, taking as incontrovertibly and ultimately true everything in our own outlook, would seem to invest an individual's understanding with a reliability which appears superhuman in its perpetual correctness. Perhaps the most satisfactory way in which to view the relationship between these two loci of concern is to see the effort of the individual to formulate a worldview of his own as a perpetual attempt to bring his outlook into line as closely as possible with the actual state of things. That is, as being an ongoing search for truth\(^{(35)}\). The search for a comprehensive and cogent religious outlook which will be such as to provide us with a "world decision" certainly involves the attempt to render as closely parallel as possible areas (iii a) and (iii c), and a vital part of the process whereby we try to achieve this alignment is the study of the outlooks of others, considered as possible readings of what really is (and thus as possible alternatives
to our own point of view).

Perhaps we could analogically sum up the three levels of seeing by imagining the outcome of three people reading this page: the first one is completely illiterate (thus, strictly speaking, he looks at rather than reads the page) and represents level one seeing; the second, who is able to recognize the various different letters of the alphabet and thereby accurately, if tediously, describe what is there (though without necessarily understanding it) represents level two seeing; whilst the third is a fully competent reader and represents level three seeing. Clearly, though they are all engaged in "seeing the page", they are not really doing the same thing at all. In as much as it makes any sense to talk of perception, description and imagination separately, it is on these exercises respectively which the three modes of sight concentrate their efforts. Indeed we can, without undue strain, enlarge the final part of this analogy, in view of the three loci of concern we have drawn attention to within level three seeing, and identify three basic concerns of the reader: firstly, to be clear in his own mind of what he thinks about the writing in question (i.e. to have a point of view); secondly, to understand what the writer says; and thirdly, to try to establish if what the writer is saying is true.

Obviously for some reading matter such concerns will not be evident in the way I have suggested. After all, we are simply not interested in matters of ultimate truth or falsity when we read things for entertainment. It is, in
fact, only where the phenomena being investigated involve some factual claims about the nature of the world or about the occurrence and significance of some event or events in history, that a need to establish how things really are or were, and how we and others see them, becomes manifested. It is thus with religions taken as fact asserting phenomena, as world certainties (rather than as embodiments of "poetic" truths or as collections of discourse which can be judged only within the bounds of their own "language game"), that I am concerned here. I do not want to suggest that every religious phenomenon without exception displays a factually assertive nature, but rather that this is an important characteristic (among other characteristics) of religion in general.

Of course it would be misguided to try to engage in perception, description or imagination alone, ignoring the other two activities. All along I have been at pains to point out that such things are inextricably inter-related. My point is that it is possible for an enquiry to stress the aims of or to lean closer towards, one particular type of seeing rather than another, and it is by virtue of their closeness of approximation to a particular type, according to my tripartite classification, that I wish to categorize and eventually criticize the various phenomenologies of religion as embodiments of the possible orientations which the religionist's inquiries could take. Moreover it ought to be realised that in identifying level one, level two and level three seeing I have not pre-empted any
phenomenology by outlining methods of sight, for, in the presentation given above, each of these levels has been put forward in the most general terms only, as a statement of a direction in which the religionist might move, not as a concrete method by which such an orientation could be confidently followed.

Turning now to our example, how would the Shiva Nataraja appear according to these three possible orientations of vision?

Assuming, for the sake of neatness, that we could in fact return to level one seeing, what would appear on the screen in the empty cinema of our pre-verbal, pre-reflective minds when an image of Shiva as Lord of the Dance was placed before our eyes? Presumably "we" would "see" something. That is, something would appear on the screen even though there would, so to speak, be no one there to see it. As the nearest plausible parallel to such a state of seeing we might consider the world of a new-born baby, or, better, of a man brought into the world "on a sudden" with all his sensory faculties fully developed, but with no past experience (and therefore no language or memories) by which to categorize the flood of perceptions he is so suddenly confronted with (36). Under such circumstances how would the Nataraja appear? Given that there were no physical malfunctions, doubtless an awareness of the image would manifest itself as the requisite combination of shapes and colours which informed level two seeing could recognize
as a sculpture of the dancing Shiva. However, at level one it seems doubtful that we would even be able to tell that the Shiva Nataraja was a single discrete object, let alone what sort of object it was. For without the ordering resource of verbal categorization, seeing at this level would seem to involve a memory-less eye (memory-less because deprived of the ability to identify, and, therefore, to separate, different objects) watching a visual field of endlessly novel shapes and colours, none of which could have any consequential, emotional, or behavioural impact. Such an eye could watch the most horrendous atrocity as impassively as it might watch a snow shower or a field of flowers. There could be no possibility of meaning or significance at more than the most basic level of primitive, amoral aesthetic preference.

Seeing at level two would seem to be largely dependent on the extent of our existing knowledge and vocabulary. Thus descriptions of a sculpture of the Shiva Nataraja (descriptions of the type called up by the request to "just describe exactly what you see") might range from the minimal and somewhat perplexed statement of one wholly unfamiliar with Hindu art (something like, for example, "a small metal statue of some four-armed figure standing within an encircling arc, with one foot raised and one foot placed on the back of a small prostrate child or dwarf") to the sort of highly detailed and specific account provided by the expert:
Figure of the Shiva Nataraja of copper, cast by the cire perdue process in several parts and braised together. South Indian; Chola dynasty (Madras state); 10th century. Height: two foot two inches. Shiva dances the Nadanta dance. He has four arms, of which the normal arms display the gajahastra and abhaya mudras and the auxiliary arms hold the drum and fire. The braided hair touches the ring of fire (the prabhamandala). On this ring to the god's right, is the mermaid figure of Ganga. The hair is done in a cone (jata makula) and has entwined in it a cobra and the crescent moon. Beneath the dancer's foot is the Asura Muyalaka (the Apasmarapurusha), looking up to the god and holding a cobra. The whole work is on a double petalled lotus base. (37)

Seeing directed towards level two depends a great deal upon prior knowledge. In a basic physical sense - in the sense of level one seeing - both the expert and the layman will see the same thing, so that, supposing we could photograph the retinal image of each, the same "picture" of the Nataraja would doubtless appear to both. But whereas one recognizes what he sees (according to previously encountered categories) the other, perplexed by the novel and unusual, is apt to let details drift through his awareness without proper apprehension, simply because he has no appropriate way of labelling them. At level one it would, of course, be quite nonsensical to speak of recognition at all.

Seeing according to an orientation towards level three again demands a background of prior informedness about the history and mythology of Shaivism, and a detailed understanding of the symbolism as it operates within the cultus. But it involves more than an ability to produce technically correct descriptions in the specialist vocabulary operative
in this field. Rather than naming, its mark is the ability to make clear the meaning of the phenomena so described. Seeing the Shiva Nataraja at this level might thus issue in the sort of account given by Heinrich Zimmer:

As Nataraja, king of the dancers, (Shiva's) gestures, wild and full of grace, precipitate the cosmic illusion; his flying arms and legs and the swaying of his torso produce - indeed they are - the continuous creation/destruction of the universe, death exactly balancing birth, annihilation the end of every coming forth. The choreography is the whirligig of time. History and its ruins, the explosion of suns, are flashes from the tireless swinging sequence of the gestures ... Whereas the right foot, planted on the back of the demon forgetfulness, symbolizes Shiva's world creative driving of life monads into the sphere of matter, the lifted left symbolizes their release. The two feet thus denote the continuous circulation of consciousness into and out of the condition of ignorance.

The ring of fire surrounding the figure symbolizes the dance of nature which is the life process of the universe and its creatures, and within which is taking place eternally the dance of the prime mover, the lord god. (38)

However, it is somewhat difficult here to separate out the three loci of concern which operate in level three seeing. For instance, is Zimmer telling us how a Shaivite devotee understands this image (or how he should understand it), or is he telling us how he understands it, how it appears to him? Perhaps somewhere along the line these two endeavours have become somewhat inter-mixed and confused, as perhaps has that between study and advocation or belief. Certainly in the resultant description we have something which we could
Imagine either a "believer" or a "non-believer" plausibly accepting (one using theological-ontological criteria of correctness, the other historical-aesthetic criteria: this is how things are, and this is how a certain group of people have believed, rightly or wrongly, things to be). But it is far from clear which criteria Zimmer himself has in mind. How adequate a picture of reality does he take the Nataraja to be in terms of expressing world certainty? Does he see a direct correlation between it and some actual entity or state? For we must remember that it is one thing to see a sculpture as summing up "the continuous creation/destruction of the universe", and quite another to suggest that it correctly represents some actual entity or force—Shiva—which/who is responsible for such a process. The two feet of the Nataraja may very well "denote the continuous circulation of consciousness into and out of the condition of ignorance", but does such a continuous circulation actually occur? Is it a literally accurate picture of the world we live in? (Or is it, for that matter, a metaphorically accurate representation of that world?)

**WHAT CAN BE MEANT BY "THERE"?**

At precisely what loci are the three possible orientations of sight directed? In "seeing what is there", just what is meant by "there"? In parallel alignment with our senses of "see", so I would suggest that "there" can also have three distinct readings. For convenience I will refer
to these senses of "there" as level one being, level two being and level three being. I would stress that (as was the case with seeing) I am not suggesting that these are three different states of actual objective existence, rather I am drawing attention to three possible areas of interest open to different modes of inquiry, areas at which the religionist's research might be directed in his effort to escape from the hall of mirrors. To a certain extent what I say under this sub-heading is a repetition or re-confirma-
tion of what was said concerning what we could mean by "see". For clearly we cannot see anything unless something is there, and each of the senses of sight suggested has thus to some extent located a range of operation already, simply in expressing its own nature. The following consideration of these ranges of operation may thus be seen more as a teasing out of tacit assumptions than as the introduction of any startlingly new material.

Level one being refers to the existence of things "as they are in themselves", meaning by this no more than how things would appear directly to a neutral consciousness independently of any mediating (and therefore possibly distorting) interpretative or descriptive process. Level one being is that state of affairs which would be apprehend-
ed by level one seeing if such a thing was in fact possible. It would consist of noumena rather than phenomena, the world perceived by a camera rather than an eye, or by an eye shorn of all its cognitive connections\(^{(39)}\).
Level two being refers to the existence of things as they are perceived by us through, and as that perception is expressed in, some particular linguistic scheme operated in a deliberately "neutral" way so that appearance alone is recorded. It is the world as it would be perceived by the "ideal witness" who is concerned only to register and describe what would be apparent to any observer, not to assess possible significance or to record his own feelings and ideas. This area (which level two seeing is directed towards) is non-controversial and straightforwardly factual, in as much as it consists only of the "given". But we must not make the mistake of assuming that the given is always simple. For, for every phenomenon, there are numerous angles from which it may be observed and described, and when we consider these en masse, even the most apparently mundane of objects becomes invested with an almost numinous complexity. Thus, for example, although one might think that in terms of its existence at level two (or in terms of observing it via level two seeing) the human hand is no more than a straightforward physical combination of palm, fingers, thumb, nails, etc., located at the end of the arm, this is to offer a somewhat circumscribed account. Consider, as a counterweight to any such restrictive view, the following "wide-angled" approach:

It's just a shape that interrupts the light. To a child who has not yet learned to interpret what he sees, that's all it would be, just a shaped blotch of colour... But now supposing I try to consider the thing as a physicist... well then, I have to imagine an almost inconceivable number of atoms, each consisting of
a greater or lesser number of units of negative electricity whirling several million times a minute around a nucleus of positive electricity ... seen by a biologist, it reveals itself as a collection of cells, having each its appointed function, and existing harmoniously together, never trespassing upon one another, never proliferating into wild adventures of growth, but living, dying and growing to one end - that the whole which they compose may fulfill its purpose...
The hand is part, not merely of a living thing, but of a being that knows good and evil. This hand of mine can do good things and bad things. It has killed a man, for example; it has written all manner of words; it has helped a man who was hurt... This shape which interrupts the light - it is enough to think of it for five minutes to perceive that it exists simultaneously in a dozen parallel worlds. It exists as electrical charges; as chemical molecules; as living cells; as part of a moral being; the instrument of good and evil; in the physical world and in the mind. (40)

And at level two, seeing is concerned with each of these parallel worlds, and, as such, may be employed by the chemist, physicist, biologist, religionist or whoever, each of whom will direct it towards that particular world which happens to interest him. However, to lose sight of the other worlds in doing this is to risk allowing specialization to become a form of blinkering.

Level three being refers to that state of affairs viewed through a "final" understanding, where what things mean becomes clear. It consists of the answer discovered when the non-interrogatory results of description/experience at level two are approached questioningly, that is, when we
demand a further account of things, over and above what is
given, which makes sense of that giveness in all its
multifaceted fullness. At this level the world - as a
whole or some particular phenomenon in it - is viewed
through the lens of some sense giving meaning, according
to some ultimate clause which gives account of all
sub-clauses. It is an overview which makes sense of all
the numerous and perplexing parallel worlds in which (at
level two) we see things existing, which makes sense of
the phenomena in all their strangeness and perplexity. It
is the level at which the question "why?" is finally
answered.

To stay momentarily with our example of the human hand:
At level one it exists without perceptible significance as
a combination of changing shapes and colours; at level two
it exists in numerous "parallel worlds", some of which were
identified in our quotation above; at level three it could
be seen as existing either as the adaptive result of
millions of years of evolution, or as an aspect of a deity's
creation, or constituting an unremarkable example of an
accidental and wholly purposeless combination of matter.
Level three, in other words, contains the explanation for
what we find at earlier levels. It ties together the wind¬
ing thread of our inquiries in a conclusive knot, beyond
which we cannot go further. It is at this tertiary level
that world certainties are located.
Turning once more to our example of the Shiva Nataraja, in what manner could this image be seen to exist at the three levels of being?

At level one being it would occur "as it is in itself", that is, as a grouping of shape, texture and colour wholly shorn of any possible associations, memories or meanings. It would appear as a phenomenon among other phenomena (at level one we would encounter an undifferentiated world of seamless unity) stripped of vocabulary and history.

At level two being the Nataraja could be seen as existing, like the hand, in numerous different "parallel worlds" which could be explored by our various branches of knowledge. Thus it too might be seen as a collection of electrical charges, or chemical molecules, as the aesthetic culmination of an artistic tradition, and so on. But it is as a religious symbol that we are interested in it here, and we would thus focus our attention on the ways in which it has been manifested in the religious consciousness of the people among whom it has arisen as a pictorial statement of the holy.

At level three the Nataraja may be seen to exist in one of a variety of ways, and the one which we choose to accept will, at the end of the day, depend on the nature of our view of things as a whole, i.e. on the world decision we make. For the range of meanings which could plausibly account for its form and existence in some "final" sense are numerous, ranging from a dismissive rejection of it as being only the confused expression of an overfertile
mythological imagination, to an approving acceptance of it as an accurate diagrammatic representation of reality.

Given the different ways in which "seeing what is there" might be understood, it now remains to ask:

1. Towards which sense (or senses) of see ought the religionist to orientate his inquiries in order to answer his primary questions and thereby escape from the hall of mirrors? Or, to put this in another way, at which locus of being ought his interest to be directed?

2. Does any existing methodology provide him with an already systematized means of seeing in the way in which he wants to see?

In order to give some further attention to the contrasting modes of sight before judging between them, I will turn my attention to the second question first and consider phenomenology of religion in terms of its providing possible systems of approach which already follow the three senses of "see" according to which the religionist can structure his work. The question of which sense is best for this particular purpose will be postponed until the next chapter.

(v) The Plural Focus Employed: Some Varieties of Phenomenology of Religion

We must remember that the categorization suggested by the three possible meanings of "see" does not provide some sort of straightforward systematic netting device which brings immediate clarity and order once we throw
it over the area in which phenomenologies of religion occur. Rather it provides a series of reference points around which we may loosely group the various phenomenologies (according to which they most closely approximate to) and at which, in the absence of a more clear cut target, we may direct our criticisms. As we have already discovered, the search for any strictly clear cut normative definition of phenomenology cannot succeed and this is not an attempt to offer such a definition in disguise.

The examples I have chosen to mention here are not the only ones which would have been possible, and my brief selection makes no pretence at being comprehensive. My intention is to show how the plural focus may be utilized, rather than to use it exhaustively. (41)

(a) Gerardus Van Der Leeuw

As it is explained in the "Epilogomena" (i.e. chapters 107-110) of Religion in Essence and Manifestation, phenomenology of religion according to Gerardus Van der Leeuw certainly seems to disassociate itself from the aims of what I have referred to as level one seeing. For, although Van der Leeuw does seem to think that there is in fact some kind of level of perceptible existence prior to the appearance of objects in our everyday consciousness, this is simply not the concern of phenomenology as he sees it, which focuses instead on what does so appear. What appears behind the phenomenon in question (phenomenon simply meaning that which appears) is, in Van der Leeuw's
view, the concern of the metaphysician, not the phenomenologist. The importance of both person and object in "creating" the appearance with which phenomenology is concerned is stressed repeatedly, and Van der Leeuw is at pains to make clear that the focus of such a study is thus neither purely objective nor purely subjective. To study phenomena as they appear means taking both person and object into account, for appearance occurs because of indeed consists of - a subtle inter-action between perceiver and perceived:

'appearance' refers equally to what appears and to the person to whom it appears; the phenomenon, therefore, is neither pure object, nor the object, that is to say, the actual reality whose essential being is merely concealed by the 'appearing' of the appearances; with this a specific metaphysics deals. The term 'phenomenon', still further does not imply something purely subjective, not a 'life' of the subject; so far as is at all possible, a definite branch of psychology is concerned with this. The 'phenomenon' as such, therefore, is an object related to a subject, and a subject related to an object. (42)

Level one seeing dismissed, or rather its focus pushed into the court of metaphysics or psychology, between which Van der Leeuw deftly steers his course, which (if either) of our other two senses of see does this approach most closely approximate to?

Rather than selecting either the goal of level two or of level three seeing and emphasizing that, Van der Leeuw's exposition is more like some sort of amalgam of these two endeavours. Given this, a slight uneasiness
might begin to arise in the reader's mind, for, if the
concerns of both level two and level three seeing are
given equal emphasis, it is difficult to envisage a way
in which stalemate, or disrupting tension, is to be avoided.
For the concerns of reporting things from a neutral
descriptive standpoint and of establishing how different
people see things and how things really are, do not, so
to speak, always pull in the same direction. In Chapter
107 Van der Leeuw lists the various concerns of phenomenology of religion at some length, but in Chapter 109 he
provides a concise statement which summarizes this well:

The phenomenology of religion must in
the first place assign names: -
sacrifice, prayer, saviour, myth, etc.
In this way it appeals to appearances.
Secondly, it must interpolate these
appearances within its own life and
experience them systematically. And
in the third place, it must withdraw
to one side, and endeavour to observe
what appears while adopting the
attitude of intellectual suspense.
Fourthly, it attempts to clarify what
it has seen, and again (combining all
its previous activities) try to
comprehend what has appeared. Finally,
it must confront chaotic 'reality' and
its still uninterpreted signs and
ultimately testify to what it has
understood. (43)

The first stage (44) in this conception of the phenomenology
of religion seems to fall fairly neatly within the ambit of
what I have called level two seeing - simply describing
clearly the phenomenon being dealt with in terms of a
neutral and evaluatively uncontroversial vocabulary.
Whereas stages two, three and four taken together seem to
approximate more closely to the goals of level three seeing,
searching in particular for the meaning which others invest in appearances. And yet this investigative re-experiencing seems to be based on level two rather than on level three seeing. It seems as if, on the one hand, we are being asked to see things in a straightforwardly descriptive sense, and, on the other, (whilst still using this neutral and non-judgmental picture) to see how others view the world. But surely to do this we need a mode of sight which is precisely attuned to all the varieties of commitment, evaluation and sense which animate the faith of mankind's various believers.

Apart from this apparent incompatibility in stages two, three and four, it is unclear just what Van der Leeuw has in mind for the fifth and final stage of his phenomenological programme (the confrontation with chaotic reality and the testifying to what has been understood). For phenomenology confronts "appearance" rather than "reality", and it is difficult to see how any sense of "chaos" could appear when descriptive categories of a level two type (in the religious realm such things as saviour, myth, sacrifice, etc.) are being applied, since such things knit a reassuring structure of commonsense meaning across the fabric of raw experience, which, albeit, without them would be chaotic. Moreover, "testimony" seems an odd choice of word to describe the activity of an exercise which attempts to adopt an attitude of intellectual suspense and, as such, is thus not concerned with issues of truth or falsity, with
giving evidence or suggesting proof. As Van der Leeuw himself stresses in his interesting negative clarification of phenomenology of religion (pp. 685-688), where he explains why it is not (i.e. how and where it differs from) poetry of religion, history of religion, psychology of religion, philosophy of religion and theology, a vital characteristic of phenomenology of religion, and one which decisively sets it apart from theology and philosophy which both "claim to search for the truth" (45), is its use of epoche, its deliberate refusal to take up any evaluative judgmental stance. Thus, for example, although the phenomenologist can see "how the experience of Jesus of Nazareth has founded in history a mighty stream of faith experiences" (46), he cannot - whilst still continuing in his role of phenomenologist - see "how in history God gives himself to man as mediator" (47). But this is surely precisely what he must try to see if he is to gain any idea at all of how Christians understand the course of history.

Van der Leeuw's exposition of the phenomenology of religion calls for further clarification at a number of points. However, since I do not want to launch into a full scale critique of his thought, I will mention only three more here.

(i) At the very outset of the Epilogomena we find the following passage:-

Phenomenology seeks the phenomenon, as such; the phenomenon, again, is what appears. The principle has a three-fold implication: (1) something exists (2) this something appears (3) precisely because it 'appears' it is a 'phenomenon'. (48)
But if, as Van der Leeuw says, phenomenology adopts an attitude of *epoche*, then how can the first of these three implications be accepted? Surely if he is to be consistent with his own principles the phenomenologist can only accept that $x$ appears, not that the entity $x$ has any substance apart from that appearance.

(ii) The identification of three levels of thought at which an object appears and three correlated (though not equivalent) "levels of life" leaves the reader with a feeling of uncertainty about just what is meant. The levels of phenomenality (listed on p.671) are:

1. Its (i.e. the phenomenon's) (relative) concealment
2. Its gradually becoming revealed
3. Its (relative) transparency

And the three levels of life or attitudes are:

1. Experience
2. Comprehension
3. Testimony

The last two, when "systematically or scientifically employed"\(^{(49)}\), constitute the procedure of phenomenology.

But behind what is the *phenomenon* (as opposed to the noumenon) concealed, and just how is its revelation brought about? Through what must we penetrate to find the "appearance", for surely what "appears" does so without concealment? Although it is perhaps tempting here (for the sake of neatness) to try to identify Van der Leeuw's categorization with my own tripartite schema in terms of seeing and being, this could not be done without strain and misrepresentation.
According to Van der Leeuw, phenomenology is unable to lead the researcher to any knowledge of God, for God does not appear, or "at least not so that we can comprehend or speak about him" (50). Indeed given his view that religion "is an ultimate experience that evades our observation, a revelation which in its very essence is, and remains, concealed" (51) how can phenomenology function at all in this area? As Van der Leeuw succinctly puts it, "How can I pursue phenomenology when there is no phenomenon?" (52). Apparently, in the case of revelation, the answer is simply "I cannot", for we are bluntly told that "before revelation phenomenology comes to a halt" (53). But two questions precede this matter of how phenomenology can proceed in an area where there are no phenomena. Firstly, if religion is manifested at all then how could it not appear, i.e. how could something appear without constituting a phenomenon? (and ergo being open to phenomenology). And secondly, on what grounds can such a statement be made in the first place? What mode of thought could lead us to the conclusion that in the area towards which it is directed a perpetual non-appearing elusiveness is encountered? And is this mode of thought itself immune from the phenomenological epoche so that its conclusions can in this a priori fashion delimit the area of presuppositionless inquiry before it begins?

The major operative device which emerges from a reading of Van der Leeuw on phenomenology of religion is
that of epoche, the decision to "bracket out" judgmental assumptions of value and to conduct a presuppositionless inquiry. Since this has become the central methodological characteristic of almost all the phenomenologists of religion who have followed him, it is worthwhile to spend a few moments noting its main features as it is presented in *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Van der Leeuw gives a clear summary of what epoche means in a footnote to Chapter 100 paragraph 1, where he discusses at length the subtleties involved in value free investigations. The note itself is worth quoting in full:

The term *epoche* is a technical expression employed in current phenomenology by Husserl and other philosophers. It implies that no judgment is expressed concerning the objective world, which is thus placed 'between brackets', as it were. All phenomena, therefore, are considered solely as they are presented to the mind, without any further aspects such as their real existence, or their value, being taken into account; in this way the observer restricts himself to pure description systematically pursued, himself adopting the attitude of complete intellectual suspense, or of abstention from all judgment, regarding these controversial topics. (54)

But it soon becomes clear that Van der Leeuw does not allow such "complete intellectual suspense" an unrestricted range of operation. We cannot simply decide to "bracket out" everything. On the contrary, he suggests that "man exists in the world in some quite definite way" and that - with respect to his own weltanschauung - any 'unprejudiced' treatment is not merely impossible but "positively fatal"(55). And it is fatal because "it
prevents the investigator's complete personality becoming engaged in his scientific task" (56). Both the possibility and the desirability of the completely unprejudiced approach apparently offered by the application of *epoche*, are dismissed as "unintelligent" (57) and, far from attempting to achieve the total bracketing out of the investigator's religious feelings, as he is sometimes represented as doing, Van der Leeuw advocates using the attitude of *epoche* or intellectual suspense

while at the same time I bear in mind
that this is possible only in the
light of one's own experience, and
that this can never be freed from its
own religious determinateness. (58)

Thus the Christian sets out the phenomenology of religion from a Christian starting point, the Buddhist from a Buddhist one, the Muslim from an Islamic one. None begin *de novo* from a point of complete religious neutrality. In short, Van der Leeuw argues for the use of a carefully qualified application of *epoche* rather than taking it over uncritically from its philosophical background and allowing it free range. (His thinking on this front, incidentally, reminds us of Nygren's point about the distinction between presupposition and prejudice (59)). *Epoche*, then, according to this treatment, could be seen as a methodological device available either to level two or level three seeing (to be able to facilitate level one seeing, however, it would need to offer a way to that total bracketing out which Van der Leeuw explicitly rejects as unsound).
Some further light on Van der Leeuw's view of phenomenology of religion occurs in comments made in *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, his study of the holy in art, and in his "Confession Scientifique", which originally appeared in the first issue of *Numen* (1954). Firstly, from *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, we have a straightforward reiteration of phenomenology's focus on "appearance" rather than "reality":

where history asks 'how did it happen?', phenomenology asks "how do I understand it?", where philosophy examines truth and reality, phenomenology contents itself with the data without examining them further with respect to their content of truth or reality. (60)

Secondly, from "Confession Scientifique", we find a passage which stresses more clearly than at any point in *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* the strand of imaginative re-experiencing present in phenomenology of religion. Thus we read that such phenomenology consists

Not merely of making an inventory and classification of phenomena as they appear in history, but also a psychological description which necessitates not only a meticulous observation of the religious reality, but also a systematic introspection; not only the description of what is visible from the outside, but above all the experience born of what can only become reality after it has been admitted into the life of the observer himself. (61)

Phenomenology of religion thus appears strikingly similar to Collingwood's idea of doing history, where the historian is called upon to "re-enact the past in his own mind"(62), or, (as Van der Leeuw himself noted(63)) to Kierkegaard's
conception of the psychological investigator. But where, one might ask, is there actual evidence of such imaginative re-experiencing in Van der Leeuw's work? At the end of the day the reader is surely left with the feeling that whereas both level two and level three seeing have been advocated, only the former has actually been carried out.

I begin with Van der Leeuw because his *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (first published in 1933 as *Phanomenologie Der Religion*, English translation 1938) has had such a seminal influence in Religious Studies. At this stage in the history of the discipline it is perhaps difficult for us to appreciate why its influence has been so great, since, from a methodological point of view (and it is as a methodologist that Van der Leeuw is most frequently cited) his work leaves much to be desired. His recommendations as to how the phenomenology of religion might proceed are programmatic or prophetic rather than actual. That is, they appear very much as theoretical epilogomena tacked unto, rather than forming an integral part of, the main body of his work. As Spiegelberg has quite fairly remarked, Van der Leeuw's attempt to link up the insights of phenomenology to the study of religion "has very much the character of an afterthought" (64). It is, for example, an interesting speculation to ask if an attentive reader could work out for himself the methodological principles outlined in the Epilogomena, from a reading of the preceding 106 chapters. I think that the answer is bound to be that he could not, or, as I suggested
earlier, that whilst he could find abundant evidence of level two seeing throughout the book, it would be much more difficult to detect the operation of any very serious attempt to see at level three.

This is not intended as a criticism of the quality of Van der Leeuw's work. As his English translator says (65), Religion in Essence and Manifestation is a book of such comprehensiveness and originality as to deserve comparison with that other great classic of the study of religion, James' The Varieties of Religious Experience. I am, however, questioning to what degree his methodological theory can be seen to have been put into practice.

I have already drawn attention to the intrinsic difficulty of clearly formulating any standard procedure for phenomenology, given its nature as perpetual beginning. Perhaps there is something of this nature operating in Van der Leeuw's work. Certainly he himself acknowledges the unsatisfactory nature of Religion in Essence and Manifestation in a manner wholly reminiscent of Husserl's frequent disclaimers of having completed the task he set out to do. In the author's preface to the German edition, for example, Van der Leeuw notes that this volume, itself intended as the definitive work outlined in a short Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion published in 1925, is in many ways little more than a sketch or summary. In his own words:

now that the more substantial work has appeared I must admit that I have made little, if indeed any, advance. (66)
And he suggests that perhaps phenomenology of religion can be dealt with adequately only by monograph, rather than by extensive all inclusive surveys of world religions. Certainly in terms of finding level three seeing genuinely put into action, his suggestion here rings true, as we shall presently see.

(b) Winston L. King

King, to whose ex post facto phenomenological awakening we have already drawn attention (see note 20), provides what I take to be one of the most honest, penetrating and self conscious methodological reflections available in this area, in a short lecture published four years after his Introduction to Religion, a Phenomenological Approach and originally delivered as part of a Drew University colloquium on phenomenology. It is mainly on what he says in this lecture that I will focus here.

The lecture, simply entitled "The Phenomenology of Religion", could, with perhaps more justification than Van der Leeuw's concluding chapters, have been appended to his book as an Epilogomena. Certainly considered side by side the relationship between Introduction to Religion (67) and "The Phenomenology of Religion" bears a striking similarity to that which we found between the text of Van der Leeuw's work and his methodological afterthoughts. For again we tend to find method and material sundered, with theoretical principles evaporating mysteriously and leaving little detectable trace when it comes to practical application. As with Van der Leeuw's work, so with King's I think it is
a fair and revealing question to ask whether the reader of his *Introduction to Religion* could, if he skipped out the first few pages, deduce what methodological principles lay behind the rest of the inquiry, let alone piece together the substance of the argument in King's later lecture devoted to a more extended treatment of this subject. However, in King's case there are certain extenuating circumstances which go some way at least towards excusing such a bisection.

Firstly, it is of course quite legitimate to point out that King's thought may well have developed substantially in the time between the two pieces of writing, and that to expect methodological conclusions reached in 1972 to be employed in a work published in 1968 (or to treat them as a single entity: text and epilogomena) is simply to expect the impossible. After all, in his *Introduction to Religion* King admits right away that phenomenology of religion (which, incidentally, he does not distinguish from history of religions, science of religion or comparative religion) is "a recent and as yet ill defined method for the study of religions"(68). What more natural, then, than that his thinking four years later should render it more clearly defined? To some extent this is, of course, a valid rejoinder. However, since King refers to but makes no explicit retraction of his own earlier statements on the subject, we can safely assume that his lecture is to be taken more as a commentary or reflection on, rather than a correction of, the phenomenology to be found in his *Introduction to Religion*. 
Secondly, according to King's own expressed view of phenomenology of religion we ought not to expect to be able to abstract clear methodological principles from any case involving its operation, since for him "phenomenology of religion is primarily an emphasis and spirit rather than a clearly defined methodology"\(^\text{(69)}\).

This bisection of method and practice and its extenuating circumstances noted, let us now turn to a consideration of King's view of phenomenology and see into which of our three categories it most neatly fits.

In company with most other writers who have surveyed this field, King complains that he has "not found any very precise definitions of phenomenological methodology"\(^\text{(70)}\), and in facing the diversity of activities grouped together under the single rubric of "phenomenology", he makes the common opening move of distinguishing between "the history of religions type of religious phenomenology" (as practiced by Van der Leeuw) and "the philosophical religious phenomenology" of a figure like Scheler\(^\text{(71)}\). His own work can be seen to have more in common with the former than with the latter grouping. Building on the classification of five types of the study of religion which he had already elaborated at some length in his Introduction to Religion, a classification couched in terms of the various approaches' positions of commitment regarding their subject matter\(^\text{(72)}\), King pursues the notion of phenomenology of religion as the study of religion from the "detached within" and stresses in particular the importance of being able to
re-experience "alien" religious phenomena with empathy, whilst at the same time not losing oneself in them and finding it impossible to return to the point (i.e. detached withinness) from which one set out. Thus he writes:

The phenomenological ideal is to observe any and all modes of religiosity as from the veritable inside, and yet escape to tell all to outsiders - including one's own outside ordinary self. (73)

Such an attitude is "detached but empathetically within the tradition one is working with" (74). And it is interesting that in his discussion of Van der Leeuw and Wach, King picks out and emphasizes those elements in their thought which stress this idea of empathetic re-experiencing. Thus in commenting on Van der Leeuw's assertion that "all understanding rests upon self-surrendering love" (75), King comments,

If this sounds too mystical-emotional to recommend itself as a methodology, it can be interpreted, I think, as meaning a self-surrendering and sympathetic study of religious experience in whatever forms it expresses itself, striving unceasingly to empathetically enter into such forms in their full religious givenness. (76)

And in Wach too, King finds that "a kind of re-experience of the original religious quality is aimed at" (77). Moving back again from the lecture to his Introduction to Religion, we find King insisting that

each phenomenon must be appreciated and described in its own integrity and native cultural context and not fitted into some prior definitional mould. (78)

Clearly, then, King's thinking on phenomenology of religion
approximates most closely to what I have called level three seeing, his concern being to "understand what men intend to be and do when they act religiously" (79), this concern taking into account both the need for trying to see the world through someone else's eyes, and at the same time not losing or obscuring our own view of it. Indeed King is perhaps the thinker who most clearly recognizes that at least three separate loci of concern are operating when this tertiary level of seeing is emphasized, for, in dealing with some of the difficulties which arise from attempts to implement the ideal phenomenological guidelines he suggests (an exercise which all too few phenomenologists of religion attempt), his listing of those difficulties isolates clearly the inter-relating problems of how I see the world, how the world really is and how others see the world:

How does one get "inside" another culture and yet remain outside it, with one foot still in his own existential world, or at least with the possibility of re-entry into it? What of the influence and role of his own forms of ultimate concern? How can the phenomenologist who empathetically identifies with another culture make valid judgments about significance, or level of importance, or religious worth with respect to that culture? (80)

Interestingly, in clearly dissociating phenomenology of religion from any kind of pre-reflective focus, King seems almost to draw a line beyond which level three seeing cannot take the investigator, and, in so doing, raises an interesting point about the relationship between level one and level three seeing. He is quite adamant that in phenomenology of religion
there is ... no attempt to get to the ultimate cognitional situation in which an absolute basis for all knowledge is to be laid, as with Husserl. (81)

Because,

In the religious sphere this would entail ... a revelational situation in which one would find a way to infallibly apprehend (or be apprehended by) the Ultimate Reality. (82)

Rather than providing some sort of "infallible or revelational mode of awareness of the ultimately real" (83), King sees phenomenology as being "geared only to an understanding in depth of the authentic religiosity of the culture or cultures under study" (84). But presumably the believers of any religion have themselves (or at least some of them have) precisely such a mode of awareness of what they take to be (rightly or wrongly) Ultimate Reality. How, then, if we follow the orientation of level three seeing, can we stop ourselves coming into contact with the object of such an awareness, supposing that a method geared to this orientation has, in the first place, the ability to reach understanding in depth? Surely this means it has at least the potential of allowing its users to re-experience the focus of the believers' concern (assuming of course that it is used by a painstaking and able investigator). It is surely precisely the risk of reaching such a point that gives real urgency to the question of how, as King might put it, the investigator gets "inside" another culture, whilst at the same time remaining outside it with one foot still in his own exist-
ential world, thus allowing him the possibility of return.

The whole question of the religionist's possible contact with some sort of absolute, his directly experiencing an "ultimate concern" in the course of his work, is a somewhat emotive issue in Religious Studies and one on which we receive various advice. Waardenburg, for example, warns us that even dealing with phenomena which have absolute connotations for other people (whether or not these connotations are accurate) is a hazardous undertaking:

Since we have to do with phenomena that have some absolute connotations for the people concerned, there is the ever present risk that the discipline itself or one of its students comes within the grasp of such an absolute, often by sheer fascination. The result may be an absolutized idea on the part of the scholar, which leads to a misrepresentation of reality; or even the discipline itself might tend to absolutize, to become a sort of new religious ideology. (85)

And Kristensen, in similar vein, attempts to draw some sort of intellectual or spiritual crash barrier between believer and investigator, a barrier which seems to insist on a cut out point beyond which empathy and imagination cannot take us, in the same way as King has suggested. Thus he argues that the religionist

cannot understand the absolute character of the religious data in the same way that the believer understands them.... There is a distance between him and the object of the research, he cannot identify himself with it as the believer does. We cannot become Mohammedans when we try to understand Islam, and if we could our study would be at an end: we should ourselves then directly experience the reality. (86)
But is the whole effort of phenomenology geared to following a course of third level seeing not aimed precisely at such re-experiencing? If not, just where is its ideal target located and how can it claim to offer an understanding in depth if it is out of line with the believer's own focus of concern?

On the other hand, some writers seem quite prepared to accept that it may be part of the eventual identity of the study of religions, part of its natural development rather than some sort of catastrophic aberration, that it shall take on (or has already) some sort of "religious" nature. Thus Cantwell Smith suggests that

The practitioner of comparative religion ... may become no longer an observer vis-a-vis the history of the diverse religions ... but rather a participant in the multiform religious history of the only community there is, humanity. Comparative religion may become the disciplined self consciousness of man's variegated and developing religious life. (87)

And Eliade, much concerned to re-discover the "sacramental" dimension of life, sees the study of religions as establishing a kind of spiritual blood bank or genetic memory which (western) man can draw on when he discovers a lost psychic sensitivity(88). Indeed Kristensen himself has suggested that "when religion is the subject of our work, we grow religiously"(89).

Whether or not the religionist is in any risk of encountering some kind of absolute in the course of his work and whether this work itself may conceivably have some kind of absolute or religious quality, are matters
which will be discussed further in Chapter Six. The question will, however, be re-stated before then, leaving the theoretical fold in a compelling and disturbing way when, very shortly, we come to consider the phenomenological work of David R. Kinsley.

(c) Edward J. Jurji

Jurji's *The Phenomenology of Religion* (1963) is an impressive survey of world religions undertaken from a phenomenological standpoint which is (almost uniquely for a work of this size and scope) both readable and methodologically self conscious. These two qualities alone might be enough to suggest that it has received too little attention in this country, and, added to them the fact that its treatment of the various religions is systematic, well informed and original, this may, perhaps, be enough to convince us to include Jurji's name more regularly in our standard bibliographies. This said, however, we are still left with that (by now familiar) feeling of being presented with the data, having our attention drawn to some of the difficulties arising both directly from it and from attempts to collect, present and approach it, and then being left to our own devices with little or no advice being given on how we ought to proceed in dealing with the problems which are now (courtesy of a factually well presented volume) our uncomfortable intellectual property. Phenomenology seems to take us so far, but no further, like a guide who takes us half way into the jungle and then stops and disappears.
Basically the phenomenology which Jurji suggests corresponds most closely to level two seeing. That is, it is an exercise in descriptive phenomenology. Thus we read in the opening pages of the volume:

What the present phenomenology seeks to discover is precisely how a given religion exhibits itself in authentic records, historic settings, and career of founder, saint, and philosopher. Further disclosures are sought in sacred text, symbol, and doctrine, in piety, in social structure, and, above all, in religion's idea of the holy and its expression of faith. The treatment relies upon extensive scholarly research supplemented by on the spot observations. (90)

However, as we also found in Van der Leeuw, it becomes clear that some of this description is going to focus on how the religious devotees themselves understand such things, it is going to study what meanings certain phenomena have for them, in other words, level three seeing (at its second locus) is also to be employed. The standpoint of the empathetic imaginative "participant" is to accompany the stance of the "ideal witness". Thus we find that

As regards symbols and rites, phenomenology invokes the affirmations of engaged believers. Meticulously, it endeavours to formulate judgments that correspond with a devotee's conception of the truth. Its object is to arrive at a solid understanding of the facts, valid in as much as it represents an approximation of that which displays itself. In other words, it seeks to depict with fidelity and accuracy the essence of a given religion under study. (91)

Despite this failure to identify and distinguish clearly
between the concerns of second and third level seeing, Jurji is by no means unaware of the problems involved in phenomenology directed towards a path of third level sight - problems which bring in the other two loci of concern at level three, i.e. concern for what we ourselves believe and concern for what is really there, thus "the question of truth and validity is never far removed from one's consciousness"(92), and far from being "an unconditional surrender to alien doctrines"(93) the investigator's own commitments may be "conveniently introduced in parenthesis"(94). This sounds all very well, and granted that "to describe a phenomenon dispassionately is not a token of endorsement"(95), but can an exercise in third level seeing issue in dispassionate description? Again the failure to distinguish between, or explore the relationship of, level two and level three seeing, between descriptive and imaginative strands of phenomenology, results in no small degree of uncertainty. And, as with Van der Leeuw and King, whilst the reader of Jurji's volume who was deprived of the (relatively few) overtly methodological pages might "work back" and discover the principles of descriptive phenomenology, these seem so to overshadow its imaginative strand as to obscure it from sight altogether.

However, any criticism of Jurji must be tempered by the realization that he does not try to provide any sophisticated methodological template by which the religionist may order all his problems. Rather, as he
says at the outset,

    suffice it if the methodology succeeds
    in awakening more perceptive vigour
    and more mature perspective in the
    reader. (96)

And this, I think we can be sure, it does quite successfully.

(d) Edward Farley

    Strictly speaking, Edward Farley's Ecclesial Man, a
Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality (1975) is not an
exercise in phenomenology of religion, but rather a
theological utilization of Husserlian phenomenology(97).
I include it here because it is of use in seeing the sort
of ways in which such a philosophy might be applied to the
study of religion, offering as it does clear guidelines
concerning the relevance of Husserl's thinking in the
general area of religion which are helpful both to
theologians and to religionists alike. Farley's exposit-
ion of philosophical phenomenology seems to me to be
clearer than, for example, Guerriere's "Outline of a
Phenomenology of the Religious"(98) which likewise tries
to suggest an Husserlian approach but, whilst it contains
some interesting insights, seems seriously flawed by its
use of an over technical vocabulary which inevitably
results in uncertainty and obscurities. The discussion
in Ecclesial Man whilst carried out "at a very high level
of formulation and grasp of Husserl's thought"(99),
evertheless manages to remain lucid throughout, and the
praises it has received seem well justified:
It is an important, fundamental piece of work, an original, creative development of phenomenology, and a radically new point of departure and problematic for theology. While it is carried out at a high level of rigour and clarity, it is also written with the spontaneity and enthusiasm of a new discovery. (100)

Although we may well disagree with Farley's conclusions, his work is worth attention if only as providing a much needed examination of the relationship between phenomenological and theological thinking (an examination which is brought into clearer focus by the excellent appendix on "Phenomenology in Catholic and Protestant Thought"), and by offering ways in which "the methodological paralysis bequeathed to us from the past" (101) may, perhaps, be broken.

Whereas Duméry has offered us a phenomenology of Christian institution (102), Farley focuses his attention on the "pre-institutional strata of this community" (103). "Community" here is a key word, drawing our attention back to the subtitle of Ecclesial Man, i.e. "a Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality", and we must remember throughout that Farley's concern is with the lebenswelt or life-world as constituting the central locus for "the problems of knowledge and being" (104). Social phenomenology, according to Farley, is principally indebted to Husserl's reflections on intersubjectivity and to the thought of Max Scheler, and has found elaboration in Merleau Ponty, Schutz, Natanson and Bollnow "in their philosophies of body, social world, and lived space" (105).
In terms of our threefold division, then, what type of phenomenology is Farley's Ecclesial Man? His description of phenomenological theology as "the attempt to penetrate and describe the pre-reflective matrix of faith's acts and structures"\(^{(106)}\) would seem to make our decision an obvious one, and indeed I think Farley's work does fall into our category of level one seeing. However, it is important, firstly, to make sure that such a classification is not based simply on the unexamined assumption that the term "pre-reflective" can automatically be taken to mean pre-theoretical and pre-linguistic in the sense we have associated with level one sight and, secondly, to remind the reader that I am considering phenomenologies according to various loosely bound types, dictated by a general (if not crude) system of classification based on an identification of the three basic directions open to the religionist's inquiries. I am not attempting any kind of conclusive critique or simply trying to label such a subtle and penetrating work as Farley's a straightforward attempt to "see at level one", this is very much an ad hoc procedure geared to a specific situation. I do not seek or claim for it any overall validity. But Farley's work is closer in type to level one than to level two or three seeing and, as such, according to this degree of proximity, falls into the catchment area of certain problems facing any such type of approach. In Chapter Three I will consider the problems contained within these different catchment areas
(i.e. which face methodologies which follow the three modes of sight), attempting in this way to gain some general sense of the spectrum of difficulties facing the religionist in his attempt to see religious phenomena and to discover how his initial choice of direction might be guided. Given the degree of individual variation encountered in doing (or recommending) phenomenology of religion, such a process seems preferable to focusing on particular texts and offering highly specific (and thus non-transferable) criticisms.

So in what sense does Farley's work follow a level one orientation? In *Ecclesial Man* we are presented with an attempt to pose, and to go some way at least towards answering, "the problem beneath the problem of (Christian) theological method". Briefly, the problem of theological method is to find ways in which such classical motifs as the resurrection of the body, the determination of each individual's lot on earth, the question of post mortem survival and judgment, and so on, may be spoken of intelligibly. In short, "theological method in its traditional meaning is **criteriology**"(107). That is, the search for adequate criteria by reference to which theological language may be accepted as meaningful, in the light of our non-theological knowledge of the world. Farley draws attention in particular to the effect of historical-critical thought here, noting that in some instances its influence has encouraged theological thinking to excise the motifs mentioned above altogether, whereas
in most cases, classical motifs were retained in an ambiguous rhetoric which still spoke of Jesus as the word, God's mighty acts, the resurrection, and the trinity, but in such revised senses that few could understand what was really retained. (108)

But we could just as well mention the (similar) effects of scientific or philosophical thinking. Logically prior to any issue of criteriology, however, is the problem "of whether or not faith apprehends any distinctive realities at all" (109), and it is this which constitutes what Farley refers to as "the problem beneath the problem of theological method" (110) and towards which he directs his work:

In sum we are arguing that the problem of reality pushes traditional theological method (criteriology) back to the pre-critical situation in which realities are immediately grasped. The description of this situation has priority over criteriological clarifications. (111)

But how do we get to the "reality references" and "reality apprehensions" which Farley suggests "are typically located in the pre-reflective, pre-institutional strata" (112) of ecclesia? ("Ecclesia" simply denotes a "corporate historical existence" which embodies and transmits "an intersubjectively shaped redemptive consciousness" (113).) Such a return to beginnings, which is elsewhere described as the attempt "to gain access to pre-conscious and pre-individualistic dimensions of faith" (114), is to be effected by a Husserlian "questioning
back. This questioning back is itself carried out by a number of devices, but most importantly by the "theological epoche" which involves

a shift in deeply habitual ways of looking at reality, a kind of alteration of consciousness which attempts to be self aware of the hidden models of reality that restrict and impoverish our apprehension of most of our life world. (115)

At this point it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of Winston L. King's contention that phenomenology of religion "does not so much represent a precise methodology as it does the spirit or attitude which informs one's approach to religious phenomena" (116), indeed after reading Farley we might go further and suggest that it is more a goal towards which one's approach is directed, rather than a methodology or an attitude, and it is to the extent that one aims at uncovering "the immediate and founding apprehensions which accompany faith" (117) that one's enquiry may be considered to be phenomenological. For the further we reflect on what Ecclesial Man is attempting to do, the further we are convinced that what is being outlined is a desired goal and some directional pointers regarding how to get there, rather than a definite methodology or the results of its application. Farley himself is aware of the programmatic nature of his book, admitting "rather regretfully" (118) at the outset that "this is yet another work in the general area of theological prolegomenon" (119), and, in a more specific realization of the nature of his
proposals as directive rather than terminal (i.e. as indicating the way in which our inquiries ought to proceed rather than as taking them along some recommended path and reaching particular conclusions) he suggests that the theological epoche might be seen as

a permanent attempt, perhaps always
only an attempt, to put out of action
the reality models which have shaped
our consciousness, so that the
specific realities of a determinate
faith can appear. (120)

However, as we also found in the work of King and Kristen-

sen, so with Farley there seems to be some sort of barrier
which stops phenomenology of religion from achieving
"too much", so to speak. Thus although it may be employed
to reach the realities apprehended by ecclesia which have
become obscured by linguistic and historical phenomena -
and indeed by the concerns of a traditional criteriological
theology^1) - we find that "phenomenological theology
cannot itself restore faith's reality-loss"^2 for

the actual reality-apprehendings of
a determinate community do not
occur in the 'uncovering' analyses
of phenomenology but in participa-
tion in the community itself. (123)

Again, no matter how deeply the phenomenologist may touch
the mainspring of a religious experience, a definite
qualitative line seems to be ruled between his phenomenol-
ogy and the faith of the believers concerned.

Farley, with his pre-reflective level one focus, is
asking
are there any realities at all which faith apprehends through linguistic and historical phenomena, or are the 'realities' of faith simply these phenomena themselves? (124)

And in Ecclesial Man we are provided with detailed directional guidelines pointing all future theological inquiries in the direction of this question. The religionist doing descriptive phenomenology (geared to level two seeing) would, on the other hand, be concerned only with the level of appearance defined by the linguistic and historical phenomena, having no interest (not at least qua descriptive phenomenologist) in the question of whether some reality was in fact apprehended by such appearances. Following the orientation given by third level seeing, the phenomenologist, via his concern with meaning, would be interested in both appearance and reality.

(e) David R. Kinsley

Kinsley's book The Sword and the Flute is a brief study of Kali and Krishna, two deities who at first sight would appear to be located at opposite ends of the Hindu pantheon, one being benign, playful and beautiful, the other frighteningly ugly, malevolent and violent. Their contrasting symbols sum up their apparent incompatibility well, Kali being associated with the sword which she wields in a mad frenzy of destruction, Krishna with the flute which he plays in his numerous amorous adventures with the gopis, or cow girls, which are recorded in such profusion in the associated mythology. However, according to Kinsley, the two deities
are inextricably entwined, each summing up an important aspect of Indian religious thought, and, taken together, providing a clear insight into the Hindu world view as a whole. Indeed he prefaces the concluding chapter of his study with a quotation from Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs which ends with the words:

   Krishna wearing a garland of wild flowers with a flute in hand becomes Kali with a sword.  

(125)

In the interests of brevity I will deal with only one of the deities of Kinsley's study, and, since it so obviously constitutes a different world to that of any Western Christian/post-Christian outlook, and thus poses more of a challenge to the religionist from such a background, I will concentrate on what he says about the goddess Kali, who, iconographically, is perhaps the most strikingly demonic and horrifying deity in the Hindu pantheon, outpacing even Shiva in his "ghora", or terrible, aspect.

Kinsley describes his study as "primarily phenomenological" rather than historical. He is not concerned merely to chronicle the development of the worship of Kali as it might be seen by an outsider, but to see it as it animates a devotee, to see it as it expresses a certain lived religious view of things. In other words, according to our threefold categorization, Kinsley's phenomenology is directed towards third level seeing.

At this point it is perhaps best to let Kinsley speak for himself as much as possible, since he writes with a style and concision which few religionists manage to achieve.
In the opening pages of the book he explains the nature of his investigation in the following terms:

My approach is not to attempt to understand Kali and Krishna by amassing historical data: I seek instead to discern in the 'presences' of these two beings, as revealed in history to be sure, hints of the transcendentally real in the Hindu spiritual tradition. To put it in very unscholarly terms, my approach is to attempt to understand Krishna and Kali by trying to glimpse Kali's sword and hear Krishna's flute. (127)

In other words, Kinsley does not shy away from a deity which to the average western outlook is almost certainly distasteful, if not actually repellent and frightening, but instead chooses to view it from the point of view of a believer, in keeping with what he calls a "primary presupposition"(128) of his study, namely "the conviction that religious phenomena can best be understood on their own plane of reference"(129). Kinsley's disarming openness about expressing himself in unscholarly terms is, in fact, misleading, for it is rather a measure of his scholarship (a scholarship which soon becomes apparent) that he can articulate the goals of his study by utilizing the symbolism he is concerned with. He proceeds deftly and systematically to portray Kali not as "an aberration"(130), as some sort of anachronistic left over from aboriginal times, but as an intense and viable expression of the numinous. Taking the popularity of the cult of Kali as an indication that the goddess in some way typifies the Hindu vision of the divine, Kinsley runs through the main elements
of the Hindu view of ultimate reality and demonstrates, I
think convincingly, how "Kali either embodies elements of
this vision or dramatically illustrates them"(131). In
Kinsley's hands we seem to travel smoothly and easily
right into the heart of an "alien" religious world. In
the following extracts Kali, it seems to me, is presented
very much in terms of a viable religious option (a possible
world decision) both open and alive:

Meditation on Kali, confrontation of
her, even the slightest glimpse of
her, restores man's hearing, thus
enabling or forcing a keener percept-
ion of things around him. Confronted
with the vision of Kali he begins to
hear, perhaps for the first time,
those sounds he has so carefully
censored in the illusion of his
physical immortality ... He may
also be able to hear, with his keener
perception, the howl of laughter that
mocks his pretence, the mad laugh of
Kali, the mistress of time, to whom he
will succumb inevitably despite his
deafness or cleverness (132) .... She
invites man to join in her mad dance
in the cremation ground, she invites
him to make of himself a cremation
ground so that she may dance there,
releasing him from the fetters of a
bound existence. She invites man to
approach the cremation ground without
fear, thus releasing him to participate
in his true destiny, which lies beyond
this whirlygig of samsara in
transcendent release. (133)

This is quite a series of invitations and we are left
wondering if the religionist can simply ignore or refuse
them all. What, though, if he does accept? In Kinsley
we do indeed seem to catch a glimpse of something bright
and enticing - but is it Kali's sword or a sort of
religionist's version of Macbeth's dagger? Are we face to face with some absolute, or only with a creation of "the heat oppressed brain" which has reached some sort of unhealthy spiritual boiling point through too much study of religions?

The Sword and the Flute might be seen as the testimony of a phenomenologist who seems to have gone beyond that theoretical crash barrier raised by Kristensen, King and Farley across the path of third level seeing, and to have reached a perception of some sort of absolute, some "wholly other" tremendum. The question which remains is whether such an absolute is apparent or real, whether it operates only within the "language game" of a specific Hindu cult, or if beneath its attendant historical and linguistic phenomena there is a more widely valid reality.

(vi) Some Alternative Categorizations

Given the confusing variety of phenomenologies of religion, the attempt to bring some sort of ordering categorization to the field is a natural first step in any effort to evaluate the usefulness of this mode of research. The model which I have suggested in terms of the different senses of "see" is by no means the only one possible, nor indeed is it necessarily the best one for all possible occasions since it has been designed principally to determine the usefulness of phenomenology to the religionist conceived as a discontented figure
standing mesmerized within "the hall of mirrors". Looking briefly at some alternative categorizations may help to reinforce the idea that there is no single sense of what phenomenology of religion really is, and that we are dealing here not with a single clear cut methodology but with a broad spectrum of concerns, none of which has any claim to exclusive legitimacy. Again, my presentation of such alternative categorizations makes no pretence at being exhaustive, my intention being simply to show that such alternatives do exist, not to enumerate them without omission.

Firstly there is the basic separation of phenomenology understood as a specialized philosophy and generally associated with the name of Husserl, from phenomenology as a possible branch of any intellectual discipline. Schmitt makes this primary division clear:

'Phenomenology' is ... used in two distinct senses. In its wider sense it refers to any descriptive study of a given subject. In the narrower sense it is the name of a philosophical movement. (134)

And within that wider sense lies the phenomenology of religion, in which various sub-senses can be identified.

Ninian Smart(135) suggests that it is possible to distinguish between "pure typological phenomenology", which concentrates on non-evaluative description, and "metaphysical phenomenology", which presents a view of religious phenomena according to some particular interpretative mould. This division would separate the
work of, say, King, Jurji and indeed Smart himself (in The Religious Experience of Mankind, for example), from that of such figures as Otto, Wach and Eliade. Given the overtones of dismissive condemnation which "metaphysical" has acquired in recent philosophical usage, Smart is, however, quick to point out that he does not wish to suggest that the latter type of phenomenology of religion is "in any way illegitimate" (136), rather his categorization is designed simply so as we may be "clear as to what people are doing" (137). As well as this distinction between typological and metaphysical phenomenology, Smart also draws attention to a distinctively imaginative thread in this area of thought:

In addition to all this, the expression phenomenology has been used in another way, namely to refer to the procedure of getting at the meaning of a religious act or symbol or institution etc., for the participants. It refers, in other words, to a kind of imaginative participation in the world of the actor. (138)

Such participation is not to be confused with actual lived involvement (the play is different from any real life drama), and such intellectual "mimicking" is to be justified in the interests of more accurately apprehending the meaning of any given religious belief. As Smart puts it:

If I wish to convey Buddhist sentiments about the killing of certain kinds of animals, then I fail to convey the force of these sentiments if I describe them flatly. The exercise needs to be evocative, and in the best sense becomes a kind of mimicking. (139)
And although such exercises in empathetic imagination may change a person's religious outlook, Smart suggests that it would be misguided to suppose "that the main point in the study of religion is to change people in this way" (140).

So we are left with typological phenomenology, metaphysical phenomenology and imaginative phenomenology. The categorization seems a fair, if unremarkable, one, though we are perhaps left wondering to what extent these various types of phenomenology overlap with each other. Clearly the typological variety forms some sort of common foundation without which no phenomenological inquiry could proceed (we cannot, after all, say a great deal of any value if we have failed to establish the facts of the case). But, at the same time, can a purely typological approach ever hope to apprehend religious phenomena in their "natural" setting? And of course outwith such a setting they lose their meaning, for, as Kristensen puts it,

If the historian (but the comment holds good for any religionist no matter what his disciplinary orientation) tries to understand the religious data from a different viewpoint than that of the believers, he negates the religious reality. (141)

Whether, as Kristensen goes on to argue, "there is no religious reality other than the faith of the believers" (142), seems a much less certain contention, but that we do shoot wide of our original target if we try to understand what some particular religious phenomenon means to some individual
or group from a standpoint other than theirs, seems clear. Yet how are we to get to their standpoint using purely typological means? Surely some degree of imaginative re-experiencing is demanded. But of course it is a pertinent and difficult question whether, once such imaginative phenomenology has been brought into play, we are able to distinguish between successful re-experiencing and further interpretation over and above (indeed based on) such an intimate and authoritative knowledge of things. Does the accomplished actor in tune with the play in which he is taking part necessarily do violence to the meaning that is intended by ad-libbing some lines when the text seems unclear? Is the religionist's main concern with the text or with the meaning? To suggest that meaning is something quite fixed which can be described without remainder, that it is simply there in as specifiable and delimited a sense as a series of discrete concrete objects, seems to fail to take into account its continually vital and creative aspect.

At the outset of The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge Smart points out that the way in which one may deal with religion scientifically and, at the same time, warmly is imprecisely understood. (143)

And he isolates the goal of the book as the attempt "to throw some light" (144) upon this enterprise. I would suggest that we would go a long way towards a solution to this dilemma if we were able to plot out the way in which
the three types of phenomenology of religion which Smart identifies inter-relate in their attempts to further our understanding of the religious dimension of man.

Michael Pye suggests a limitation rather than a classification of the meanings of "phenomenology of religion", but since his treatment does identify various different ways in which this term has been used (albeit in an attempt to show that many of them ought to be disallowed) it seems legitimate to consider his remarks under our current sub-heading of "Some Alternative Categorizations".

Since the term "phenomenology of religion" "has meant many things in the past, and is sometimes still used to refer vaguely to all these things" (145), Pye is insistent that

If the word 'phenomenological' is to be useful in the definition of the methodology of the study of religion, its meaning has to be stated in terms of the requirements of the subject itself. (146)

And these requirements he sees stated in the two main concerns of the Dutch school of phenomenology of religion, represented principally in the writings of Van der Leeuw, Kristensen and Bleeker, in which "phenomenology" "has been freed from the philosophical tradition" (147) from which it originally arose. These two concerns are, firstly, to distinguish the study of religion from Christian theology, and, secondly, to understand religious phenomena from the point of view of the believer himself. The aim of the first concern is achieved by insisting on a presuppositionless inquiry in which "the question about the ultimate
validity of a specific revelation, or about the ultimate nature of God, etc. is to be bracketed off (148); whilst the aim of the second is achieved by advocating the need for imaginative re-experiencing or empathetic interpolation, this having, as Pye points out, "much in common with the aims of field work in anthropology" (149). Phenomenology of religion as defined by these two characteristics is advocated as the method for Religious Studies, indeed it is, we are told,

quite essential for religion to be studied 'phenomenologically' in this sense if the subject is to develop the world-wide validity it ought to have. (150)

However, if this understanding of phenomenology is to be of any practical value in shaping future studies then it is desirable to exclude other meanings which have been given to it, but which can just as well be referred to by other terms. (151)

Thus Pye proceeds to identify and re-christen four redundant senses of phenomenology.

The first of these is that (mis)usage which simply equates phenomenology of religion with comparative religion. This, says Pye, is mistaken since (according to his definition of phenomenology) comparative religion covers a wider area of concerns than phenomenology of religion, dealing, for example, with "the correlations between religion and general social factors or general psychological factors" (152); the second redundant sense of phenomenology uses it simply to refer to what Pye now re-christens typology, i.e. "the discernment and categorization of
recurrent types within a range of otherwise disparate data" (153); the third sense identifies phenomenology of religion with the search for the essence of religion, a pursuit which, far from being phenomenological, is rather, Pye argues, "nearer to theology and its equivalents, and also near to would be comprehensive and constructive philosophies of religion" (154); lastly, the phenomenology of religion has been used to refer to that search for structures associated with, for example, Jung's treatment of symbols or Levi-Strauss' study of mythology. Such a use also goes "beyond the strict sense in which the term 'phenomenological' is useful in the study of religion" (155).

Pye suggests that simply "to speak of 'phenomenology of religion' is to invite all the confusions which need to be avoided" (156) and he advocates an adverbial or adjectival use of the term only, dispensing altogether with its application as a noun. Given his exclusive (in the sense of excluding comparative religion, typology, essentialism and structuralism) programme of limitation we might, perhaps, wonder at his reluctance to go the whole hog and claim to have established a normative functional definition. Once again, however, the sense comes across of phenomenological studies of religion as embodying an ethos, rather than as representing a concrete methodology.

Definitely some sort of ordering limitation or categorization is needed in this field, so that, for example, when Eliade's work is described as "phenomenological" we may
object that

the distinction between the
application of the proper criteria
of phenomenological study and the
move into creative interpretation
is not sufficiently clear. (157)

However, it is far from clear if the broader classification
which Pye hopes to establish, separating "the phenomenological
study of religion and creative interpretations of
religion" (158), is in fact possible (or desirable). As
Ninian Smart has remarked:

What we need to do ultimately in
the study of religion is to break
down that simplified opposition
between learning about religion
and feeling the living power of
religion. The two can go
together and indeed must go
together if the study of religion
is to enter boldly into its new
era of promise. (159)

Jacques Waardenburg suggests a reasonably straight-
forward fourfold classification of phenomenology of
religion, our main criticism of which is (as it will be,
more seriously, with J.D. Bettis) that it is too
inclusive. For it is difficult to think of any study
of religion not fitting into one of Waardenburg's categor-
ies and thus not qualifying as phenomenological (but surely
not all studies of religion are phenomenological in nature).
Firstly, there is what he calls "the general phenomenology
of religion" (160) which is simply a synonym for the
morphology or typology of religion.

It is the careful description of
religious facts, a comparison
between them to distinguish the
similar and dissimilar, and a rational classification of them on the basis of empirical analysis and descriptive categories. (161)

Secondly, there is "special phenomenology" (162) which focuses on some specific set of religious phenomena, either by taking one of the descriptive categories identified by general phenomenology, e.g. sacrifice or prayer, and focusing on that, or by using a geographical or historical criterion to delimit the scope of an inquiry (Eastern religions, the cult of Nerthus in the early Iron Age, etc.).

Thirdly, there is "reflective phenomenology" (163) which is "partly methodology and partly theory" (164) and which is, unfortunately, not so clearly defined by Waardenburg as his other categories. But, given the little which he does say about it, it would seem to cover such a wide area (for in it "both the procedures which are in fact followed in classification and analysis, and the fundamental questions of any study of religion" (165) are dealt with) that it would be of little use in identifying any very specific type of approach.

Fourthly, Waardenburg’s final category consists of what he calls "a more existential phenomenology of religion" (166), which considers the different ways in which mankind "has responded religiously to problems which it has encountered" (167).

Waardenburg’s classification does seem to verge dangerously on the brink of being too inclusive to be of any real use. In the work of J.D. Bettis we can see what happens when a system of categorization actually steps over
that brink. Bettis claims that "phenomenology of religion" "can mean at least three things" (168). It can be a study of religion derived from and in accordance with the main ideas of Husserlian philosophy, or a study of religion using "broad phenomenological methods" (169) as evidenced in the work of Eliade, Van der Leeuw, Wach, etc. (who concentrate mostly on primitive religions), or it can be "the application of general phenomenological methods to the whole spectrum of religious ideas, activities, institutions, customs and symbols" (170). In short, "phenomenology of religion is an effort to focus the perception of religious data to the degree of clarity demanded by the sharply focused questions of the inquiring modern intellect" (171). On this classification one is left wondering exactly what does not constitute phenomenology of religion. Indeed I am inclined to agree with Sharpe here and note how in Bettis' work "a respectable scholarly idea has disappeared behind a verbal mist" (172).

(vii) Conclusion

It is not easy to sum up our findings with regard to the phenomenology of religion. The whole area has an unsatisfactorily untidy feel to it which no ordering categorization seems fully able to overcome, so that in the end we perhaps come full circle and are left agreeing with Hans H. Penner's view (quoted at the beginning of
the chapter) which suggests that

anyone who desires to find out what
a phenomenology of religion is, and
how it is applied, will find the
search a frustrating experience. (173)

Strung out between apparently endless prolegomena and
epilogomena, we might well begin to wonder if phenomenology
of religion can ever be seen to be employed, or if its
formulation is just an abstract reflection undertaken
before or after the event in order to satisfy intellectual
conscience with some sort of prescriptive or retrospective
justification. Perhaps one of the more persistent aspects
of the discontentment occasioned by the study of phenomeno-
logy of religion is the feeling that the relationship
between philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology as
used in the study of religion has not yet been sufficiently
well explored, and in particular there is an uneasy sense
that a potentially potent methodology is being undervalued.
Thus Courtney, in his assessment of Ninian Smart's
phenomenological work, suggests that "there are resources
in Husserl which Smart has not tapped" (174), his use of
reduction, for example, having in mind "rather modest
goals" (175) compared with those aimed at using the same
technique in the philosophical strata of phenomenology.
Farley makes a good beginning in sorting out the relevance
of philosophical phenomenology to the study of religion,
and, since this is still a relatively young field of
thought, it would be unnecessarily pessimistic to suppose
that current uncertainties and confusions were unresolvable.
It is, for example, with interest that we look forward to Courtney's promised work in this area\(^{(176)}\).

However, although irritating, this frustration over pinning down phenomenology of religion decisively, according to some sort of generally valid categorization, does not form any serious obstacle to the course of our present inquiry. All along I have been dealing with a specific situation and attempting to discover a mode of thought appropriate to the dilemma it poses, I am not engaged in the task of trying to formulate a (or the) phenomenology of religion as a generally applicable methodology suitable for Religious Studies as a whole. My consideration of phenomenology has been based on an assessment of its possible use for a particular standpoint, and ought not to be taken as a comprehensively valid exercise.

Our conclusion must be that whereas in its present forms phenomenology of religion does offer some guidelines concerning how the various senses of see might be developed, there seems to be no reason to suppose that phenomenology has been systematized to such an extent that any adoption of one of the three methodological orientations open to the religionist must in some way come under a phenomenological aegis. We must, of course, orientate our inquiry, we must choose in what sense of "see" we want to see, but there is no need to use an expressly phenomenological vehicle for our journey along the path which our chosen orientation indicates. On the contrary, it would seem wiser at this
stage deliberately to avoid phenomenological terminology wherever possible, given the degree of confusion which still obtains in this area of thought. The religionist's main concern at this point is to keep the course and direction of his inquiries clear, rather than to experiment with (albeit exciting and possibly useful) intellectual vehicles. It is to the matter of choosing the initial bearing which his inquiries are to follow that we must now turn our attention.
CHAPTER THREE
SAME HOUSE, DIFFERENT WORLDS: THE SELECTION AND TASK OF A
MODE OF SIGHT

Nothing human can be utterly alien to me, especially at the
so essentially human level of man's truly ultimate concerns.
For the primitive man, like me as 'modern' man, is also
striving to make existential sense of his world. As man, he
deliberates on the meaning of life and death, and his own
destiny - and deals with such existential urgencies in his
own religious forms. Thus even though clothed in
thought-forms and permeated by presuppositions that are
quite strange to me (a technized, scientized man), it is
precisely the religiosity of the primitive mind that opens
to me the possibility of genuinely penetrating this alien
culture. For all men, whenever and wherever, share the
human predicament.

Winston L. King: The Phenomenology of Religion

The astonishing mobility of our mental standpoint enables
us to enter very deeply into the feelings and outlooks of
others but we never reach the point where we cease to be
separate selves. In acts of personal explanation, I use
myself as an analogical means of explanation. I can never
make other people plain to myself by simple repetition of
what I know myself to be and to be doing and feeling. I
must never lose my respect for the other person as another
person. I depersonalize him if I assume that he is no
more than a simple duplication of the states of my own
personality. I ignore him if I refuse to explain him
analogically.

G.F. Woods: Theological Explanations
In this chapter I want to do three things: firstly, to identify which of our senses of "see" is best suited to the religionist seeking a resolution of the hall of mirrors dilemma (i.e. to choose from the three possible modes of sight or methodological orientations the one which his inquiries ought to follow in the attempt to reach a point where a world decision might be made); secondly, to examine more closely the setting which his seeing must attempt to cope with; and thirdly, to discuss in a preliminary fashion some first steps and first difficulties that are involved in aligning his studies to the orientation which is chosen. In Chapter Four I will consider in greater detail the elements involved in effecting such an alignment.

(i) Selecting a Mode of Sight

Which sense of "see" can best serve the religionist's basic desideratum (of seeing clearly what is there)? If he is to reach any usefully conclusive evaluation of the possible directions in which he may proceed in his attempt to move safely and deliberately through the hall of mirrors towards a point of world certainty, then the religionist must - for each of the modes of seeing available - ask himself:
- How is it to be put into operation? What will be involved in moving in the direction in which it points?
- In adopting its mode of vision, in looking in the direction which it suggests, what are we likely to see?
- Would its application and likely outcome definitely help to resolve this particular dilemma?
It might well appear that if he asked himself the last of these questions first the religionist would save himself much time and mental energy, since, once he had decided which mode(s) of sight would be helpful and which would be unhelpful in resolving the hall of mirrors situation he could then concentrate on the former and leave the latter to one side as irrelevant. Tempting though this shortcut might be, it would take us forward faster at the risk of assuming that the three senses of "see" represent wholly separable and distinct activities which could be considered in isolation from each other. So, in order to avoid such a misleading assumption, I have decided to put these questions to the three senses of "see" in turn. Thereafter the chapter turns its attention to a consideration of the sense thus selected.

I would stress again that the three senses of "see" overlap and that they suggest only rough directions in which it is possible for the religionist to turn, rather than offering fully mapped out routes and destinations. To the extent that it is nonsensical to speak of perception, description or imagination occurring quite apart from each other, so it is likewise absurd to suggest that seeing which concentrates on perception, description or imagination can do so in a strictly singular sense quite independently of the other two activities. I am concerned throughout with emphasis rather than with exclusive selection, and it is especially important to realise that seeing in a third level imaginative sense will also involve elements of perceptual and descriptive sight. It is
as well to remember that we are concerned with finding a way out of the hall of mirrors, not with conducting an abstract intellectual exercise or identifying some abstruse mode of cognition. Our method will thus be somewhat \textit{ad hoc}, with all the "mongrel" qualities which go with such an approach. It would, however, be quite mistaken to suppose that what is \textit{ad hoc} is necessarily unsystematic, or that its specificity involves any circumscription of vision.

(a) Level one seeing (seeing which concentrates on perception)

Moving in the direction suggested by level one seeing would involve adopting a process of \textit{radical reduction} whereby all transcendent \textsuperscript{(1)} aspects involved in the perception of some phenomenon would be "bracketed out", and the religionist would attempt by this means to descend to a level of pure immanence \textsuperscript{(2)} and see only what is there "in itself". In a sense, such reduction could be seen as a device by means of which its practitioner seeks escape from some original perceptual sin (real or imagined) which is thought to mask the true nature of things, and through which he will eventually arrive at a level of perceptual innocence where sensation and reality correspond in an unambiguous one to one relationship. To employ seeing in this sense would be to assume that our everyday commonsense outlook on the world is some sort of sensory or cognitive palimpsest written over and obscuring an earlier and "purer" perception.

Whilst no doubt possible up to a point, such an exercise would involve so extensive and rigorous a bracketing out if its eventual goal were to be reached that we are forced to
conclude that beyond a minimal level it would, from a purely practical point of view, be impossible. And from a logical point of view too it is by no means clear whether we could know, beyond a very preliminary stage, what to apply our excluding brackets to. For it is only by transcendent categories, i.e. categories which are to be excluded in the course of level one seeing, that we can define, identify and isolate particular phenomena in the first place.

Supposing that, to take a simple example, we wished to see this page according to level one seeing, how would we keep our focus of attention on the required A4 area covered with words? For the fact that it is a page covered with writing would be bracketed out. From a purely perceptual point of view such information would be unavailable (it would not be among the data which appear immediately). But in that case, once this preliminary bracketing out had been performed, why not "focus" our attention on every constituent of our visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory fields which happen to be present at that moment? On what grounds could we continue to selectively restrict our attention to the page alone once the process of reduction had begun? Moreover, even if we could reach a level of complete and uncorrupted immanence, it seems unlikely that we would be able to make any verbal reports concerning such a state. We would, in other words, end up in a situation of experienced ineffability, which is itself (as we will show in Chapter Five) a highly questionable state of affairs, and one which, represented as the outcome of some procedure,
should make us suspicious of the logical soundness of the steps it follows.

But even if we did judge it to be possible, of what use would the outlook made available by following such a mode of sight be to the mesmerized religionist? To stress level one seeing in the hall of mirrors might appear to help us towards a decision concerning the extent of religious optionality, i.e. it might seem to offer us a way in which to discover the extent of real differences between the various world certainties offered (for perhaps below their cultural and linguistic manifestations every religious world decision in fact displays a fundamental similarity). But it is by no means clear what the discovery of similarity at a pre-reflective level (between phenomena which at a post-reflective level appear to be different) would tell us, beyond the trivially true fact that when broken down into their constituent sensory elements, complex phenomena of quite dissimilar appearance seem to be the same. Thus whilst at the basic level of colour sensation seeing a landscape and seeing Grünewald's painting of the crucifixion might involve the same perceptual building blocks, this does not mean that the two phenomena are identical, only that a similar process is used to apprehend them.

The problems which confront the religionist occur at a post-reflective level and would presumably recur there no matter what state of perceptual immanence might be found to underpin it. And even supposing that we could reach such a state of immanence it seems unlikely that we could, or
would want to, remain in it for long. Although seeing in a level one sense might appear to be of use in probing "beneath" the linguistic forms in which religious meanings are expressed, in order to further discover what such forms are attempting to say, such a descent to the "pre-linguistic" is better effected by an immersion in already existing linguistic forms than by any bracketing out, and such an exercise involves the sort of procedure associated with following the directional bearing of third, rather than first, level seeing\(^{(3)}\).

(b) Level two seeing (seeing which concentrates on description)

To orientate our inquiries in the direction suggested by level two seeing would involve adopting a process of non-radical reduction, or epoche, in which any judgmental preconceptions held by the religionist would be bracketed out as detrimental to accurate observation. In a sense, whilst level one seeing tries to bracket out all our presuppositions whatsoever, level two tries to bracket out only our prejudices\(^{(4)}\). Epoche is designed to let the phenomena in their post reflective/linguistic guise stand clearly before the investigator in that guise so as he may describe them in terms appropriate to their given setting, rather than importing alien descriptive terms loaded with evaluative assumptions.

It would certainly seem possible to move at least some distance in the direction in which level two seeing points. The attempt to view things objectively or dispassionately is, after all, a familiar exercise in everyday life. But
again, any conception of an **ultimate** goal attainable through such an outlook (perhaps envisaged as being something like the standpoint of the perfect witness who can, in any situation, report accurately (and only) on what he sees) may be more of an ideal that an actualizable reality. To remove **all** the tacit value judgments implicit in a person's point of view (albeit temporarily) would, I think, be impracticable. We cannot start **de novo** from an evaluative blank sheet, as Van der Leeuw has made clear⁵, but we can at least be aware of the existence of our assumed evaluations and the likely effect which they may have on our observations. It would be misguided to pretend that we had no opinions, but these opinions can, so to speak, be tethered until we want to let them loose.

This second mode of seeing would seem to be that which has largely dictated the direction of Religious Studies in this century and which has thus been largely responsible for mesmerizing the religionist into his current problematic state. It collects data with little or no consideration of consequence, placing clearly and accurately before his eyes accounts of all the diverse phenomena which comprise the religious experience of mankind. In a sense, it could be seen as being responsible for gathering all the mirrors together in a single place or for drawing back the curtains from in front of them (the mirrors themselves being taken as representing the various religions). As such, it obviously cannot be dispensed with. To do so would simply be to seek a solution to the dilemma of mesmerization by
pretending that it never happened or by drawing closed the curtains again, and we have already dismissed such a deliberate recourse to ignorance as untenable. Rather, this mode of seeing needs an additional active dimension to evaluate the passively ordered information already gathered. Level two seeing might be taken as the basic foundation upon which the religionist must build. But to continue to practice it alone, without adding an evaluative and critical dimension, would simply render the original problem more serious.

For the religionist, as I am picturing him here, to employ this mode of seeing to escape from the hall of mirrors dilemma, would be somewhat akin to the drowning man having recourse to water in an attempt to alleviate his plight. For it is almost exclusively work done according to the alignment suggested by this mode of seeing which the tradition of the History and Phenomenology of religions has been concerned with. The vast amount of information about religion thus stockpiled has, paradoxically, been largely responsible for the situation of world uncertainty which studying religions encounters and for the extensive cataloguing of possible solutions to such uncertainty. Or, to put this more simply, cataloguing a range of world certainties leads both to a state of world uncertainty and to a situation in which such uncertainty may find a possible resolution (as we pointed out in Chapter One, the religionist stands midway between risk and security).
This dual effect of work undertaken according to level two seeing is rendered less paradoxical when we remind ourselves that the problem of mesmerization is an eventual rather than an initial one. It does not confront the religionist immediately he sets out on his studies, but rather will occur only when he is well under way. Indeed, in a sense, this problem is a self generating one, since until religious information is acquired it lies dormant, or at best only abstractly recognized, in the religionist's consciousness. A.C. Bouquet has suggested that the individual who begins a study of religions is often simply overwhelmed by what he calls "jungle books"(6), works like Frazer's Golden Bough, which are so immensely long and so laden with meticulously recorded (though not necessarily accurate) detail that it is difficult to see anything in them but a massive and impenetrable tangle of information. C.J. Bleeker, in similar vein, warns how easy it is to go astray in the vast jungle of facts innocently grouped under the apparently orderly headings of History of Religions, Comparative Religion, or Religious Studies(7). Such comments suggest an analogical comparison between the religionist and the jungle explorer which casts sufficient light on the "eventual" and "self generating" nature of the hall of mirrors dilemma to make it worth developing briefly.

The present day religionist might be seen as one who is familiar with many well worn tracks and signposts giving ready access to what was once the impenetrable and forbidding (if not actually forbidden) jungle of man's religious life.
Indeed even what were once secret and esoteric beliefs can now often be explored by anyone who cares to take the relevant books down off the shelf. Thus, for example, we can all learn the (somewhat complicated) answer to the Upanishadic question, "Do you know how it is that at the fifth oblation water comes to have a human voice?", although knowledge of this, the secret basis of life, was originally thought to ensure the knower of salvation, giving him power over death and rebirth, and was consequently taught only to the initiated of an elite group. Moreover, we can understand why this knowledge was thought to bestow such power, and why it was thought necessary to keep it as a secret doctrine (8).

The result of this collection of religious knowledge which is so easily available today (and which has been gathered mostly via methods which we can class together roughly as having been orientated towards level two seeing) is, to continue the analogy, that many of us have gone deep into the jungle. However, despite such apparently successful progress, and our initial confidence that we could see clearly where we were going, a certain unease may now be detected in the air. Here and there, travellers are turning to their guides (whether these be phenomenological, historical or comparative in nature) and are beginning to question just how trustworthy they are. Where exactly have they led us? Are we really beginning to understand the jungle, or can our long journey only be measured in terms of miles covered, a marathon rather than an exploration? Can we find our way
back out again? (Though perhaps we do not want to, for some of our number appear to have "gone native"). Are we really in the jungle at all, or are these fantastic creatures that we see simply illusions, what we imagine the jungle to contain? Can we really expect to understand the jungle in the ways that its inhabitants do? Does our very presence here not distort what we came to see? Are we wandering through a single jungle or many different ones? Are these great towering trees, which the jungle dwellers climb and live in, safe? Are their roots secure, would they bear our weight? And why are there so many different types of tree in the first place? Moreover, why did we want to come to this perplexing and uncomfortable environment, would we not have been safer and more comfortable at home?

Or, translating back into non-analogical terms:-

Are we beginning to understand religious phenomena or are we just amassing a vast amount of information about them? Where is the line between understanding and belief, which some scholars seem at times to have "crossed over" (and what is their position then in regard to the study of religions)? Are we really studying religions as they are lived and believed in, or are we just wrapped up in our own ideas about religion? Can we ever discover the inner core of religions, "penetrate into the hearts and minds" (9) of the believers, or are we inevitably restricted to an observation of externals? Does our approach distort what we want to study, so that a kind of Heisenbergian principle comes into play, always keeping the religious phenomena one
step ahead of the religionist\(^\text{(10)}\)? Are all the religions in some sense the same, or are they essentially different? (and do they in that case actually conflict?). Are we studying one phenomenon or many? Should we talk of religion or religions? Can we accept as valid any of such central ontological assertions as the existence of God or Brahman, or that the overall nature of the universe is samsaric or sunyatic? Why, for that matter, are there so many religious outlooks to begin with? Finally, why are we studying religions at all, would we not have been better simply to have stayed within our own indigenous belief system?

Such doubts characterize the mesmerization felt in the hall of mirrors, and they are contained in summary form in the three primary questions of the religionist. They do not occur before we set out, but emerge (I would suggest inevitably) somewhere along the way. They should not be seen as reasons for not setting out, for not studying religions, in the first place, but neither should they be indefinitely ignored once they do arise. At some point they must be carefully examined, otherwise the value of continued study is bound to be called in question. To simply continue in a mode of inquiry which is largely orientated towards level two seeing, after sufficient data has been gathered for these problems to become clear, would constitute a refusal to come to terms with the highly perplexing nature of the material being considered.

Paul Younger sees the study of religions as having gone
through two stages, historical and phenomenological, in which questions of meaning and truth were "consciously postponed" (11). The next step, according to Younger, would be to see the historical and phenomenological materials in terms of the underlying meaning-experience of an individual within each of the several traditions. What do the phenomena that make up this religious tradition add up to in terms of the individual's experience of meaning? Or what is human life like when viewed through the forms of this religious tradition? (12)

I do not wish to consider the historical accuracy of Younger's comments as giving a generally valid picture of the development of Religious Studies. For our purposes, however, his analysis is useful. Thus the first two stages he identifies may be seen as corresponding to an emphasis on level two seeing, and his proposed third stage to a re-direction towards our third mode of sight. Certainly in terms of the religionist's search for world certainty this progression rings true, for there comes a time when accumulated impersonal information about religion begins to pose insistent questions about truth and meaning and about the nature of those exercises which handle such phenomena in the first place. Thus in rejecting level two seeing as the mode of sight required by the religionist I am not denying its initial value. I am, however, denying the wisdom of indefinitely continuing to orientate Religious Studies in a descriptive way.
(c) Level three seeing (seeing which concentrates on imagination)

An alignment according to level three seeing seems to be the methodological orientation required by the religionist in the hall of mirrors. Its fundamental operative device would appear to be what we might call interpolation,\(^{(13)}\) which is concerned with changing one's perspective in a profound and comprehensive way in order to see things from various different points of view. More specifically, it involves the ability to see things clearly from one's own point of view, from others' points of view and from an objective (or cumulative) transpersonal view. Suppose, for example, that some object is regarded by one group of people as a sacred thing and by another as a mundane and purely functional artefact, the religionist using interpolation would be concerned to see this object with as near equal conviction as possible through the eyes of each group. Moreover, in light of this exercise he would want to know how he viewed/ought to view this object, and what, in some objective sense, its true nature was.\(^{(14)}\) In the case of a particular object he might conclude that its "true nature" was simply the total of viewpoints expressed concerning it and that diversity here was unproblematic. That what it "really is" is how men have seen it and will continue to see it across the ages, and that it makes no sense to try to locate some impersonal and objective veridical essence which will hold good for all time. However, in the case of ontological claims about the ultimate nature of things - when he considers religions in terms of offering systems of world certainty - it would appear that
in attempting to locate veridicality a more exclusive (z is right, a-y are wrong) or "translatory" (z is right/wrong, but a-y are, despite appearances, identical to z) approach would be required. The relativity which is acceptable at a "partial" level, when we are dealing with discrete objects or events, is not allowable when we come to talk about totality. As Roger Trigg has put it:

if there are different ways of conceiving reality, it is not enough to describe them. We cannot avoid choosing between them. (15)

The religionist who adopts an interpolative approach might, perhaps, be seen as one trying to bring his own view as closely as possible into parallel alignment with how things ultimately are, by exploring this latter state of affairs via a comprehensive sifting through of others' viewpoints concerning it, and then matching them against his own experience and knowledge of things. He is engaged in a process which seems very much a matter of heuristic interaction.

No decisive bar to the possibility of looking in the direction suggested by level three type seeing seems to exist, though of course there are limits to the extent to which it would be possible to pursue it. In attempting to see something from someone else's point of view, for instance, we are clearly limited by both their articulateness and readiness to communicate and share their outlook, and by our own initial attitude towards that outlook (it might, for example, be difficult to reach a point of accurate
interpolative insight into the mind of a sadistic killer\(^{(17)}\), and, at all events, no matter how close empathy may bring us, we can never become some other person. Likewise in attempting to see how things are in some overall objective sense there are obviously constraints, both in terms of available information and in terms of our own intellectual limits. Indeed even seeing or realizing fully what we ourselves believe is not a one hundred percent foolproof process. It is all too easy to let the consequences of some part of our outlook escape us, and, to the extent that such consequences would alter our viewpoint if they were realized, we cannot really claim to know our own minds.\(^{(18)}\)

Given the hall of mirrors situation it seems clear that a basic methodological alignment according to level three seeing is required. The question is, can such seeing be embodied in a definite mode of investigation or does it simply provide a statement of what would constitute our ideal *modus operandi* and directional heading in this particular case? (In the same way as, for example, a description of what the features of a perfect escape plan would be might not provide a foundation for an actually operable mode of escape which could be successfully followed). However, before we discuss precisely how the orientation suggested by this type of seeing is to be followed (the concern of Chapter Four) I want first to consider more fully the situation it is faced with, what it aims to achieve, and some of the problems it will immediately encounter.
(ii) The Area to be Explored

The problems which confront the religionist in the hall of mirrors and which he needs to see through in order to avoid mesmerization, arise from the straightforward fact that, from a religious point of view, individuals believe vastly different things about the nature of the world and the meaning of human existence. The title of this chapter is derived from a comment made by Max Müller to Henry Newbolt (one of his house guests at Norham Gardens in August 1885) which neatly sums up the common response to encountering an alternative world certainty to one's own. Müller said:

If you say that all is not made by design, by love, then you may be in the same house but you are not in the same world with me. (19)

And I will use the terms "same house" and "different worlds" to further articulate the nature and consequences of this state of perceived diversity in world certainties (using Müller's remark as no more than the starting point for a metaphorical device: I am in no sense suggesting a literal exegesis of what Müller "really meant").

The point of disagreement which arouses this feeling of being in some sense worlds apart from someone with whom we may otherwise (sometimes quite literally) be standing shoulder to shoulder, commonly centres around the question of teleology. It may find expression in terms of disputes concerning the existence or nature of deity, the explanation of suffering, the possibility of post-mortem existence, or
the morality of some mode of behaviour, but all such issues are ultimately grounded in a world view which puts forward a teaching about the overall design and purpose of things, and, in particular, about man's place in that design.

There are various everyday occasions on which, finding our own view of things challenged by some alternative outlook, we may well be tempted to say along with Müller: "If you believe or don't believe such and such, then although you may be in the same house you are not in the same world with me". Such an utterance would seem to denote an apparently irreducible dissimilarity, an impenetrable separateness, a barrier to any further communication or a decision simply not to attempt discussion. It suggests that although we may have certain things in common, on this particular matter we are implacably opposed. In the study of religions, the occasions on which we might be tempted to make such an utterance are legion.

The interpolative religionist, however, suspends his right to make such statements of distancing unlikeness and disagreement, and chooses instead to investigate with impartial thoroughness the different worlds which religious man seems to occupy in such perplexing multiplicity. Indeed an orientation towards level three seeing might well be metaphorically characterized as an exercise in inter-global travel and exploration in which no religious world of meaning is considered too distant or too strange to visit, and the hall of mirrors could be presented as the realization that although we are in the same house we are often in different
worlds (and that given an awareness of this situation it becomes difficult to know just which world we occupy, or should seek to occupy).

Let me stress that in using this terminology I am not suggesting some sort of religious relativism where the religionist might simply avoid the necessity of having to come to a world decision by arguing that evaluation is all a matter of standpoint and that according to which particular position he occupies at any moment so his outlook is automatically determined. Whilst accepting that standpoint does influence outlook to a certain extent, I do not wish to elevate such regional colourings to the status of independent ontologies - to do so would be to risk making what is merely appropriate stand in place of what is true. As we have already suggested, there are difficulties in accepting more than one view of the totality of things and it is in terms of the world certainties which they voice (i.e. their overall outlooks on the human situation) that we are concerned with religions here. (This point will be stressed again later when we distinguish between universal principle and local setting). A passage from Roger Trigg's *Reason and Commitment*, which I endorse as summarizing the sort of situation facing the religionist, may serve as a correction against any tendency to read the same house/different worlds metaphor in a relativistic way:

A Christian (but the same goes for an adherent of any particular religious tradition) must not be thought to live in a different world from the non-Christian.
The holder of one scientific theory must not be conceived of as living in a different world from the holder of another. The fact that people hold different beliefs does not mean that the beliefs are about different things. The beliefs are all about the same world, but some of them are false. ... When someone is committed to Christianity, he shares the beliefs which constitute Christianity, and if they are true, they are true for everyone, including atheists. If they are false, they are false even for Christians, even though they do not recognize it. If this were not so, there would be no clash between Christians and atheists, since they could not be disagreeing. (20)

The meaning and accuracy of claiming that we are all in the same house becomes clear if we reflect on three aspects of life:

Firstly, if we consider the purely physical nature of the world we can see that its basic fabric according to any human perspective remains constant across all the flux of personality, time and culture. Light and dark, hot and cold, wet and dry, large and small, metallic and non-metallic, animal, vegetable and mineral - such various general categories or states of thing have faced all homo sapiens throughout history (although whether or not these categories are consciously perceived or understood does of course vary immensely according to time and place).

Secondly, the basic possible settings for a human life strung out between its temporal defining points of birth and death are likewise constant: male or female, childhood,
youth, old age, solitude and companionship, poverty and wealth, health and sickness, and so on. 

Thirdly, for life lived within these physical, biological and social constraints the same basic structures of feeling obtain: joy, despair, contentment, fear, love, ambition, anger, and so on (though again the extent to which these various states are named and articulated may differ enormously from age to age).

In short, what we might call "the human situation" does not vary appreciably across the centuries. Its basic constituents remain the same for the Iron Age Celtic warrior who worshipped the goddess Nerthus with offerings (which included human sacrifice) cast into holes in the ground or into bogland tarns,\(^{21}\) and for the twentieth century religionist who may be a knower of many gods and a worshipper of none, and for every other individual spark of consciousness which flickers briefly in the awesomely diverse human multitude before it too (to use a phrase of Thomas Mann's) "disappears through history's trapdoor"\(^{22}\).

That it is, in a similar fashion, metaphorically accurate to suggest - in spite of this basic shared condition - that we are nonetheless in different worlds, becomes clear when we consider what might be called the contextual details of specific lives, and when we note the varieties of interpretation put forward to account for life's meaning and to suggest the most fitting ways to live in the light of such a meaning.

By contextual details I mean no more than the particular
combination of circumstances in any individual's life - biological, social, cultural, historical, and so on - which serve to render it unique. It is unnecessary to labour the point that within the common area of the human situation, fate, for want of a better word, provides vastly different places in which we must live out our lives. Even individuals born in the same time and culture, indeed even within the same family, may be worlds apart in terms of the course along which their lives and thoughts will run. And when we consider humanity as a whole, the variety of fates is staggering in its unevenness, presenting us with such giddy and unsettling contrasts as that between, say, a Roman galley slave and a concert pianist, a millionaire business man and a wandering ascetic, between a shaman and a roadsweeper, or an aborted foetus and a man who lives to be a hundred. In this sense we are in different worlds.

However, it is not on this sense of being in different worlds that I wish to concentrate here. Why, from the common stock of possibilities, we are dealt such vastly unequal hands is a question which any religious outlook must face up to in its attempt to provide a sense-giving view of things, but here we can simply include this unevenness of experience among those other common elements which make up the basic human situation, subsuming the dissimilarity it individually results in beneath the fact that it is an unevenness encountered by everyone. The fact of inequality is as basic to the human situation as that of love, fear or finitude.
The sense of being in different worlds which I do wish to examine here, is that which sets us apart in terms of how we look out upon this world, how we view our situation and how, in consequence, we feel we ought to act in whatever particular web of circumstances our biography is enmeshed.

Again, it is obvious that men view the world differently from a religious point of view and that consequently they try to live their lives according to different ideal models. Clearly for the man who considers his situation to be explained largely by the operation of karma and samsara, a different view of things and a different code of conduct will emerge than for one who does not believe in the occurrence of rebirth, but sees himself as a single (rather than serial) creation of a personal god of love (rather than the outcome of a mechanistic process of moral cause and effect). Or, if the codes of conduct appear to be similar, the reasons behind them will certainly be different (23).

Perhaps at this stage, though, a specific example might bring home the point more forcefully than these somewhat crude caricatures of doctrinal difference. To give this I will go back to Müller and compare a brief statement representative of his world certainty with that of Eugene Marais, the South African poet and naturalist who was one of the pioneers of the science of ethology. Both passages are theologically untechnical, indeed strictly speaking Marais's might be considered as non-religious. I choose them chiefly on account of the sense of personal commitment and immediacy which each one gives, a sense which might risk
being distanced in a more philosophically considered statement. On the subject of different worlds it is essential to remember that we are not dealing simply with a series of opposing theoretical ideas, but with the way particular persons actually experience (or experienced) the world. First Müller:

How thankful we ought to be every minute of our existence to him who gives us all richly to enjoy. How little one has deserved this happy life ... what better, more beautiful, more orderly world could we wish to belong to than that by which we are surrounded and supported on all sides... It is a perfect sin not to be happy in this world. (24)

And now Marais:

We seek in vain in nature for love, sympathy, pity, justice, altruism, protection of the innocent and weak. From the very beginnings of life we hear a chorus of anguish. Pain is a condition of existence, escape from pain is the purpose of all striving ... If nature possess a universal psyche, it is one far above the common and most impelling feelings of the human psyche. She certainly has never wept in sympathy, nor stretched a hand protectively over even the most beautiful and innocent of her creatures. (25)

Logically, but none the less tragically for that, Marais took his own life in 1936. As Huston Smith has pointed out, the acceptance or rejection of some such concept as God is sometimes, at root, very much a matter of facing life in an attitude of hope rather than despair(26).

I have suggested that we are similar in terms of the basic elements of which our lives are composed, and I have
collectively termed these elements "the human situation" and located the accuracy of claiming that we are in the same house in the fact that whatever shape the individual biography we happen to live through may be, it is lived within the defining constraints of these basic shared conditions. We could, for convenience, symbolize these common elements as the letters of the alphabet. Our difference lies first in the particular combination and alignment of these "letters" which spell out our person, place and history, and secondly in the world certainty which we accept as providing an accurate overall view of things. In the hall of mirrors provided by the accumulated data of his discipline, the religionist faces a myriad of different worlds. Both the problem of and the likely solution to this mesmerizing situation seem to originate in extensive inter-global investigation, undertaken in the first instance in a descriptively orientated spirit of research and in the second by an interpolative approach. World certainty could of course be included within the elements of any alignment as just another characterizing feature of that particular circumstance, but it is also clearly set apart from all other such features by the fact that it attempts to make sense of that alignment as a whole. Whether or not we can always consider as strictly religious such attempts to provide some sort of sense giving overview to our lived alignments (taken as representative of the human situation as a whole) is not clear. Suffice it to say that world uncertainty and world certainty occur throughout the
concentric rings found in any plausible definition of religion, and overlaps with non-religious phenomena occur at the periphery of such definitional "targets". The question is, can our attempt to see clearly what is there, in terms of arriving at a cogent and reliable religious world decision in the face of religious diversity, strike the right balance? Can it successfully thread a way between, on the one hand, that simple unreflective exposure to the data which results in our mesmerization and critical uncertainty in the first place, and, on the other, a data-free type of abstract reflection which would tend towards groundless speculation and unreliable certainty? Interpolation seeks an exposure to "the facts" of such depth and intimacy that whilst the danger of groundless speculation is eliminated, the risk of some kind of hypnotic paralysis (indeed even of conversion) remains. However, such a risk is lessened by its insistent investigative drive which demands continual re-evaluation until the diversity with which we are confronted has been exhaustively explored. Interpolation, in other words, tries to follow a middle way between uncritical saturation and uninformed decision making.

(iii) First Steps and Difficulties

Broadly speaking, interpolation is based on the assumption traditionally made by poets, from Goethe ("in every man all forms of human character are potentially present") to Walt Whitman who acknowledged the duplicates of himself "under all the scrape lipped and pipe-legged concealments"(27). In other words, it assumes that since
we are all in the same house we can therefore at least see into and understand - if not agree and sympathize with - our different worlds. This is perhaps the most basic methodological assumption underlying the interpolative study of religion, i.e. that from a starting point of shared likeness what is initially unfamiliar and alien may be investigated with a reasonable hope of eventually understanding it. The consequences of such an assumption (which is, I think, a reasonable one, though I do not wish to discuss the grounds for accepting its validity here) are enormous in terms of enlarging the scope of our religious view. To return to Walt Whitman, a passage from his "Song of Myself" demonstrates the sort of way in which, by an imaginative process, we might extensively widen our circle of religious thinking:

I am the man ... I suffered ... I was there,
The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
The mothers condemned for a witch and burnt
with dry wood, her children gazing on;
I do not despise you priests;
My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
Enclosing all worship ancient and modern ...
Waiting responses from oracles ... honouring the gods
... saluting the sun
Making a fetish of the first rock or stump
... powowing with sticks in the circle of obis,
Helping the lama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols,
Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession ...
Rapt and austere, in the woods, a gymnosophist,
Drinking mead from the skull cap ... to shasta and vedas admirant ... minding the Qur'an,
Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore
From the stone and knife-beating the serpent skin drum:
Accepting the gospels, accepting him that was crucified,
Knowing assuredly that he is divine,
To the mass kneeling - to the puritan's prayer rising
- sitting patiently in a pew,
Ranting and frothing in my insane crisis -
Waiting dead-like till my spirit arouses me? (28)
In a more disciplined and codified way this placing of oneself in a range of different religious situations, and attuning one's ear to all their various rhythms and rhymes until a sense of belonging appears, is precisely what the interpolative religionist must attempt to do. He is concerned with seeing from the inside what he had hitherto observed from an external standpoint only. Momentarily reversing the focus of our same house/different worlds metaphor, we might envisage the religionist as one who is trying not just to look from the outside at the different houses he encounters on his journey, and inferring from that what sort of lives their occupants lead, but with gaining entry as a visitor and walking through their rooms himself (where of course he may be considered as an intruder). He is concerned not merely with compiling a descriptive catalogue of immediately observable religious characteristics (though his acquaintance with such a catalogue may be an essential formative influence on his turning to an interpolative mode of inquiry) but with engaging in what Van der Leeuw has called "psychological description" (29) based on "systematic introspection" (30). It is as if he places himself as the decoding grid upon the scattered ciphers of religious phenomena (which cannot be understood unless read through a human life). He acts in loco parentis, as it were, for all the religious symbols he encounters, making himself responsible for allowing their meaning full expression. Indeed, as we have remarked before, he is engaged upon an exercise very similar to that of Collingwood's
historian, who is called upon "to re-enact the past in his own mind", for the interpolative religionist is called upon to re-enact in his own life the many diverse religious outlooks he encounters.

Many have drawn attention to the effect this sort of investigation has on the religionist's own outlook (and through him on the religions themselves). Joachim Wach, for example, suggests that the main worth of studying religions lies in its broadening and deepening of what he calls the *sensus numinis*, which in turn prepares us for "a deeper conception of (our) own faith"(31), whatever that may be, since the *sensus numinis* nurtures "a new and comprehensive experience of what religion is and means"(32). It is to such a process of new knowledge shedding light on what we are already familiar with, that John S. Dunne refers when he talks of "passing over" from one religion to another and "coming back" with new insight to one's own beliefs. Indeed Dunne goes so far as to claim that

The holy man of our time ... is not
a figure like Gotama or Jesus or
Mohammed, a man who could found a
world religion, but a figure like
Gandhi, a man who passes over by
sympathetic understanding from
his own religion to other
religions and comes back again
with new insight to his own. (33)

Likewise Huston Smith - echoing our same house/different worlds analogy - suggests that the study of religions introduces "a whole new dimension" into what he calls "the glance of the spirit"(34), for to engage in such an activity is "to have another world to live in"(35). And, in the
same vein, Kristensen maintains that "when religion is the subject of our work, we grow religiously" (36).

Inter-global travel between the various religious worlds of meaning certainly sounds both useful and intellectually exciting from the point of view of the mesmerized religionist and, if the authorities I have quoted above are to be believed, it may well be religiously important too. We have given some thought to the way in which it might be effected, though our emphasis has so far been on outlining the goal of interpolative seeing rather than enumerating the steps necessary to reach it. We have also seen in the work of David R. Kinsley an example of what may be considered as interpolative travel to another (and quite distant) religious world. But before considering in detail how we can both "pass over" into such different worlds as that of the cult of Kali and "come back" to our own world again (the concern of Chapter Four), and how such imaginative intellectual/spiritual journeying may affect both us and the loci we visit - can we, for example, include such phenomena as Kali within the "glance of the spirit" or would we be forced to look away, perplexed and appalled at what we see? - (issues which will be considered in Chapter Six), I want first to look at what we might call some "first order considerations", difficulties which confront the basic idea of such an exercise as interpolation even before anything more definite than a general picture of it (as a means by which we may orientate our inquiries in the
direction indicated by third level seeing) has been given.

There are, I think, three such considerations. The first concerns the bounds of relevance for religious world certainties, the second queries the effectiveness of interpolation as a means of arriving at decisions (as opposed to merely collecting information) about them, the third questions (and seeks to circumscribe) the range within which interpolation can operate. All make important challenges to the very fabric of our argument so far, suggesting that, on the one hand, the hall of mirrors constituted by our knowledge of religions is not necessarily the problematic and mesmerizing place I have suggested it to be, and, on the other hand, that - even if it was - interpolative seeing would not be the way out.

Let us now focus our attention on these three considerations in turn:

(1) Perhaps the first question that arises from our re-statement of the hall of mirrors situation in terms of a confrontation with different worlds of meaning, and our suggestion of a way to deal with it (i.e. by adopting an interpolative mode of inquiry), is one which we have touched on earlier, namely: "are religious certainties suggesting how we should see specific cultural, temporal, or psychological worlds, that is, are they speaking to particular contextual situations, or are they suggesting a way of seeing the basic elements of the human situation, offering an outlook which will remain valid in any alignment of them?" Or, putting this in terms of our alphabet analogy: are religions talking about
the specific states A, AB, ABC, C, CA, G, GH, and so on, or do they say something about the alphabet itself which holds good for any particular combination of letters? This question is a vitally important one in terms of deciding what attitude to adopt towards the diversity of man's beliefs. For, on the one hand, if religions are seen as providing particular accounts of particular sets of conditions then the fact that they are different is unproblematic, whereas if, on the other hand, they are seen as something addressed to what we might call the elemental structure of life, that is, if they seek to provide meanings for existence and directions for living which hold good under any circumstances, then the fact of religious diversity is a highly (not to say urgently) problematic matter, since it then automatically poses the question (to everyone): "which view, if any, is the right view and what is the right way to live?"

We have already asked if it is reasonable to consider religions in terms of systems of world certainty, rather than focusing on their mythological, ritualistic, social, or political (that is, rather than ontological) characteristics. Our reply was that so long as such a focus was seen as a selective emphasis, other than an exclusive identification of single function or essence, it could legitimately be allowed. The question we are now considering asks: granted that religions can be seen as offering distinct ontological teachings which suggest what the nature of the world is and how human life ought to be lived in such a world, are the
offered world certainties "international" certainties rather than "national" certainties? Do they speak to specific individual life-settings or to the human situation in general? Are we dealing with a global or with a local scale?

I cannot discuss in detail the very complex issue of whether we ought to view religious world certainty as being addressed to "world" in the sense of the particular alignments, or to "world" in the sense of the basic elements, of existence. This would require careful investigation of each tradition, posing the question from faith to faith without assuming that a single uniform answer would fit them all. At first sight it might seem reasonable to suggest that primitive religions address alignment more than element, whereas with the great world religions the situation is reversed, but this may simply be to confuse a deliberate preoccupation with one particular cultural locus with an accidental unawareness of the simple facts of history and geography. In any event I do not think that a simple either/or answer would be possible here, for there seem to be certain aspects of religion which are geared mainly to element, others which are geared mainly to alignment (this getting back to our point that to take religions as systems of world certainty in the first place is to concentrate on one aspect among many). Anyway, for the purposes of our argument, I will follow Huston Smith's line of thought on this issue, since it strikes me as being reasonable and uncontroversial (although whether or not myth and rite can never make their way into the emotional
life of an outsider is, perhaps, questionable in the light of a developed interpolative approach. According to Smith every religion is

a blend of universal principles and local setting. The former, when lifted out and made clear, speak to man as man, whatever his time or place. The latter, a rich compound of myth and rite, can never make its way into the emotional life of an outsider and can reach his understanding only with the help of a poet or a skilled anthropologist. (37)

It is when these so called universal principles are involved that the same house/different worlds situation becomes intellectually interesting, if not perplexing, it is when we are dealing with those elements of religion which speak to Everyman regardless of his temporal or geographical setting that the hall of mirrors weaves so mesmerizing a dilemma. Of course there may be considerable difficulty in providing reliable criteria to distinguish between those elements of religion addressed to a universal context and those addressed to a more local one, but the distinction itself seems valid nonetheless.

In other words, it will not always be easy to extricate world certainty from the more incidental milieux in which it may be locally presented. Sometimes a process of comparison may, however, help to isolate the universal principles involved. Thus, for example, when we notice that matriarchal agricultural societies tend to see deity in female terms, whereas patriarchal pastoral societies tend to see it in male terms, we might suggest that the concept of deity was
the universal principle (and thus of concern to all men) whereas particular gender was a matter of more local import. However, whilst acknowledging the difficulty which will frequently attend attempts to make a clear distinction between world certainty and its accompanying setting, I want simply to assume that such a distinction is basically valid in its intention and that it could in fact be made. My concern here is not with attempting to construct an explicit formula to separate "national" from "international" aspects of religion, but to suggest guidelines for dealing with the diversity of outlooks found in this latter category.

Given, then, that (at least in aspect if not in total) religion is concerned to provide universal principles by which we may understand and guide our lives in the world, that is, any human life in any situational alignment, and given also that there is a variety of such principles which are, at least at first sight, incompatible (either we are reborn or we are not, time is either cyclical or linear, the operation of samsara and karma is incompatible with the will of a beneficent and all powerful deity, the self is either eternal or transient, either it is wrong to kill or it is not), then apart from the questions of why so many different religious pictures of the world occur (dealt with in Chapter Five), and how best we are to respond to this situation of perceived and perplexing diversity (dealt with in Chapters Two, Three and Four), we are faced with the problem of how an interpolative approach can hope to lead us to a decision here. It is with such a question
that our second "first order consideration" is concerned.

(2) The religionist is faced with a situation of perplexing religious diversity. We have suggested that, if he is to escape the intellectual and spiritual mesmerization inherent in the range of world certainties thus offered, he ought to adopt an interpolative approach - orientated towards third level seeing - to the phenomena of his study. An approach, that is, which takes him further "inside" the phenomena, allowing him (so far as this is possible) to stand within each of the different worlds lived in by religious man, and to see things from the viewpoint of their indigenous inhabitants. (As we shall discover in the next chapter, interpolation consists of more than just the straightforward effort to see things from other people's points of view in some kind of disciplined and systematic way, but since it is this - important - aspect of interpolation which our second "first order consideration" focuses on, we shall, for the moment, concentrate exclusively upon it). This consideration voices what is perhaps the most obvious question confronting a recommendation of an interpolative mode of inquiry as a means of resolving the hall of mirrors dilemma. It asks: "Can an approach which seems to concentrate on taking us further inside religious phenomena avoid not also taking us further down the road of mesmerization, rendering us more and more incapable of reaching any religious conclusions as we recognize more clearly the nature and number of the images confronting us?"
This so called mesmerization is an invasive uncertainty about such questions as "what kind of world is this?" and "what sort of a person should I try to become?" (38), questions which, at least in part, acquire their sense of difficulty from a knowledge of the various different alternatives available here (39). But if we follow an approach which simply shows us more fully the range of those alternatives, do we not inevitably further, rather than lessen, our state of hypnotized indecisiveness? If we are genuinely advocating a departure from work orientated according to level two seeing, then how can we justify what, by virtue of its further penetration into and collection of "the data", appears to be little more than an extreme application of it?

There are, I think, three possible ways of replying to the suggestion that interpolative seeing simply involves the religionist in a deepening of his dilemma, rather than offering a feasible means of escape from it.

(i) We have, in fact, considered this first reply already (see above, our discussion of the first of the three "first order considerations"). I mention it again here simply in the interests of completeness. This reply suggests that there is no dilemma, arguing that, in imagining his mesmerization to be problematic, the religionist has simply viewed the findings of his work from an incorrect angle. Instead of accepting religious diversity as the endpoint and legitimate conclusion of his investigations, the religionist has seen it as a phenomenon
necessitating further thought. According to this reply, interpolation could not be accused of deepening any dilemma since to imagine that there is a dilemma in the first place is mistaken. It may deepen an illusory dilemma, but, providing the religionist abandons the standpoint which renders its findings problematic, it ought, on the contrary, to deepen his understanding of man's religious life. Now to accept religious diversity as unproblematic in this way involves appeal either to some principle which claims an underlying similarity to exist beneath it, there acting to negate what, according to this principle, are only specious surface differences, or to the idea that the consitutive differences in this apparently complex node of diversity cannot be seen as dissimilar alternatives since they do not originate in, or address, the same situation. The second reply, which we will consider in a moment, defends interpolation by reference to the former type of argument, the first by reference to the latter. In short, this first reply argues that since religious world certainties are addressed to alignment rather than to element (that, in other words, they are temporally, geographically or culturally specific, that a state of religious relativism obtains) no mesmerization need occur: the religionist is faced with the relatively simple task of matching particular beliefs to particular situations and discovering what range of possibilities is available in any particular time and culture, rather than with discovering some single absolute outlook which holds true in a comprehensive and objective
sense. As such, interpolation ought greatly to aid, rather than hinder, his quest.

We have already noted that, although partly issuing from and addressed to specific alignment, an important part of religion is nonetheless of a universal tone such that any alternative to it does in fact constitute a potentially mesmerizing problem. Under such circumstances our second first order consideration repeats: why do we follow an interpolative course?

(ii) The second possible reply to the challenge that interpolation simply worsens an already serious problem, is to suggest that it is only from a superficial "external" viewpoint that the religions appear in such a light as to create any mesmerizing diversity. When we penetrate into the outlooks of the various believers in an interpolative way, we will find that, fundamentally, all religions are the same. This reply suggests that, beyond a superficial level, there is in fact no religious diversity, no range of world certainties, and, therefore, no religionist's dilemma. Far from just accumulating more perplexing data, interpolation, according to this view, takes us below the level of a descriptive approach and leads us to where the hall of mirrors reflects a single image.

Although I think it is clear that close study of apparently quite different religious phenomena will sometimes lead to the conclusion that they are not so far apart as might have first been thought, it seems quite implausible to imagine that all religious diversity could be
transmogrified into a unified system in which no serious oppositions in outlook occurred. And, so long as a situation of religious diversity obtains, so long as any alternative world certainties exist after its application, then interpolation is still called in question as a means of approaching this situation. (40)

(iii) Whilst the first two replies seek to defend interpolation on the grounds that the data it collects result (or ought to result) in conclusions which resolve the diversity which creates the hall of mirrors dilemma in the first place (in the one case by suggesting a relativistic view, in the other by locating a common underlying similarity), the third reply (to our second "first order consideration") seeks to defend interpolation on the grounds that, far from being some super-descriptive mode of seeing, interpolation is not principally concerned with the collection of further data whose informational content will offer a possible justification for practising it. It is this reply which I want to present as a legitimate rejoinder to the objection that interpolation merely renders more critical the mesmerization already felt by the religionist.

Let us first of all make quite sure that we recognize fully the force of this objection to interpolation. It has sometimes been said that to understand is to forgive. Now if we assume that successful interpolation would result in understanding (without yet assuming whether, or to what extent, interpolation can in fact be successful) then would the religionist who used it extensively not risk impairing
his ability to arrive at judgments? Of course judgment and forgiveness are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but despite our crude shorthand use of these subtle and complicated terms, the point remains that if we end up being religiously multi-lingual, we may, so to speak, lose our own voice. Granted that to see the world through a Müller's or a Marais' eyes may make the basis on which we formulate any final world decision of our own a more informed one. But if we succeed in seeing into such polar opposites of outlook with equal depth and intensity (so that we can "forgive" Müller and Marais any divergence which they may show from our own point of view, so that we can see the world through their eyes) then it seems clear that it will become more difficult for us to decide what the true nature of things is. Can we still maintain operable criteria of truth and falsity in a situation of extensive inter-global travel, where we are brought into contact with so many conflicting points of view? Perhaps such diverse acquaintance will make us laudably tolerant of all men's religious beliefs and practices, but if it does so at the cost of rendering us morally paralyzed and ontologically costive then it would seem unwise to advocate any procedure which demanded such a price.

Can interpolation escape the criticism that, far from helping the religionist to steer a course through the hall of mirrors, it simply floods him with more data (gathered in a more effectively paralyzing way) which re-multiply the myriad of mesmerizing religious images he had sought release from through it?
The third possible reply to our second "first order consideration" (and the reply I wish to advocate here) claims that interpolation avoids its accusation of further implication in already mesmerizing religious information, simply by virtue of the fact that the prime focus of such interpolation is not (unlike that of work orientated towards level two seeing) the acquisition of straightforward factual data about the various religions of man. However, the immediate and obvious retort to such a reply is plainly: of what use is a non-factual mode of research? What can it tell us if it does not inform us of anything new?

Now I am not suggesting that no new factual information is collected during the course of an interpolative investigation (just as there will often be elements of interpolation in a descriptively orientated approach: I stress again that there are overlaps between those different modes of sight according to whose various outlooks the religionist may direct the course of his inquiries). However, the discovery of new factual material is not the primary aim of an interpolative approach, and thus to claim that such an approach can help the religionist may, at first sight, seem somewhat eccentric. Granted that the religionist seems to have become mesmerized by an over-exposure to a mass of accumulated data, it would nonetheless seem to be something of an over-reaction (and one which sounds suspiciously similar to the "recourse to ignorance" which we have already dismissed as unacceptable) to suggest that the "cure" for such a dilemma lies in a data-less "investigation". For
how can we expect to escape from the hall of mirrors unless we are presented with some concrete information which we did not possess before?

I think that the best way to substantiate what may, at first sight, seem to be a hopelessly weak reply, is to refer to John Wisdom's now famous parable of the gardener, for this casts much light on how we may in fact further our understanding of some state of affairs without learning any facts about it which we did not know before. So to begin with, let me simply quote the original version of this story as it was given by Wisdom himself to the Aristotelian Society in March 1945:

Two people return to their long neglected garden and find among the weeds a few of the old plants surprisingly vigorous. One says to the other "It must be that a gardener has been coming and doing something about these plants." Upon inquiry they find that no neighbour has ever seen anyone at work in their garden. The first man says to the other "He must have worked while people slept." The other says "No, someone would have heard him and besides, anybody who cared about the plants would have kept down these weeds." The first man says "Look at the way these are arranged. There is purpose and a feeling for beauty here. I believe that someone comes, someone invisible to mortal eyes. I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this." They examine the garden ever so carefully and sometimes they come on new things suggesting that a gardener comes and sometimes they come on new things suggesting the contrary and even that a malicious person has been at work. Besides examining the garden carefully they also study what happens to gardens left without attention. Each learns all the other learns about this and about the garden. Consequently, when after all this, one says "I still believe a gardener comes" while the other says "I don't" their different
words now reflect no difference as to what they have found in the garden, no difference as to what they would find in the garden if they looked further and no difference about how fast untended gardens fall into disorder. At this stage, in this context, the gardener hypothesis has ceased to be experimental, the difference between one who accepts and one who rejects it is now not a matter of the one expecting something the other does not expect. (41)

Wisdom's garden is not merely some distant analogical territory staked out with stark precision somewhere in the abstract reaches of a philosophical consciousness: we walk through it here and now, and the need to know about its origin and nature, and how we ought to behave in it, is a pressing one. The observers each voice a particular world certainty, and we are faced with trying to decide which (if either) offers a true picture of things. To de-analogize: the garden is the world, more particularly the human situation in that world, and the observers' opinions about the gardener represent the "religious" (42) outlooks of mankind. In the situation encountered by the religionist, there are, of course, many more varieties of alternative in outlook than the simple dichotomy presented here by Wisdom.

The "facts" of the case, the general nature of human existence, are known and have been known for many thousands of years. The religions do not disagree concerning man's capacity for suffering and joy, for kindness and cruelty, nor over the facts of his birth, his life, his loves and
fears, his health and illness, his ageing and his death. The general characteristics of the human situation are undisputed. It is how we understand or "pattern" such general characteristics, it is over the question of what meaning to give them, that difficulties arise. As Virginia Woolf put it:

The strange thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to everyone for hundreds of years, no one has left an adequate account of it. (43)

The religionist/Everyman is concerned with the question of whether an adequate account does in fact exist in the patternings offered as such by Christianity, by Hinduism, by Islam, and by the various other religious outlooks of man.

Whereas level two seeing is mostly concerned with discovering what the constituent facts of the alternative viewpoints are, with mapping out the elements which go to make up each suggested "adequate account", level three seeing is concerned with how the world will "appear" when viewed through the patternings thus discovered. That is, with seeing in what way the basic facts of the human situation are understood according to the various religions. The interpolative religionist is concerned with putting himself into the thought world of each of the observers of the garden and seeing how it appears according to their different outlooks. As such, he is primarily concerned not with discovering any new and hitherto unobserved aspects of the garden, or with adding to his basic factual knowledge of
the outlook in question (knowledge on these two counts being assumed as necessary pre-requisites for his interpolative endeavour) but with seeing how the various observers understand a given situation, upon the basic constituent facts of which there is agreement.

This is all very well, but it scarcely answers the question of how interpolative seeing is supposed to free the religionist from his mesmerization. Indeed, from the above presentation, it would seem that far from offering any road to freedom here, interpolation would be more likely to render the religionist's bedazzlement with a situation of religious optionality far more serious than it was before. For if a confusion over which (if any) religious world certainty to accept is fostered to begin with by a descriptive knowledge of the basic facts of religious diversity, then surely an interpolative knowledge of this area could only make that confusion worse. For whereas a descriptively orientated approach keeps the whole subject at "arms length", so to speak, - the distinction between theism and atheism, for example, is recognized at a theoretical level of conflicting arguments - an interpolative approach brings the issues right inside the religionist's consciousness: he sees them in terms of the passionate perspectives on life taken through each of these ontological lenses by a Müller or a Marais. He no longer has to do with facts which admit of inclusion or exclusion in abstract philosophical argumentation, but with patterns which constitute the experience of the individual. Whereas it may make sense to argue that
such a logical fiction as "the atheist" is mistaken in his unbelief, since he has failed to take certain specific facts into account, what sense would it make to say in a similar fashion that Marais was mistaken in his outlook on life? After all, he was the man, he suffered, he was there. And in trying to be there with him (and, equally, with all the other various "believers" - i.e. holders of some world certainty) the interpolative religionist surely risks losing his ability to make any clear cut decisions concerning the truth and falsity of such things. Seen in this light, interpolation seems more like an exercise in multiple religious schizophrenia or in "multithink" than a systematic and disciplined attempt to bring intellectual and spiritual order to a situation of religious diversity.

If the interpolative religionist's acquaintance with the varieties of religious outlook is an acquaintance not with positions whose difference is a purely factual matter (which could thus be settled by straightforward empirical investigation) but with differences which arise out of different patternings of the facts, it is easy to conclude that any sort of evaluation concerning them is then automatically ruled out and that we must, whether we like it or not, endure a situation of religious relativism. Such a conclusion is, I think, unwarranted. To place this important area of diversity beyond any scheme of rational judgment is to mistakenly conclude that simple factual verification is the only form of evaluative device which we have in our cognitive repertoire, and that since it does not
seem to apply here that we are left evaluatively paralyzed. Before going on to show how the religionist can make some kind of judgment concerning the different worlds of meaning he travels to, however, I want first simply to focus more closely on the difference between how a "factual" dispute is settled and how a "patterning" dispute seems at first sight to be wholly unsettleable.

Two opposing schools of thought concerning the so-called "cave bear cult" of early man may serve as an example of a dispute which arises out of a paucity of information and which could be settled decisively one way or the other with the discovery of new facts. According to some (Gahs, Koppers, Schmidt), the finds of cave bear remains such as those in the Drachenloch cave in Switzerland, indicate an offering of first fruits made by early paleolithic hunters to a supreme being, probably a lord of the wild beasts. Others (Koby, Leroi-Gourhan) see the presence of such remains in various alpine caves as wholly explicable by geological forces and the behaviour of the bears themselves. As with many theories about early religion based largely on archaeological data, these viewpoints are in a state of provisionality based on the possibility that new finds will reveal further connections or disconnections between the cave bear remains and early man. If, for example, some bones were to be discovered in what was more definitely a shrine (as opposed to a cave), and if this shrine was located in a geologically stable region and was such that the bears themselves could not have gained access to it,
then clearly the former theory would be strengthened.

Looking back across the history of Religious Studies we can see many instances of how the discovery of new information can radically alter our picture of things - indeed such a process forms the very backbone of this (or any other) discipline. For example, to the present day religionist, early European accounts of, say, the Hindu gods, may appear comical such is their inaccuracy. When, for instance, we read William Finch's account of his travels in India in 1608, and find descriptions of sacred sculpture showing gods "with long horns, staring eyes, shagge haire, great fanges, ugly pawes, long tailes, with horrible deformity and deformity"(47) we are apt to smile. Less colourful but more persistent and specific misconceptions in this particular field of the study of religion have been the idea of Shiva Ardhanarisvara as an amazon of classical antiquity rather than the androgenous aspect of this god (a mistake which continued into the eighteenth century), and the notion that Shiva Mahesamurti represented a trinity of three separate gods rather than constituting a single transcendent divinity, an idea which persisted down to Hegel(48). Doubtless at least some of the "facts" which we now hold to be true shall, with future research, and on a purely factual basis, be shown to be wrong. An indispensably important part of the religionist's work (that which I have characterized roughly as following level two seeing, i.e. investigation which has a basically descriptive orientation) is concerned with ensuring and maintaining as comprehensive factual accuracy as possible.
Perhaps the best example to give of a "patterning" dispute is that between William James' two psychological types, the "sick souled" and the "healthy minded"(49). According to James these two polar extremes of personality are characterized by their contrasting world outlooks. The sick souled emphasize the fact of evil and tend to see the world as a place of suffering, pain and pointlessness, whilst the healthy minded tend to minimize the fact of evil and see the world as a pleasant and purposeful place. To the sick souled, healthy mindedness seems "unspeakably blind and shallow"(50), to the healthy minded, the sick souled seem "unmanly and diseased, with their grubbing in rat holes instead of living in the light"(51). It is not as if one saw something which the other had failed to take into account, or that something had been mistakenly imagined which was not in fact there. As James points out, in neither sick souled or healthy minded formulations is there "any intellectual insanity or delusion about matters of fact"(52). The intrusion of new factual information would make no difference to this type of dispute, in one case it would simply be assimilated into an optimistic pattern, in the other into a pessimistic one. Indeed in patterning disputes we seem to be faced with outlooks which are not unlike hypotheses as these are conceived by Tristram Shandy:

It is the nature of a hypothesis,
when once a man has conceived it,
that it assimilates everything to
itself as proper nourishment; and,
from the first moment of your
begetter, it generally grows the
stronger by everything you see, hear,
read, or understand. (53)
The question remains: if interpolation primarily acquaints the religionist with a knowledge of religious "patterns" (rather than with "facts") how is he to proceed with his evaluation of them, given the apparent resistance of such patterns to the normal processes of verification? Moreover, what can he learn from such an acquaintance anyway, of what real use can it be to him? For, since the basic facts are already agreed upon, a knowledge of a wide spectrum of patterns involves the acquisition of little or no new additional information which was not known at the outset. An increase in the number of patterns we "know" does not involve a corresponding increase in the number of facts we know.

My answers here are largely based on thoughts expressed by Renford Bambrough in Reason Truth and God, in the one case directly, in the other indirectly. Following Wisdom's demonstration in "Gods"(54), Bambrough draws our attention to

Occasions when we can achieve and convey knowledge and understanding by seeing and showing a pattern of relationships between a set of items in which each separate item is already available for inspection. (55)

The examples he gives - the illiterate child and the professor looking at the same page of print, or the layman and the art critic looking at an impressionist painting - suggest an important aspect of learning in which the discovery and description of what is learned "take us off the narrow beaten tracks of induction and deduction"(56).
For, to take the case of his latter example, we can envisage a situation where the layman may be made to see something he had not at first noticed

in spite of the fact that he ... has for twenty minutes had his eyes open and turned in the right direction in a good light. (57)

In other words, he may be made to see something which was there all the time, he may come to have an insight which is not dependent on the introduction of any new element into his visual field, and it is this sort of seeing with which level three is concerned.

Bambrough argues that both in the complexities of abstract thought and in ordinary everyday life we quite often simply "lose our bearings" and need "guidance rather than information, a perspective on what we can already see" (58) rather than a discovery of any new and hitherto unseen facts, and he suggests that anamnesis can be taken as a "pictorial expression" (59) of the literal fact that

moral and religious and philosophical understanding is achieved by remembering and reviewing what we had known but half forgotten rather than by coming to know what we had in no sense known before. (60)

That we "often learn without learning anything new" (61) ceases to appear paradoxical when we make the distinction between knowing and "really knowing" (62) or knowing and "fully realizing" (63). Thus Bambrough notes that although we may be able to imagine quite accurately what it would be like to have fought in the trenches in 1914 or to orbit the earth in a satellite or to be an orphan, we could still
learn much about such experiences from having them ourselves - even if such direct experience did not add anything to our projected, imagined account. We would, however, subsequently speak of knowing or realizing for the first time what it really meant (or means) to have fought in the trenches, to orbit the earth in a satellite, or to be an orphan.

Apart from direct experience, Bambrough points to literature as a source of discovering what things are really like or of fully realizing their import. As he says,

in reading a work of literature, as in having a new experience, we may acquire a degree of new knowledge and understanding that is disproportionate to the number of new facts that we learn. Some works of literature teach us that which we ourselves know, but teach us nonetheless something that we still have need to learn. (64)

Thus the accusation that by engaging in interpolation the religionist may learn little or nothing because he learns few or no new facts, is simply mistaken: Bambrough has provided a convincing refutation of such an idea with his demonstration of how genuine advances in learning may be made without anything substantial being added to our store of factual knowledge.

His demonstration also suggests a way in which we may counter the suggestion that since he is dealing with patterns rather than facts the interpolative religionist is bound to be stymied when he comes to attempt an
evaluation of this material. (For, so the argument runs, there seem to be no available criteria by which we may judge one pattern to be better than another.) Staying with Bambrough's example of literature providing circumstances where we often learn without discovering any new factual information, we could suggest that although much "serious" literature could be seen as a "patterning" of the human situation, no one expects the well-read individual not to have his own particular "favourite" work. We do not expect him to be unable to say which volume he regards as the best reflection of the world. At the same time, the criteria which he uses to arrive at such decisions may well be unclear. In putting Dostoyevsky above Dickens, or Tolstoy before Proust, or Shakespeare before Racine, we are dealing with whole complexes of phenomena, few of which we may be able to pick out as the main operative devices which determine our choice, but our failure to explicitly identify the criteria used does not prevent us from reaching (and attempting to justify) our decisions.

The comparison between the reader and the religionist (which I have referred to before and to which I will refer again) is, I think, a fruitful one, containing many enlightening parallels which help us to understand the nature of the religionist's work, particularly as regards its interpolative side. Thus, just as we may be loathe to accept even some quite plausible sounding claim as, for example, that Shakespeare is the greatest writer in the English language, if we find that it is made by one who has only read works
by Shakespeare and has no knowledge of Chaucer or Milton or of any other literature, so we might likewise be suspicious of one who claims that Islam or Judaism or Zoroastrianism is the greatest, or the only (or the best, or the truest) religion, if we find that they have no knowledge of the other faiths of man. Indeed even to say "I'm a Christian", "I'm a Hindu", "I'm a Buddhist", "I'm an atheist", or whatever, without knowing in interpolative depth what alternative positions are available, seems suspiciously like saying "blue is my favourite colour" without having seen the rest of the spectrum.

But is the religionist who eventually arrives at a world decision (through practising interpolation) not then simply picking out his "favourite" religion? Although to some extent a degree of straightforward personal preference is bound to operate in the study of religion, it does not necessarily have any distorting effect and we can defend the religionist against this sort of charge again simply by making reference to our literary parallel, pointing out that although someone may have a great liking for the writings of, say, Rudyard Kipling, they can still recognize that his work is not in the same class as that of a Dostoyevsky or a Tolstoy. And just as the widely read reader need not get "stuck" in the thought world of any of the books he reads, no matter how deeply he may read them, no matter how intimately a part of that world he may feel himself to be for a short while, so the religionist need not become mesmerized into critical paralysis by his interpolative
investigations of the religions of man.

In presenting the religions in terms of patterns rather than facts, I do not wish to suggest that they assert no factual propositions and that no conceivable state of affairs could be envisaged which would alter our evaluation of them. At the end of the day, to put it simply, either there is a gardener or there is not. Rather than being non-factual it would, I think, be more accurate to see religion as supra-factual, as something which can only be conclusively verified by knowledge or experience of things in toto (which may occur in certain mystical states or, perhaps, in some form of post-mortem existence). To this notion of all inclusiveness I will return in Chapter Five, where attention will be paid to the origins of the many different patterns in the first place. In the meantime we might reflect that given this supra-factual nature of religious patterning it might not be too fanciful to picture the religionist's task of interpolation as some sort of cumulative attempt at verification and evaluation, since (like the well-read individual) with each religious idea which comes within the "glance of the spirit" the wider that glance will become and the more critically and insightfully it will be applied to each successive phenomenon it encounters.

If we accept Alain Daniélon's contention that

All religions, all religious philosophies are ultimately attempts at finding out the nature of the perceptible world - and of ourselves who
perceive it - the process of the world's manifestation and the purpose of life, so that we may discover the means of fulfilling our destiny. (65)

Then we might see the religionist as one who is concerned to "test" each of the offered religious world certainties facing him as possible accounts of that destiny, as the possible world within which the house we live in is located, and we have suggested that interpolation is the way in which he must do this if he wishes to proceed from a standpoint of mesmerized knowing (arrived at by level two seeing) to what Bambrough has called "really knowing". That literature (and perhaps especially the novel form) seems the most powerful way for presenting such knowledge, coincides in a methodologically pleasing way with the treatment needed for what is, in an important sense, ineffable - but this is to anticipate the findings of the next chapter.

In answer to the objection that interpolation simply renders the plight of the mesmerized religionist more incurably serious, my reply might be analogically summarized in the following way: Just as someone hit with a barbed arrow cannot hope to pull it out again without fatal consequences, but must either bear with his injury or push the arrow through, so the religionist already acquainted with a descriptively categorized mass of information about religions must seek release from the hall of mirrors it creates by "pushing through" with renewed determination, by continuing his study of religions rather than terminating it.
However much it may seem to worsen his original injury, he must continue to pursue his already started religious world exploration, but henceforth with the self consciousness of intention and penetrative insight afforded by interpolation. In the sense of adopting a new approach, of choosing a fresh methodological orientation towards the perplexing accumulation of information which confronts him (rather than in the sense of abandoning it altogether and starting from scratch) the religionist must begin again.

(3) The third and final "first order consideration" facing the notion of interpolation can be stated and dispensed with very briefly. It is perhaps best summed up by using Evans-Pritchard's colourful expression which dubs it the "if I were a horse fallacy"(66). It suggests that in some situations (particularly in the case of primitive religions) any claim of empathy is misplaced, and to suggest that some sort of imaginative re-enactment or systematic introspection can take place is to imagine that one can achieve an intimacy of understanding with something so alien that to make this claim is as ridiculous as it would be to claim insight into the way in which animals think.

As I have pointed out already, the degree to which interpolation is possible will vary from case to case, its success depending in part on our own attitude towards any particular outlook and the readiness and ability of those who hold it to communicate that outlook with us. It seems obvious that some situations will pose more problems than
others and that sometimes the problems may indeed be insuperable. But against the "if I were a horse fallacy" put forward as a criticism of interpolation in general, we may stand the claims of the poets (and indeed of some philosophers) to be able to understand any human phenomenon, being human themselves. Moreover, the power and accuracy of the educated and disciplined imagination is attested to repeatedly in the history of literature. To this third objection we might point out that there is also an equal and opposite absurdity - one which might be dubbed the "I can never imagine what it would be like to be anyone except myself fallacy". Steering a middle course between the two would seem unproblematic.

To sum up: in this chapter we have selected that mode of sight according to which, so we have argued, the religionist should orientate his inquiries in the hope of escaping from the hall of mirrors (in which a descriptively orientated approach to the subject puts him); we have re-stated the salient features of the setting from which such a mode of sight must begin; and we have considered something of the nature of an alignment (i.e. interpolation) which tries to follow it, suggesting how some of the more obvious problems which challenge its effectiveness (if not its very possibility) may be dealt with. It is now time to turn our attention to a more detailed examination of the practical mechanics needed to apply it.
CHAPTER FOUR

INTERPOLATION

This, then, is the task: to reproduce, as if real to us, all the ideas which compose the mental picture present to the stranger, to repeat in our own imagination all the feelings or will-attitudes which are bound up with this experience.

James Haughton Woods: The Value of Religious Facts

Without at least a sense of beginning, nothing can really be done, much less ended. This is as true for the literary critic as it is for the philosopher, the scientist, or the novelist. And the more crowded and confused a field appears, the more a beginning, fictional or not, seems imperative. A beginning gives us the chance to do work that compensates us for the tumbling disorder of brute reality that will not settle down.

Edward W. Said: Beginnings
What steps must be taken to achieve the interpolative vision which will enable us to see clearly into (and out of) those different worlds of religious meaning encountered opaquely, so to speak, in the course of a descriptively orientated approach? If we are to break through the mesmerization threatened by a purely surface acquaintance with the facts of religious diversity by delving further into them, rather than withdrawing from them altogether, how are we to proceed in gaining that depth of contact needed for us so to travel to the centre of the various images confronting us in the hall of mirrors?

So far we have suggested that, faced with such mesmerization, the religionist may either shut his eyes and attempt simply to ignore its existence or stare back with renewed concentration and vigour, attempting somehow to see a way through it. Rejecting the former alternative as fundamentally unsound, we have identified three different ways in which the course of action proposed by the latter may proceed, and from the trio of possible foci which would dictate the path of his concentrated sight, third level seeing, that which emphasizes imagination rather than perception or description and proceeds by interpolation rather than reduction, was selected as being the most helpful in terms of offering a potential solution to the problem in hand. (1)

In this chapter, the final one addressed to the first of the religionist's three primary questions (namely that
which asks in what way he may hope to discover which, if any, of the world certainties confronting him in the hall of mirrors is true), I want to concentrate on making clear how what I have referred to as interpolation follows the methodological orientation selected as most likely to provide an answer. I will try to do this in three ways:—

Firstly, by discussing an analagical comparison by means of which the nature of the interpolative endeavour may be further understood.

Secondly, by stating the basic operative principles of interpolation in terms of its central cohesive theme of a return to beginnings (and a setting out from there again) and by suggesting (very briefly) how such operative principles might be applied to a specific example.

And thirdly, by considering a sustained display of interpolation in action as it is found in a novel by William Golding.

Thus, after some general comments concerning the search for a method in the study of religions and the relationship between my own work here concerning interpolation and such a search, the chapter will be divided into three parts. These will be followed by a brief examination of some problems facing interpolation and a summing up of our answer to the first of the religionist's so called "primary" questions.

(i) The Search for a Method in the Study of Religions

To trace the growth of methodological self consciousness in the history of the study of religions would be a
fascinating and rewarding undertaking, but, alas, it is one which is quite beyond the scope of our present inquiry. Here I can only hint in the briefest and most inchoate fashion at the whereabouts of some of the main loci of concern which such a study might wish to map out in detail, for my purpose is only to locate the intellectual nature and whereabouts of the following discussion of interpolation in relation to the "mainstream" tradition of methodology (if we can call so comparatively recent a thing that), rather than to offer any extensive catalogue of that tradition's content or an analysis of its conclusions.

Of course, to some extent, any history of Religious Studies is bound also to be a history of the methods used in this area of thought. For, in order to define itself as a specific entity whose development we can trace in the first place, it must display some sort of specific approach, a uniquely identifying method or methods, or at least some distinguishing methodological aims or general ethos, which sets it apart from adjacent and therefore potentially "predatory" disciplines (theology, anthropology or philosophy, for example, which could claim to cover the same ground). In the absence of any completely new territory being marked out in terms of subject matter not already dealt with by some other field of research, the presentation of Religious Studies as a specific, if not autonomous, discipline, relies upon its claim to cover an already known area (i.e. the religious experience of mankind) in a new way, to adopt a fresh approach to what is, after all, a much studied
phenomenon. However, this said, and survey made of the works currently available in the area, there would still seem to be room for (more positively: there remains a need for) a history of the subject which is explicitly focused on the growth of its methodology\(^2\).

In terms of the development of its methodological self-consciousness, the study of religions may, I think, be divided into three basic phases. Indeed I would suggest that these phases occur not only at the level of the subject taken as an historical whole, but also at the level of the individual religionist. Or, to put this in evolutionary jargon, ontogeny repeats phylogeny, biography mirroring in individual microcosm the course of this particular strand in the history of thought.

The earliest phase is that of straightforward exploration and discovery, largely "undertaken" in an undeliberate and somewhat haphazard way. It consists of the often accidental acquisition of information (which is usually not particularly accurate) about hitherto unknown areas. In terms of phylogeny this phase would be represented by the writings of early explorers, scholars and missionaries, whose primary motive was frequently nothing to do with the study of other religions, the information given by them on this count being (at least at first) incidental to their main concern. The importance of such early figures to the subject as a whole perhaps lies more in their function as disseminators of information.
about the existence of new phenomena, rather than as providers of reliably accurate knowledge about them. In terms of ontogeny we might point to the budding religionist's first encounters with individuals and/or artefacts of other faiths, either at home or abroad (depending on whether he lives in a multi-faith society), or at first or second hand (depending on the degree of his exposure to the mass media). It is obviously difficult to trace explicitly the genesis either of that gradual realization that there are people of different religions in the world or of an interest in such a fact which prompts a more deliberately investigative approach. However, although it may be difficult to concretely specify its initial stages (especially in so information-soaked a culture as ours, where the individual is exposed to a veritable barrage of data) this is no reason to suppose that Religious Studies does not have such an intellectually amorphous conception. Indeed that it does so may well account for the difficulty in clearly establishing just where it may be said to begin as a discipline and in locating when, and by what, the individual's interest in the subject was first aroused.

Next comes a phase of deliberate investigation of a more definitely circumscribed area. Here a recognition of the incompleteness and disarray (yet potential fruitfulness) of material provided by the first phase prompts a more systematic inquiry. We could, perhaps, call this the classical age of Religious Studies, raising as it did such epochal and lasting monuments as, for example, The Sacred
Books of the East. In terms of the individual religionist, this phase might be marked by his decision to study the religions of man in a concerted and disciplined way, whether this involves a course of personal reading and travel or enrolment in some formal academic course. At this stage a sense of taking part in a collective endeavour develops, of being a student of religions among other religionists contributing to and learning from a definite field of thought.

Finally (or, more accurately, "presently", for by and large we are, I think, currently in this phase and have no guarantee that it will not be superseded: indeed our hope must be that it will be superseded) we come to a point where increased awareness of the aims of the inquiry (to understand the religions of man and to establish some means by which the truth or falsity of their offered world certainties may confidently be told) coupled with a recognition of the vast scope and uniquely problematic nature of the material (as we have suggested earlier, man's religiousness is virtually co-terminous with his life as a self conscious being, and an important characteristic common to almost all the diverse manifestations of this religiousness is that of mystery, voiced in, for example, claims of ineffability) conspire to produce many paralyzing problems which not only query the possibility of proceeding further, but also ask whether the means by which our researches have arrived at this point can in fact be taken as trustworthy. This phase contains doubts which are embodied in such
questions as: can phenomenological categories (worship, prayer, god etc.), by which we seek to make accurately uniform our descriptive processes, be applied in an extensively inter- or trans-religious sense without simply reducing one religion to another? (More specifically, since many of these key terms originated in a Western context, can we simply neutralize and transpose an originally Christian vocabulary without unconscious apologetic attending its subsequent application to non-Christian phenomena?); Is a "neutral" approach adequate here, can there be understanding without belief?; How can we hope to understand phenomena at the heart of which lies something which is, apparently, beyond words?; Is the study of religion itself a religious endeavour?; How does Religious Studies affect religion?

That (phylogenetically speaking) the discipline as a whole has now largely entered this third phase may be seen from the increased interest in methodology voiced in recent publications. Thus Reinhard Pummer notes that although some years ago

publications on the theory and method of the science of religion were scarce... the number of methodological writings seems to increase from year to year. (3)

Indeed such is the current atmosphere that Brelich has suggested that the whole future of the subject "depends on the acquisition and diffusion of a special methodological conscience"(4), whereas White goes so far as to say that methodology stands out as "the single most
important problem\(^{(5)}\) for the student of religions today, and we have already drawn attention to Sharpe's dictum, reminiscent of Pirandello, that Religious Studies may be characterized as increasing accumulations of material in search of a method\(^{(6)}\). In terms of ontogeny, the entrance of the individual religionist into this phase might be marked simply by his beginning to doubt the soundness of the assumptions upon which his systematic descriptive inquiry had hitherto been based.

We might, perhaps, dub these three strands of Religious Studies as: "the unselfconsciously acquisitive", the "self-consciously investigative", and the "self-consciously reflective", and identify their primary – though obviously not sole – activities (which will perhaps form the steps of a journey from ignorance through naive informedness and doubt to an as yet barely perceptible but much desired destination of reliable knowledge) as haphazard discovery, systematization and evaluation, evaluation, that is, of both the facts themselves and the processes responsible for collecting them. It is, however, important to realize that each phase involves discovery: I do not wish to give the impression that we are dealing with a situation in which the facts of man's religiousness are clearly and completely known and that all we have to do at this point is to consider their significance and reflect on the processes by which such information was amassed. Again we are dealing not with three clearly distinct and separable phases, but more with varieties of emphasis which tend to
overlap and interpenetrate. To say that we are currently in a self-consciously reflective phase does not mean that neither unselfconscious acquisition or self-conscious investigation takes place, but rather that, by and large, more emphasis than before is put on considering the nature of the inquiry as opposed to straightforwardly pursuing it, such that this stream of thought seems to characterize (not monopolize) the intellectual mood of the subject. Nor is this to suggest that to engage in methodological reflection about some inquiry is not to further its ends. Such self-consciousness ought to be seen as providing a procedural finesse and subtlety which advances an inquiry towards its ends, rather than as constituting some sort of problematic barrier which stops it in its tracks\(^7\).

This suggestion of three phases in the development of methodological self-consciousness in the study of religion is, then, a generalization, and, like all generalizations, can easily be scuttled by persistent harping on individual cases which do not seem to fit into its suggested overview. In terms of the discipline as a whole it would be a difficult and delicate task to try to establish clear chronological watersheds which effectively separated the three phases, for, inevitably, some works come out of sequence, belonging more properly to the intellectual climate of a past or future age than to the one in which mere circumstance has placed them\(^8\). Similarly, when we come to the individual religionist it is clear that in some cases he may well not display the "standard" step
by step sequence of discovery-systematization-reflection: the varieties of human temperament ensure an exception to all but the most fundamental physical rules. However, despite its admitted (indeed its intended) glossing over of irregularities (for what other function do generalizations have?) I maintain that such a threefold division of methodological self-consciousness provides a useful model which, crude as it undoubtedly is, will help us to understand the course which the search for a method in the study of religion follows/has followed. More particularly it will help to clarify where our present reflections on interpolation relate to such a search.

James C. Moffat's two volume A Comparative History of Religions may be taken as one representative example of the turning point between first and second phases in the development of methodological self-consciousness (though whether or not 1875, the date of its publication, may be taken as any indication of a parallel pivotal point in the discipline as a whole, is a question which I leave to more historically minded researchers than myself). Thus whilst on the one hand Moffat notes that

At present (Comparative Religion's) materials are in utter chaos, in which superstition and unbelief alike find refuge, and the wildest assertions ... elude exposure, (9)

on the other a spirit of academic optimism, a confidence that sense and order can be brought to this area, pervades the whole work. Quite apart from the optimism implicit in the sheer scale of an undertaking which seeks to
"exhibit a general view of all religions in their relations to one another"(10), Moffat's statement of the comprehensive five-fold method necessary to effect such a grand design betrays no underlying doubt that such a procedure is beset by any seriously problematic intrinsic flaws or uncertainties which might query the possibility, direction - or indeed the very intelligibility - of the whole-exercise in which he is engaged(11). I choose Moffat as an example here, a relatively forgotten figure in the history of the subject compared to, say, Müller, Tiele, de la Saussaye or Burnouf, not because of any particular originality or brilliance in his presentation, but because his confidence in the possibility of some sort of "science of religion" remains unbroken despite a clearly voiced appreciation of some of the questions which such a discipline will eventually have to attempt to answer:

Of all the religions of the earth which is the best? What is it that makes it the best? Does it stand alone, or do all contain some parts of it? Does any religion contain less good than harm? Or is any existing religion better than none? Or can human society do without religion if it should think expedient? (12)

Wide ranging as the implications involved in attempting to answer such questions may be, for Moffat they do not query the possibility of establishing a science or religion which will provide a reliable means of answering them. The complexity and difficulty of the subject matter may at best postpone the final shape of such a science, they do
not call in question the assumption that such finality can in fact be reached in this field. Thus, at the outset of the first volume, Moffat is ready to lightly acknowledge that though "the science of religion cannot yet be erected in all its details" (13), at least it is possible to make a start "towards marking out the groundplan on which the final structure is to stand" (14). That the groundplan may itself contain such difficulties of procedure as to prevent any stone from being firmly laid (or to question the stability of any eventual edifice which Moffat and like minded workers envisaged building on it) is a worry which will only seriously trouble a later generation. Moffat still belongs to that time where two great world religions may be compared in a matter of pages and one of them be found wanting (15). Whilst in retrospect one may admire the bold strokes of such intellectual audacity and envy their apparent conclusiveness, at the same time one realises that the methodological naivety with which they were carried out renders the final result untrustworthy (16).

The contrast between the mood of second and third phases might best be illustrated by juxtaposing Emile Burnouf's famous methodological prophecy (written in 1870), i.e. that

This present century will not come to an end without having seen the establishment of a unified science whose elements are still dispersed, a science which the preceding centuries did not have, which is not yet defined, and which, perhaps for the first time, will be named science of religion, (17)
with an assessment of the state of such a "science"
written in 1974 by Ralph Wendell Burhoe:

It could be said that the scientific study of religion is today in a more primitive state than was biology two centuries ago. We have not yet had our Darwin; we have hardly had our Linnaeus to sharpen our basic descriptive terms and their classifications; and we have not sufficiently utilized the tested conceptual or symbolic systems of other pertinent disciplines to help structure and order our data. (18)

Symptomatic of the growing doubt that such things as Moffat's confidently staked out groundplan can in fact be built on or that Burnouf's prophecy can ever be fulfilled (and in keeping with the spirit of Burhoe's findings), we find in this "third generation" two independently written articles explicitly and identically entitled "Is a Science of Religion Possible?" (19). Their conclusions are, generally speaking, pessimistic, in terms of establishing the sort of clear cut and autonomous discipline which "second generation" scholars had in mind.

Thus Hans Penner and Edward Yonan, focusing in particular on the problems of definition, reduction, explanation and understanding, conclude that without valid theories concerning these central methodological issues "a science of religion is impossible" (21). Both their identification of the questions which underlie the uncertainty about method, and their assessment of the treatment generally accorded to the key terms here, are, I think, accurate. On the former count they suggest that the current methodological
consciousness is haunted by such questions as:

Can religion be defined? Is religion irreducible? Can religion be explained? Is there a special method of understanding religion? (22)

but at the same time

the discussion of these questions often appears deadlocked because of a lack of clarification concerning the exact meaning of the key terms being employed. (23)

So, given their criteria for the successful establishing of a science of religion (in terms, that is, of a clarification of the basic intellectual operations which are necessarily involved in such an exercise) and given their verdict that by and large the practice of such operations today is "never clarified" (24) but remains "vague and ambiguous" (25), it seems that the "science of religion" has a long (perhaps interminable) way to go before it can legitimately be regarded as such. Moreover, Penner and Yonan also draw attention to "a pervading point of view" (26) which suggests that such a science "is not only impossible but unnecessary" (27), a viewpoint which, as they observe, (28) sidetracks their (well conducted) methodological debate simply by claiming it is unnecessary. Such avoidance may perhaps best be seen as an illegitimate consequence wrongly supposed to follow automatically from a quite legitimate conclusion. For, given the existence of Religious Studies on the scale at which it is conducted today, it would be somewhat eccentric to suggest that it could not proceed until it was established "scientifically". It can and has proceeded in leaps and
bounds since Burnouf's time, and though it may yet need much revision it is hardly in need of the sort of thing envisaged by such early champions of a science of religion. It has, in a sense, outgrown (or grown into the wrong shape ever to fit) their well intended prophecies. At the same time, in as much as "the search for a science of religion" may be considered simply as a way of saying "the search for a method in Religious Studies", then though the "science" itself may, strictly speaking, be both impossible to achieve and unnecessary (or unsuitable) anyway, the search for it is nonetheless indispensable - the methodological self consciousness it fosters being essential if the religionist's inquiries are to have any sense of purpose or direction. To avoid such a search altogether is to mistakenly imagine that since the idea of a "science" of religion may (arguably) be dispensed with, so too can all methodological reflection. But the process by which the claims of a science of religion are considered (and now usually rejected) is an essential one in clarifying the identity of any exercise in studying religions and in seeing what kind of methodological options are open: we avoid it at our own peril.

In the second article which asks "Is a science of religion possible?", Donald Wiebe draws our attention to the "profound and pervasive methodological confusion"(29) in what may otherwise appear to be a "healthy" discipline of (by now) even "venerable age"(30). Indeed he suggests that the study of religion
displays little or no methodological cohesiveness despite almost a century of discussion and debate. (31)

The reason for such confusion and lack of methodological cohesion is, according to Wiebe, simply that the science of religion as it is generally conceived and sought after "does not and cannot exist" (32). He focuses on the distinction between looking at religion from the point of view of the detached outsider and from the point of view of the committed insider, and suggests that, in effect, the science of religion falls between these two standpoints. The basic methodological assumptions of the science of religion, if they are taken as assumptions of a science, are, Wiebe argues, incompatible, for, in trying to establish itself as an autonomous discipline distinct from both theology and the social sciences, it attempts simultaneously to assume a "scientific objectivity" (this setting it apart from theology) and an appeal to something "other than strict 'scientific objectivity!'" (33) (this setting it apart from the other social sciences). In trying to drive a middle way between two adjacent modes of thought so as to disassociate itself from both and establish its own independent outlook, the science of religion steers head on into a linguistic inconsistency and thus loses the identity (or at least the name) which it set out to establish.

Basing his argument on the claim made, perhaps most famously by Rudolf Otto (34), that the "detached outsider" approach to the study of religion which places no reliance upon personal religious experience (indeed which looks askance at any
introspective or biographical appeal) cannot adequately apprehend the holy, and on Heiler's contention that

any study of religion is, in the last analysis, theology, to the extent that it does not concern itself with psychological and historical phenomena only, but also with the experience of transcendental realities, (35)

Wiebe concludes that

to define religious studies as a science so as to exclude all theological 'elements' ... is no more justifiable than the positivist attempt to define philosophy so as to exclude all metaphysics. Just as the latter implies a metaphysic, so the former involves, although perhaps only implicitly so, a religious (or religiously significant) weltanschauung. (36)

The equal and opposite point to such a contention is, of course, that it also involves implicit "metaphysical" assumptions to define Religious Studies so as to include theological elements. However, true to the academic zeitgeist pervading the discipline, Wiebe is not so much concerned with formulating any clear cut and exclusive definition of what Religious Studies really is or should be, as with providing a more "loose fitting" (and at the same time, he would argue, more accurate) characterization of the overall nature of this type of study. Thus he quotes with approval Holbrook's suggestion that we speak of a "field of studies" rather than a "discipline" here(37), and King's claim that the study of religion is more "an interpretative art" than a science(38), which although empathetic also proceeds in a critical mode.

In effect, the substance of Wiebe's argument is
directed not so much against the possibility of a science of religion, but at the propriety of calling thus what is generally held to be subsumed beneath such a title. What the science of religion attempts to do is not, according to Wiebe, impossible, but it is inaccurate and misleading to call it the science of religion. So "soft" and "chaotic" (39) an activity is the study of religions that "science", with its connotations of methodological rigour, of strictly delineated procedure, is a complete misnomer. In the end we are left with the simple point that

the use of the concepts 'science' and 'religion' seems to involve sets of assumptions inimical to one another. (40)

To try to mix them is to try to force oil and water into solution: inevitably they separate out. Thus although we are forced to conclude that a science of religion which attempts to mix objectivity with what we might call "transcendental empathy" is impossible ("inappropriately named" might be a better way to put it),

This is not to say ... that there has not been, and does not now exist, a peculiar kind of approach to our study of religion that is neither 'sectarian' nor biased in any narrowly theological way nor reductionistically scientific. (41)

Clearly, then, the straightforward methodological optimism of second generation scholars has, at this stage, been fractured into concern for a host of (comparatively) recently perceived issues of procedure. Such concern, whilst not necessarily pessimistic, finds that the difficulties of its subject matter forbids the confident prophecying of a
Burnouf (42) or the pioneering foundation laying of a Moffat. This much is obvious, but on the positive side, what has the present generation of thinkers discovered about the nature of the discipline (or "field of studies") in which they are engaged?

It is, perhaps, still too close to the event to offer any sort of summary of results reached in this third phase of the religionist's self-awareness as religionist, nor, as I have said already, am I interested in analysing here the conclusions of the mainstream tradition of methodological thought in Religious Studies beyond the very minimal level required to show where the notion of interpolation stands in relation to it. However, there are two specific methodological conclusions to which I do wish to draw attention, since they provide important bearings by reference to which this relationship may be made clear. These "conclusions", to which discussions about the impossibility of a science of religion have already pointed, consist simply of the realization that:

1. No single method can adequately serve the study of religion, and

2. All the diverse methods used must, however, attempt to conform as closely as possible to an ideal balance between detached objectivity and imitative if not committed empathy (43).

(1) Talk of establishing the method for studying religion or of developing a clear cut and singular procedure which would give the Science of Religion (or Religious Studies,
Comparative Religion, History of Religions, or whatever other general title we choose to give the study of religion) a more precise meaning than it can at present boast, now tends to be dismissed as methodological imperialism or dogmatism (44). It is increasingly realized that neither a phenomenological, historical, comparative, philosophical, or any of the other traditional approaches, can, by themselves, bear all of the desiderata of the religionist to fruition. Religion is too multi-faceted a phenomenon to yield the full burden of its meaning to any one dimensional approach. Centrally embedded in the history of man, its tendrils wind circuitously through the realms of art, literature, philosophy and psychology, and its manifestations issue from many different intentions in many different forms. To suggest that it could be exhaustively investigated by any single method is like suggesting that Michaelangelo's Pieta might have been completely sculpted using only one mallet and chisel. It is clear that thus equipped even the most consummate artist could, from the raw block of stone with which he starts, sculpt only the crudest outline. All the subtlety of the finished article would be lost.

The confidence that a single definitive method could be found which would establish a completely autonomous science of religion, belongs to the classical age of thought in this field (what I have called the second phase or second generation). As Haydon has pointed out, the search for such a method
was a sign of a new spirit, a thrust
 toward objectivity, an effort to
 escape the hampering hand of
 apologetics.  (45)

And, in similar vein, Wiebe argues that it is "extremely
important to note" (46) that

almost all reference to the 'science
of religion' is primarily a way of
referring to a definite ... break
on the part of the early academic
... students of religion from a
narrowly (sectarian) theological
perspective in the study of
religious phenomena.  (47)

That break now largely made, the hampering hand of
apologetics now almost entirely eluded, there are, perhaps,
clear historical reasons for the switch in concern from
mono-methodology to poly-methodology, quite apart from the
logical reasons which may be appealed to in defence of the
latter strategy.  Be this as it may, the confidence in a
single method has now been replaced by an acknowledgement
that so complex a subject as religion requires a
polymethodic approach.  Thus (writing in 1926) Haydon notes
that

The troubled experience of two
decades has convinced historians
that no single science is able
to give a descriptive interpre-
tation of the materials of
religion.  (48)

By 1971, in answer to the question "what is the scientific
study of religion?", Smart can give as one of its three
fundamental characteristics the fact that it is
"polymethodic" (49), and two years later, at the
International Association for the History of Religion's study
conference on methodology, such has become the currency of
this conclusion that Lauri Honko could say

it would hardly have been necessary to
arrange a conference ... merely to
establish the fact that the situation
in Comparative Religion is characterized
by a kind of disparate poly-methodology. (50)

(2) The second methodological conclusion to which I
wish to draw attention has also become so widely accepted
that by now it is virtually unquestioned. It is well
summed up by S.A. Cook in one of the first full scale works
on the methodology of Religious Studies to appear (and one
which, I stress again, has much more than a unique place in
the history of the subject to recommend it to the reader).
According to Cook:

it is imperative that religions
should be studied ... with a
rational sympathy and a sympath¬
etic rationalism, (51)

this mode of investigation being advanced in favour of
(indeed as a middle way between) traditional theological
and rationalistic (sometimes even anti-religious)
approaches. Much the same point is made by C.J. Bleeker,
some six decades later at the Turku conference, in his
formulation of the "one general rule" (52) for methodology:

one should study the religious
phenomena critically, unbiasedly,
in a scholarly manner, and at the
same time with empathy. (53)

This one general rule applies no matter which of the many
methods of Religious Studies one is using. Thus Bleeker
adds that no matter whether the specific inquiry being
undertaken is sociological, psychological or anthropological, "this should not alter the general line of conduct" (54). In other words, this principle of maintaining a balance between objectivity and empathy recognizes the "first" methodological conclusion to which I have drawn attention (namely that Religious Studies is poly-methodic) and seeks to establish not some single normative method but rather a general ethos to which all the various methods ought to subscribe, or by which their results ought to be approached. Kitagawa offers an alternative formulation of what we might call the basic methodological ideal of the religionist, in his identification of three "essential qualities underlying the discipline" (55):

   first is a sympathetic understanding of religions other than one's own. Second is an attitude of self criticism or even scepticism, about one's own religious background. And third is the 'scientific' temper. (56)

However, although it may be fair to say that at this stage there is virtually unanimous agreement as to the desirability of blending rationalism/objectivity with an empathetic outlook, it is by no means understood precisely how this sort of outlook is to be achieved. We have already noted Wiebe's well substantiated unease at calling this ideal (but elusive) middle way the science of religion, its elements being too vague to warrant so precise a title. In sum, although (to use Ninian Smart's words)

   the way in which one may deal with religion scientifically and, at the same time, warmly is imprecisely understood, (57)
yet it seems common ground among a great many religionists that this is the methodological goal to aim at in their work.

The three phase model of the development of methodological self consciousness in the study of religion re-emphasises the point that concern about matters of procedure is an eventual rather than an initial problem. To be asking the sort of questions with which it seeks to deal, this thesis assumes that we have reached that point of intellectual or spiritual doubt occasioned by an acquaintance with (and reflection on) the attempt to systematically study the religions of man, this methodological angst being intimately bound up with that sense of world uncertainty which is stimulated by a knowledge of the range of possible world decisions which could be made. It is here that we begin to realize that the student of religions "is caught up in questions of professional position and existential stance"(58), and that, moreover, "the two cannot be separated"(59). Subject and student begin to strain uncomfortably. The main force of our discussion is addressed not so much to our desire to know about religions, which, it is assumed, has been satisfied, but rather to the desire which follows fast (and, I would argue, inevitably) upon its heels: to know what to do about such religious knowledge and to know how such knowledge has been and should be acquired (though of course these desiderata cannot be separated in so straightforward a manner as this). Given this developmental view, our
"rejection" of a descriptively orientated approach to take us through the hall of mirrors might be seen as a refusal to keep on walking up the same flight of stairs in the attempt to get us off the landing to which they lead. It is not to deny that it takes us some of the way in which we want to go, but rather to refuse to accept an initial stage of the study of religions as its final destination.

It is, I think, possible to identify two strata of concern within methodological reflection in the study of religion. The first asks about the integrity of specific methods used to collect the data in the first place. It seeks to sharpen and render more efficient the tools of research provided by history, philosophy, theology, psychology, etc. The second asks about how the individual as homo religiosus, as man in search of meaning, is to approach the accumulated findings of such methods. In a sense the first is concerned with the development of a "discipline", with generating and maintaining an impersonal and accurate body of information about a particular area of interest, whilst the second is more concerned with the more personal question of how the individual is to deal with such information. The first strata of concern finds expression in what I have referred to as the "descriptively orientated" approach to the study of religion (an orientation which characterizes the second phase of methodological consciousness), whereas the second strata finds what expression it has so far achieved in the third phase, which, I have suggested, the discipline/field of
studies may as a whole now be said to be in (and which the individual religionist is certainly in after his experience of the hall of mirrors). There is a certain tension between these two strata, a tension which is, perhaps, largely responsible for the lack of methodological cohesion which so patently characterizes present day Religious Studies. For their concerns tend to pull in opposite directions and any attempt to reconcile them in a single unified system is bound to risk being wrenched apart. It is, for instance, precisely to such a process of attempted unification that Wiebe's unease with the science of religion may be traced. For what we might call the concern for the discipline of Religious Studies tends towards objectivity and detachment, whereas the concern for the individual religionist as homo religiosus tends more towards subjectivity and commitment. The search for method in the study of religions attempts to reconcile these two divergent desiderata and, as such, is faced with extraordinary difficulties. Michael Novak's statement of the situation is worth repeating:

At times religious studies are pursued with disciplined subjectivity: who am I? who should I become? At other times they are pursued with detachment: how can one most accurately draw a map of certain areas of experience? Subjectivity and objectivity are often at war, perhaps more properly so in religious studies than in any other field. (60)

Certainly Novak clearly identifies the source of the tension in the two concerns of the subject. But does he not somewhat overemphasize the situation? For so long as the
tension between them is realised and their respective activities are disciplined and deliberate, is there any need for subjectivity and objectivity to be at war (let alone righteous war) in the study of religions? Surely once their tension is realised the road is then open for a mutually fructifying and logically demanded reconciliation which serves both interests. For it makes no sense for the individual to be at war with his profession, especially in this field where, ideally, "we are least driven (of all the professions) by our daily work into alienation from ourselves"(61).

It is towards such a reconciliation that the second methodological conclusion to which I have drawn attention points, and which the notion of interpolation attempts to plot out in detail.

I am not putting forward interpolation as a single method by which all the religionist's diverse inquiries may best be pursued - this would be to ignore the poly-methodic conclusion which is, I think, correct - but nor am I simply offering it as one method among many. Rather than being a specific device geared to replacing or improving the philosophical, historical, and theological tools in the religionist's methodological repertoire, it is an active and elaborated embodiment of that "one general rule" in Religious Studies which attempts to heal the rift between objective and subjective concerns by providing a unified focus adequate to both, where the right balance is struck between science and personality. It is an attempt to make sure that
the results of research garnered in a polymethodic way should be approached according to a certain desired pattern. It does not, beyond the most minimal level, dictate or suggest how these separate methods should conduct themselves, but rather how we ought to approach their findings. I am not, then, offering the method for Religious Studies in the classical sense, nor am I yet suggesting a method in the polymethodic sense. Rather I am suggesting a methodological overview, a procedure by which the religionist may seek to approach all the individually perplexing methods and phenomena which confront him and attempt some sort of synthesis, a synthesis in which the interests of the discipline (to map the nature of religious phenomena) and of the religionist as homo religiosus (to establish what he ought to believe and how he ought to live) may be fused and reconciled.

This much said, its situation roughly plotted in relation to the mainstream current of methodological thought in Religious Studies (and to two conclusions in particular), of what precisely does interpolation consist and how is it to proceed?

(ii) An Analogical Elucidation of Interpolation

The analogical comparison which I wish to consider as illustrative of the nature of interpolation is that of reading. This, it is hoped, may serve in a general and "pictorial" way to introduce some of the main features of this exercise prior to a closer and more specific examination
of its elements. The analogy is not completely successful in elucidating interpolation, but, even if it does not lead us straight to our destination, it points in the right direction, and in discussing its shortcomings much light is shed on our topic. This analogy has been suggested elsewhere as a model for the sort of sympathetic imagination required by the phenomenologist of religion, and in re-using it here as a model for interpolation I readily acknowledge that parallels may be drawn between interpolation and a certain presentation of the phenomenological endeavour (or at least some aspects of it). In view of this it is perhaps prudent to remind the reader of my position as regards phenomenology of religion: since in the thought climate current in this field it is well nigh impossible to come to any commonly agreed statement of the nature of such an activity (in particular its relationship to Husserlian philosophy remains critically uncertain, its practitioners sometimes using such technical terms as epoche or eidetic vision in a purely nominal sense, sometimes replete with the whole philosophical baggage of the original context) it seems wise to suspend all use of the title "phenomenology of religion", and the use of its accompanying terminology also, wherever this is possible. So far interpolation has been identified only as the operative device of that mode of seeing which the mesmerized religionist must adopt if he is to escape from the hall of mirrors into which the first (descriptive) stage of his inquiries have taken him. It
has been cast in the role of a general methodological overview specifically for this perplexing situation (and as such may have certain similarities to any attempted methodology of Religious Studies which is orientated according to the basic bearing of level three sight, "phenomenology of religion" included). But whether or not (or the degree to which) it might be properly described as "phenomenological", must be postponed until the associative context of this over-used and confusing word has been made clear. My concern here is to plot out a route for the religionist to follow in his search for meaning, rather than to categorize and baptize its constituent steps in terms of an ill-defined methodological vocabulary.

Up to this point I have "described" interpolation almost entirely in terms of its functional locus - the vehicle by which we are to travel in the direction indicated by level three seeing, this phantom outline being given the most minimal definitional substance by our claim that it is "the ability to change one's perspective in a profound and comprehensive way and to see things from various different points of view". In Chapter Three the area to be explored by interpolation was expressed in terms of extensive inter-global travel between different worlds of religious meaning, for which travel interpolation would act as our means of conveyance, as our intellectual or spiritual mode of transport. But precisely how it operated was a matter left until now. We have mentioned its reliance on the
fundamental assumption that since we are all in the same house we can therefore see into and understand our different worlds (an assumption echoed in Novalis' rhetorical question "How can a man understand anything, if he does not carry the germ of it within himself?" (63)) and we have considered some immediate ("first order") objections which confront the very idea of any such imaginative operation. The next step, our present concern, is to move closer towards a detailed understanding of its constituent mechanics by asking (true to that central cognitive principle which will be suggested in Chapter Five) what it is like, by seeking out some analogue by which our minimal definition may be given more substance. If we start, then, by taking interpolation as the attempt to put into practice a mode of critical, sensitive and dynamic observation based on extensive imaginative re-experiencing of the phenomenon in question (64), what (if any) already known parallel examples can we point to as we begin the process of "fleshing out" this abstract theoretical statement?

Reading is the comparison which comes most immediately to mind when considering any process that involves putting ourselves in someone else's shoes and trying to see the world through their eyes in a sustained and extensive way. For in this familiar everyday activity we commonly make vast leaps in "perspectival individuality" (65) with little or no thought of the methodological issues involved in so radical (albeit ephemeral) changes in viewpoint. With the
turn of a page we may move from following the fortunes of ninth century Scandinavian Christians (as we read Sigrid Undset's epic trilogy Kristin Lavransdatter), to re-living something of the "healthy minded" pantheism which animated so much of the early Greek religious consciousness (illustrated, for example, in Mary Renault's Theseus sequence (66)), to considering a modern statement of spiritual emptiness and a-religiousness (as it is bleakly and hauntingly expressed in Joseph Heller's Something Happened). Two qualifying points must, however, be made if this "commonsense" analogical comparison is to be effective.

Firstly, it is important to stress that what we have in mind here is not the casual reader whose attention is cursory and whose concentration nominal. Rather we are referring to what George Steiner has called the "complete reader", (67) one who attempts

the complete penetrative grasp of a text, the complete discovery and recreative apprehension of its life-forms. (68)

If such "total reading" (69) is successful, its practitioner can, like the poet, say without absurdity, "Je est un autre" (70). However, as Steiner is careful to remark, such an exercise is not without its difficulties - not least the problem of where the bounds of relevance for any particular application of it may be drawn (71), moreover, although it may be possible to reach the level of insight afforded by this sort of reading (it being "an act whose realization can be precisely felt" (72)) it is "nearly impossible to paraphrase or
systematize" (73) its constituent steps. But one thing which can be said about the workings of this somewhat elusive process is that it is not so much concerned with the passive and distanced observation of external things as with their active (imaginative) re-construction and re-experiencing in the mind of the reader. It is, in other words, very much a matter of

'original repetition' (where we re-enact, in the bounds of our own secondary but momentarily heightened, educated consciousness (74)

the elements of the text under study.

Secondly, it is not in all areas of his art that the reader will be called upon to make the particular mental shift which renders the process analogous to interpolation in the first place. That shift characteristically involves persons rather than impersonally stated information or concepts. It demands an attempt to see the world according to particular individuals' viewpoints, rather than in terms of some de-personalized theoretical schema. It is that movement associated with a reading of, say, Chaim Potok's The Chosen, Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear it Away, or R.K. Narayan's The Vender of Sweets (75), as opposed to Isidore Epstein's Judaism, Ninian Smart's The Phenomenon of Christianity or R.C. Zaeher's Hinduism. Indeed we can narrow down still further that area relevant to our use of reading as an analogy for interpolation by restricting our attention to the Bildungsroman rather than simply to any fictional narrative. Not that this is some sort of highly
specific pinpointing of a particularly precise literary form, since by "Bildungsroman" we do not have in mind some psychological-literary genre of strictly defined type, but rather use it to mean

the novel or play which is about the maturing of its central character through the impact of his experience ... the Bildungsroman sets out to describe the evolution of the 'hero's soul'; it is fictional biography that is mainly concerned with its hero's reaction to ideas, or the development of ideas about 'life' from his experience. The Bildungsroman is a sort of laboratory in which the hero conducts an experiment in living. For this reason, it is a particularly useful medium for writers whose main concern is a philosophical answer to the practical question: what shall we do with our lives? (76)

And, we might add, it is a similarly useful medium by which to give voice to the religions' answers to this self-same question according to their various world certainties. Such a category takes in a very broad spectrum of works, from Shakespeare's Hamlet to Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, but it is, I think, mistaken to go so far as to claim that in the present century "the only serious form of literary art is the Bildungsroman" (77). Be as this may, it is certainly that locus within which the work of the "complete reader" most closely approaches the sort of interpolation which I have suggested it is necessary for the mesmerized religionist to adopt if he is to escape from the hall of mirrors. In fact interpolation occurs in such reading when we momentarily understand in a comprehensive
yet critical way how someone else looks out upon the world, when we see what sort of identity they consider it and themselves to have, but it occurs at a lower and less complete level than is required by the religionist.

Ninian Smart sums up some of the salient points involved in reading with particular reference to that great Bildungsroman, The Brothers Karamazov:

within the pages of the novel and in their own way, the brothers Karamazov exist, though in another way it does not matter whether they did or did not exist; typically it is not a question which needs asking ... in a novel one is immersed in a particular ambience, and moves with the characters, playing their feelings, understanding their beliefs, beginning to live in their social world. It is not necessary to agree with Ivan Karamazov in 'real life': one can still see the world from his point of view, and likewise with Alyosha. They are two brothers with very different outlooks. One may not in real life actually sympathize with a given character, but within the world of the novel one can have a vivid empathy. (78)

And, from a similar standpoint of vivid empathy with regard to the world certainties confronting him in the hall of mirrors, it is to be hoped that the religionist will be better placed to make evaluative decisions than if he were simply to remain on the "outside" looking in.

Since he is using the model of reading to illustrate the phenomenological approach, Smart's emphasis is very much on the point that the reader need neither concede the actual existence of the individuals about whom he reads, nor agree with the correctness (moral rectitude, empirical accuracy, absolute truth, or whatever) of the lives they lead or the
views they hold, in order to understand in the thorough-going empathetic way of the complete reader what animates their thoughts and prompts their behaviour, what makes them think and act as individuals in the way they do (and perhaps even to sympathize with, if not condone, some of those thoughts and actions). Questions both of existence and of evaluation may be "bracketed out" without the reading process being brought to a stop. These twin points are also important for the interpolative approach since the ability to "suspend" judgment and belief/disbelief in this way is as close to a guarantee as we can have that prejudice (i.e. arriving at judgments before all the evidence has been considered) will not vitiate the religionist's eventually fair and cogent (because fully i.e. interpolatively informed) evaluation of his religious situation by suggesting premature conclusions which are unlikely to be realiable. But it is important to add that a suspension of belief/disbelief\(^{(79)}\) is not a cancellation of it. In interpolation we are concerned to wait until a picture can be clearly seen before deciding what to make of it, rather than with indefinitely postponing such decision-making or jumping to unfounded conclusions\(^{(80)}\). Rather than slamming down the shutters of his mind as soon as he encounters an apparently admirable, sound, unreasonable or distasteful religious phenomenon and labelling it hitherto as such, the interpolative religionist is concerned to "really know" something before he is willing to make any final evaluation concerning it. And of course
the reading analogy ties in well with this desideratum since we have already endorsed Bambrough's presentation of literature as a prime means of "really knowing". In the following passage (again from Reason Truth and God) the similar role played by new experience and by literature in adding a new dimension to our knowledge is explained:

What is it like to be a coal miner? What was it like to fight in the trenches in 1914? What does it feel like to orbit the earth in a satellite, to be shipwrecked, to be an orphan, a deaf-mute, or a prisoner of war? We may well know the answers to these questions well enough to describe the relevant experiences in words very like those that would be used by people who, unlike ourselves, have actually had these experiences. And yet it is clear that we might have much to learn of the nature of one of these experiences from actually having the experience, even if we were not then able to find words for the description of the experience that were not available to us before it was our own first-hand experience. In such a situation people speak of knowing or realizing for the first time what it means to be poor or hungry or frightened ... But there is another way of finding out what it meant to be cold and hungry and afraid in the trenches of the Western Front, one which does not involve spending any time in those trenches: and that is to read Good-Bye to All That by Robert Graves, or some of the writings of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon. And in reading a work of literature, as in having a new experience, we may acquire a degree of new knowledge and new understanding that is disproportionate to the number and importance of the new facts that we learn. Some works of literature teach us that which we ourselves do know, but teach us none the less something that we still have need to learn. (81)
A little knowledge, if not exactly dangerous, is certainly liable to be a misleading thing, and in the field of Religious Studies it is perhaps especially easy to jump to the wrong conclusions from an acquaintance with those shorthand formulas (that thou art, all life is suffering, god is love, etc.\(^{(82)}\)) which are often abstracted from the organic whole of their setting in an attempt to present in an easily conceptualizable form the "essence" of such complex and holistically ungraspable entities as religions. If the religionist persists in following an approach which over-emphasizes descriptive accumulation of "the facts", then the risk of misapprehending the nature of his subject matter is prolonged. To some extent he is, of course, protected from accepting as true the more clumsy and damaging distortions of religion simply by the extent of his factual informedness, but no matter how well informed he may be at this level he is still dealing with the unordered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and, as such, may fail to see correctly the picture which they form when fitted together. The more pieces he has the less chance there is of his making premature (and therefore prejudiced) pronouncements concerning what such pieces finally portray. But a more reliable safeguard against such possible wrong-seeing is to try to fit the pieces together, and to do this what we require is not simply more information but a structure on which to arrange what information we already have and what will in future be gathered. Clearly it is arguable that until we have all the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle,
until we are completely informed about religions, there is no point in trying to fit together some final picture. However, I would suggest that such a viewpoint is inconsistent since it relies on our ability to recognize that point at which all the pieces are in our possession, but in order to do this we must first have an idea of the complete canvas which they are trying to sketch. We must, in other words, have attempted to structure the pieces into as coherent a whole as possible, otherwise we will simply not be able to see what is missing, the gaps in our understanding will remain unmapped\(^{(83)}\). An interpolative approach seeks to provide the structure required to fit the pieces together. It is an approach which, in a sense, uses the religionist, considered as man in search of meaning (i.e. in terms of his being an inhabitant of the "same house", an experiencer of that fundamental human situation shared by all men), as a living template by whose mediation the full meaning of the phenomena may be articulated. It stands in relation to a non-interpolative approach much as the full texts of Macbeth or Hamlet stand to summarizing paraphrases of them. That is, it gives access to a level of insight which cannot be apprehended by any abstracting or distancing descriptive process. To take another analogy: we might compare the interpolative religionist approaching the elements of information which constitute the raw material of his subject, to the effect which a magnet has when it is placed underneath a paper liberally strewn with iron filings. In both cases a
state of greater organization or coherence follows from
the activity in question. Interpolation seeks to mediate
between and heal the subjective/objective rift which
sometimes seems to run the full length of Religious Studies,
by re-implicating abstracted information as fully as
possible in its original human context. The interpol-
ative religionist, like the complete reader, (and unlike
the descriptive religionist or the reader of précis)
considers things in vitro not in vacuo and thereby seeks to
avoid the mesmerization with which he is otherwise threatened.

The point of the analogy with reading is that it shows
the kind of way in which a detailed empathetic standpoint
may be realistically reached whilst at the same time some
sort of critical distance is maintained which enables us to
think about the viewpoint through which we are looking, not
just to see and be hypnotized by the view which it presents.
The complete reader, extensively versed in the milieu from
which his chosen text stems, seems well equipped to achieve
that basic methodological goal of the religionist: to
approach religious phenomena with both detachment and
empathy. He seems to provide a model by which we might
come to understand religion both "scientifically and, at
the same time, warmly"; for in this particular field
information and understanding do not seem to be divorced
by abstraction. Reading provides a model for the way in
which - to go back to J.S. Dunne's vocabulary - we may
practically and successfully "pass over" into another world
of religious meaning and "come back" from that world to our
original standpoint. (As we pointed out earlier, the widely read individual need not get "stuck" in the thought world of any of the books he reads, no matter how intimately a part of that world he may feel himself for a short while to be). Moreover, in terms of the complete reader, we may pass over in more than just a token way, achieving, rather, a serious and extensive shift in viewpoint through our work. We may come to "really know" and with this re-focusing of our knowledge we may be better placed to understand the phenomena so presented. The model of observation traditionally favoured by the descriptive approach has been that of observer and observed on either side of a clearly drawn line across which the process of description attempts to build an intellectual bridge. This view tends to polarize subject and object, locating them at opposite ends of a methodological (dis)continuum. Interpolation, on the other hand, attempts to unite observer and observed more closely, in a way in which "others" may be viewed as "psychological contemporaries" of the observer rather than as distant and alien phenomena to be dispassionately described. The process of reading involves a similar closeness of observer and observed, and just as Religious Studies may be said to enlarge the "glance of the spirit", so reading likewise acts to enlarge the outlook of the reader.

Having seen how through reading we may explore any area of human concern (any area, that is, which has been consigned to a Bildungsroman type text) in a uniquely
informative way which closely approximates to the religionist's methodological ideal of balanced objectivity and empathy, we must now ask: where does reading fall down as an analogy? Where do the parallel links which allow us to use it as an elucidating comparison with interpolation break and the two activities go their separate ways?

Smart complains that reading fails as a completely satisfactory analogy for phenomenology because it is simply too easy an activity in comparison to the strenuousness involved in this latter endeavour. To this one might reply with some justification that some reading (and most complete reading) requires great effort, and is at least as difficult as doing phenomenology (89). But whatever the merits of Smart's objection may be, it does serve to point us in the direction of one important shortcoming of reading in terms of its suitability as a wholly satisfactory analogy for interpolation. That shortcoming is simply that in reading we come to the text as something which is already there. As readers we follow a pre-structured course which has been designed for us by the author, and although no author can, of course, reliably predict what thoughts will follow from our consideration of his work, he does nonetheless dictate the broad outlines of our thinking. Our objection to this givenness of the text, to the existence of a ready made path which we can follow, is not precisely one of a lack of strenuousness. Rather it is one which points out: firstly, that it is simply not the case for the mesmerized
religionist in the hall of mirrors that a collection of texts exist which can lead him to a less perplexing view of his situation. Such works as we have already drawn attention to may be some help, but few, if any, proceed in a manner such that we might accept them as genuine exercises in religious interpolation without extensive qualification. Rather, they provide models towards which such interpolation may look for guidelines. In simple terms of the resources currently available to the religionist, then, the analogy with reading is defective. It presupposes the existence of material to read whilst the religionist is more in the position of a prospective reader without books. He must make his own path, write his own text, from the scattered words provided by his work so far. Secondly, not all reading (even of the Bildungsroman type) involves the propagation of insight through active discovery on the part of the reader, discovery, that is, of how the elements of a particular outlook on the world act in the individual existence which holds that outlook. Often we are simply told ("simply" is, perhaps, something of a misnomer here: often the telling is done in a highly complex way, but the point remains that it is still telling) what a character thinks or feels, rather than being led towards discovering what it means to view the world in such and such a way, towards actually thinking or feeling his thoughts and emotions ourselves (given as generative guidelines our temporary immersion within the confines of
that milieu). To the extent that reading approximates towards telling us about the perspectival individuality associated with some religious phenomenon, it pertains to the descriptive/abstractly factual approach which (beyond a certain indispensable point) we seek to avoid. To the extent that it approximates towards discovering the possibilities contained in such viewpoints, it pertains more towards interpolation. Interpolation involves a process of first hand re-construction and discovery, and to preserve the immediacy of this mode of research and the insights which it offers we suggest that it ought to be recorded in such a way as to demand re-discovery on the part of subsequent readers. But only in relatively few cases does reading present its informational load by way of leading us towards discovering it for ourselves. What we are drawing attention to here is, in a sense, the difference between being told how beautiful a sunset is and seeing that sunset ourselves. Or, in the secondary terms of the written mediation of such experiences, it is the difference between densely metaphorical and suggestive writing and starkly literal abstract précis. If our re-enactment of things is to be effective then it must be as richly imaginative as possible. If, at the end of the day, it is not simply to dazzle us, our knowledge of religious world certainties must derive from "really knowing" rather than simply being told, and the essential characteristic of such knowing is, as we have seen, either new experience or
something which is as closely equivalent as possible. With much reading we are implicated only at surface level, so to speak, in whatever thoughtworld we might seek to consider through the medium of the text\(^{(90)}\).

Given these shortcomings\(^{(91)}\) we could, perhaps, try to locate another analogy for the interpolative process. Again following Smart we might consider acting\(^{(92)}\), for, as Eliade has remarked (through the voice of Bibicescu, one of the characters in his novel *The Forbidden Forest*) the actor identifies himself in turn with innumerable human existences, and he suffers, if he is a good actor, just as the character he represents on stage suffers in his life. This means that he knows in a single lifetime the passions, the hopes, the suffering, and the revelations of fifty or a hundred lives. \(^{(93)}\)

But despite such apparently successful enlarging of the glance of the spirit, acting does not much further our process of elucidating interpolation, for it is open to the same basic objections as that of reading (i.e. its presupposing of existing texts and the rareness of a mode of insight based on discovery being used in such texts). Moreover it is open to the further objection that a good actor might quite possibly act the part of, say, a devotee of Kali or a Christian missionary without any real understanding of the thoughts and feelings behind the actions which he portrays. Mimicry requires astute observation, it does not necessarily involve understanding.

It is important to realize that we are not rejecting
reading as an analogy. Rather we are stressing its limitations and in this way trying to further clarify our meaning. Reading does not give a complete picture of what interpolation is, but offers a rough initial sketch which serves to put our minds into the appropriate gear for understanding this concept. Having this rough sketch in view, it is now time to abandon the analogical mode and consider some of the constitutive elements of interpolation itself. Later, once these have been considered, we will return to the analogical mode and offer a more detailed and precise parallel in the form of William Golding's novel The Inheritors. Our methodological exegesis will thus mirror the abstraction/re-implication sequence which the interpolative religionist must himself follow.

(iii) The Return to Beginnings

We have already drawn attention in a general way to the importance of a return to beginnings in human thinking and it is precisely this notion of going back to a level of unconfused fundamentality (and setting out from there again) which lies at the heart of the interpolative endeavour, providing the guiding pulse by which that process seeks to proceed in its attempt to investigate those religious worlds of meaning which confront the religionist in the hall of mirrors. By adopting such a procedure of retreat, intellectual reformulation and re-advance, the religionist hopes to bypass that point at which his religious informedness seems merely to constitute an impasse, and to move
further along the road towards the making of a world decision. It is almost as if, having already gone some distance into a maze, the religionist decides that if he is ever to find the centre he must go back to the beginning and start out again. In such a situation, the business of returning to "Go" is itself no straightforward task, but one which requires skill and concentration.

But perhaps the fundamental ethos of interpolation is best stated by employing a metaphor which is somewhat richer in potential imagery than that of the maze. Indeed the illustrative fecundity of the metaphorical zero or cipher is such as to allow a fresh statement to be made of the whole situation with which we are attempting to deal. To elaborate: the interpolative religionist might be seen as one who is attempting to render himself into a human cipher (cipher in the sense of nought), a thing of no value in itself but one which, placed behind any integer, multiplies its value by ten without altering its original numerical identity\(^{(94)}\). In effecting this quantitative magnification without qualitatively altering what is there, the zero acts in a way which is functionally similar to the role which the interpolative religionist tries to play. For interpolation seeks to increase our knowledge of religious worlds of meaning without itself adding to those meanings. At the same time, however, interpolation recognizes the religious nature of men and the human nature of religions: the latter can have little sense if viewed in a wholly abstract, impersonal way (like integers shorn of their noughts, they
appear simplistically, as easily stateable things of small value whose whole field of meaning is diminished); and the former lose all significance beyond the closed circle of mortality if sundered from the latter (like noughts without their defining integers they appear as things of no significance). Put together, the value of each is immeasurably increased. The question facing the religionist, the man who is informed in a multi-religious way, might be put thus: which integer ought he to place before his nought of individual existence in order to give it its true value? (Or do all the religious integers give a falsely inflated value to things, investing lives of serial finitude and mundane explicability with a sense and significance they simply do not have?). Faced with the mesmerization caused by a straightforward factual/descriptive knowledge of the range of evaluative alternatives available, each claiming to give the right answer to the perplexing sum of the world and of human existence, the religionist must attempt to see clearly precisely what each of these values involves. Interpolation suggests a way in which he may do this, for it offers a means of seeing, in as comprehensive and detailed a way as possible, how things appear according to each particular numerical indice. By using interpolation the religionist may shift his cipher selfhood away from its original (chosen or "inherited") value position and view things as they appear to others through some different integral outlook(95). Interpolation is, in a sense, the story of the deliberately voyaging (or, one might argue, the
religiously responsible) zero. In such a voyage three key elements are involved:

1. Cutting oneself free from one's original judgmental/religious moorings and getting back to the nakedness of zero rated man, to a life which in the interests of ontological mobility denies for the moment the stabilizing efficacy of whatever anchors it had previously assumed.

2. Leaving (but not forgetting or irrevocably deserting) familiar waters and attaching oneself to new integral viewpoints, exploring all the different flags under which the vessel of humanity may undertake its voyage. Seeing the world through a variety of religious certainties.

3. Remaining self consciously critical and observant throughout this exercise of travelling to different worlds of religious meaning. If the journey of the deliberate zero is not to degenerate into aimless wandering or merely curious sightseeing then it must be borne in mind throughout that the purpose of all this movement is to discover where (if anywhere) to drop anchor and stop, under which flag and code of conduct (if any) to continue a life.

So much for my assurance to forgo the analogical mode and get down to a concrete presentation of the elements of interpolation. Under the guise of metaphor that mode has been continued and I have again used imagery rather than plain statement to elucidate my meaning. That the meaning of interpolation has been elucidated is my only defence for
such reneging. But if it is not to become endlessly metaphorical the process of elucidation must now attend more closely to the operative principles by whose means interpolation (i.e. the enactment of the above three principles) may actually be put into effect. What, then, is needed if this voyage of the zero is to proceed successfully? How are its ambitious goals to be achieved?

Our answer is: through a beginnings orientated approach. To be more precise, if religious world certainties are to be explored adequately and if the "zero" is to be freed for travel in the first place, the religionist must attempt a fourfold return to beginnings.

Firstly, the religionist must return to beginnings in terms of making a world decision. He must go back to beginnings (accept a "zero-rating") in the way in which he views the world and his own individual existence in that world, trying to establish, in a consistent and comprehensive imaginative way, a situation in which he confronts things as a representative of the unexplained human situation, rather than as a representative of some religious, cultural or political understanding of that situation. To achieve this cipher status, this existence as man in search of meaning (in contrast to that of already committed individual), a keen awareness of world uncertainty must be deliberately fostered, and the heightened consciousness of things seen thus in a profoundly interrogatory way must be taken as the common starting point for all his inquiries(96). Once this point
of human zero has been established, the religionist may then begin the investigative-evaluative process of presenting its anguished nakedness, its unsettling uncertainty, with the different value indices, the different identities, offered as clothing certainties by the religious traditions of the race. This presentation of world certainties will take place at the level of "really knowing", of self implication, offered to such a critical, observant and searching (but non-prejudiced) cipher by the three remaining senses of the beginnings orientated approach.

Secondly, the religionist (and we now mean the religionist as homo religiosus as man in search of meaning) must return to beginnings in terms of the history in which any particular world certainty has been developed. If his informedness is not to be temporally abstract and incomplete he must attempt to return to the very first traceable manifestation and work his way up the stream of time, plotting out developments and changes. Only in this way will he be enabled to see the image with which he is presented in any sort of wholeness, i.e. he must become attuned to the sources and origins (and therefore nuances) of the symbolism used to express it.

Thirdly, he must return to beginnings in terms of the persons whose lives have been constitutive of and moulded by this particular historical tradition. The temporal development must not be seen simply in terms of a history of ideas, but rather in terms of the individual consciousnesses which developed, and lived according to,
those ideas. He must not, in other words, trace out an abstract ideational history and then proceed to view it according to some foreign cultural/religious norms. He must be prepared to allow the vast range of religious phenomena with which he deals, to appear in their own milieu rather than trying to subsume or judge them according to alien (including his own native) categories of value. It is from such categories that he must have broken free if he is to be able to undertake this voyage to begin with. For example, in studying the Hindy deity Shiva, the religionist must not forget the basic fact that what he is dealing with is considered by his devotees to be divine, to be a genuine and forceful expression of the holy. Unless this is firmly borne in mind then it is likely that he will view the ambiguity of iconographic symbolism and mythology with which this god is surrounded as something problematic which must be explained away if it is not to be considered a logically incoherent extravagance. Unless he has zeroed his own evaluative scale and attuned himself (as man in search of meaning) to the Shaivite outlook, then he is likely to miss the fact that in Shiva's irreducible ambivalence, his apparent sexual, ontological and moral ambiguity, we are not presented simply with the mongrel outcome of an over-fertile mythological imagination, but with a coherent iconographic statement of how a particular current of religious consciousness understands the inter-relationship of the various aspects of reality. Taken in this sense,
as an expression of the ultimate nature of things, Shiva’s ambiguity can be seen to be vitally appropriate rather than ambiguous, as a possible world certainty rather than an impossible jumble of colourful but confused imagery. The religionist must go back to beginnings in the sense of seeing things from the standpoint of those who express and believe in (live out) the particular religious points of view with which he is concerned. If he fails to do this then he risks placing an unzeroed self behind a muddle of half discarded own-view and (consequently) half apprehended other-view. This can only result in a numerical discord which distorts the true value of all the elements involved in its dissonance. We ought, perhaps, to stress again that the point of a return to zero is not so as we can approach, say, Shaivite Hinduism in any de novo sense, but so as we can see it – albeit momentarily - through the eyes of the Shaivite. The point of a return to beginnings is not so as we may remain there, but in order that we might set out from there again, only this time using a new investigative vehicle (i.e. interpolation). We do not want to see Shiva de novo (this would be to revert to the idea of following the direction suggested by level one seeing, which we have already rejected as unhelpful), but rather through the eyes of the Shaivite, and in order to be receptive to such a viewpoint we must approach it as deliberate ciphers rather than as casual explorers. In a sense, what the interpolative religionist is attempting
to do is not to shed, but to exchange, the presuppositions of an accepted world certainty. He is interested to discover how the world appears according to such and such a point of view, and then to consider if that point of view can have any religious/existential value for him. He is not concerned to discover how things would look to a wholly presuppositionless stance (indeed, as we have suggested before, it seems doubtful if anything at all could appear at such a level, even supposing we wanted to descend to it). Fourthly, the religionist must return to beginnings in terms of the language in which the various world certainties are expressed. In formulating general descriptive categories - "prayer", "worship", "sacrifice", etc. - we are already making a start on this. But our ultimate task here must be to decide whether, and to what extent, religions are translatable out of the terms in which they are traditionally expressed, and if, at the end of the day, they are talking about the same or about different things. We must return to linguistic beginnings in terms of probing the meaning and flexibility of religious language. To do this the religionist would, ideally, investigate each religious world certainty in terms of the language in which it was originally given expression. Failing this, though, an awareness of the issues behind the inter-religious translation which he then relies on must be advocated\(^{97}\). It is only if he returns to beginnings in terms of language that the religionist will be able to determine the correctness of equating, say, Shiva, Dionysios and Osiris in view
of their many similarities (rather, he would be in a position to establish the degree to which these similarities could be considered to be such), or to decide whether the inter-equation of key terms in Christianity and Hinduism, two apparently quite different religions, is acceptable.

For instance, Daniélou has observed that

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Just as we can say, 'the French call a spoon a cuiller', the Hindu will say, 'the Christians worship a form of Vishnu named Christ', because for him Vishnu is not an individual god pertaining to a particular religion, but a general principle, as inevitably represented in any theology, in any code of symbols, as words representing objects (nouns), actions (verbs) and qualities (adjectives), are inevitably found in any language. (98)
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Clearly if our linguistic decision about such issues is to have any authenticity, we must first have established (through a zeroed return to beginnings in terms of history and persons) what Hindus mean by "Vishnu" and what Christians mean by "Christ". Only then can we seriously consider the suitability of different modes of expression from those normally found within these two traditions. (99)

Interpolation involves an active effort on the part of the religionist to immerse himself, as cipher, as homo religiosus, in the fabric of meaning of the different world certainties by means of which the various religions offer an account of existence. However, once the starting point of a "human zero" has been established, to consider the three beginnings-orientated drives (through which it then seeks to explore the phenomena constitutive of those
certainties) as quite separate or successive endeavours would be mistaken. We consider them here in turn only to make clear the methodological framework underlying interpolation, not to suggest that the elements of that framework occur in an independent non-overlapping way. For of course it would be impossible to return to historical beginnings without in some sense seeing the phenomena in question from the point of view of the persons for whom they were present experience (and vice versa). Nor would a return to beginnings in terms of persons be possible without some attempt to see "behind" temporally and culturally rooted linguistic forms in order to put those persons' outlooks in terms which we could understand (without altering the meaning involved). In other words, a return to beginnings in terms of person involves some similar movement in terms of language (and, again, vice versa). Moreover, the notion of a return to some point of zero, itself intimately involves some aspects of the remaining three beginnings themes. In short: the whole beginnings orientation by which interpolation is structured is a complex of simultaneous concerns which are inter-related at many points and which, to a large extent, act in unison.

This fourfold seeking of starting points is not keyed towards discovering "the origin(s) of religion(s)" in terms of providing some kind of underlying causal theory (religion is a disease of language, an outgrowth of magic, a manifestation of man's societary existence, a development from animism etc.), but rather is concerned with placing the
religionist in the best possible position from which to see (and to see things through) the world certainties which confront and puzzle him. Interpolation is an attempt to place the religionist deep within a system of world certainty, as a world uncertain zero, whilst maintaining his autonomy as an acute and critical observer. It is a trying on of different religious costumes to test their fit. Of course such a process may lead the religionist to develop theories concerning the origin(s) of religion(s), but this is not his primary motive in undertaking such an investigation. The initial impetus lies rather in his desire to resolve the hall of mirrors dilemma and to reach a point of world decision.

By returning to beginnings and setting out from there again, interpolation attempts to lead the religionist towards a point of naked confrontation with the vividly perceived characteristics both of the holy as it has been experienced in man's religious consciousness, and with himself as man in search of meaning. Returning to a level of complete fundamentality, working from the bottom up and immersing oneself, as homo religiosus without a religion, thoroughly (but self consciously) in the data, leads to a situation where there is little room for evasion, postponement or indecision (even though the decision made may be that no final decision/evaluation can be made). Conceived of in this sense of returning to beginnings, interpolation closely mirrors Amiel's notion of understanding as "a
putting back of the bird into the egg, of the plant into its seed, a reconstruction of the whole genesis of the being in question" (101).

Such a beginnings orientated approach applies as much to Religious Studies as a whole as to the individual constitutive investigations carried out under its auspices. Ultimately the religionist might be seen as one wanting to answer the question "What is religion?" in both a descriptive and evaluative way. That is, in terms of our hall of mirrors analogy, he wants to establish both the content (historical, mythological, doctrinal, etc.) of the images which surround him and their worth as possible world decisions. In the interim, though, he is more likely to set his sights less inclusively and ask such questions as: "What is Hinduism?" "What is Buddhism?" "What is sacrifice/worship/the significance of asceticism in medieval Christianity?", and so on (what is the nature of these various reflected images?). But the procedural ethos remains unchanged. In acting as a cumulative procedure which mirrors in its particular inquiries his ultimate goal, a beginnings orientated approach safeguards the religionist from getting sidetracked by intermediate methodological concerns (such as an obsession with pure description) and keeps his attention firmly on the need to treat religious phenomena as live subjects which must be dealt with on a day to day basis rather than as inert material which can be filed and stored indefinitely.
But precisely what happens when the religionist in the hall of mirrors takes the decision to "start again" in this radical fourfold way? Suppose, for example, that in one of the many mirrors in which he looks the religionist sees a reflection of "himself" (himself as representative of the human situation) as a life monad trapped within a fleshly existence by the karmic consequences of past lives, and that this existence with its catalogue of suffering and endlessly unsatisfied desires is viewed as something to be shunned, something to be escaped from. What is he to make of this picture? What must he do to be able to conclude whether or not it is an adequate picture of things, whether it is to be considered true or false (or in some way not concerned with objective reality at all and therefore "immune" from these categories)?

First, of course, the reflection in question must be seen by interpolation. Sketched out in the very broadest terms (for such an exercise is of too delicate and complex a nature to attempt any sort of full presentation of it here) an interpolative approach orientated towards a zeroed return to beginnings in terms of history, persons and language might attempt:

(1) To trace the historical manifestations of this kind of idea, i.e. to map out the relevant sources in an effort to see where and when the ideas involved originated, what possible factors might have influenced their genesis and development and thus what nuances are likely to be present
in any expression of them. The return to historical beginnings and the advance from this starting point to his locus of present attention, is concerned to establish what the relevant data are (in terms of which this locus may be properly understood). It asks: "What are the sources on which our investigation must be based? What must we consult to become informed about X?" (102). Suppose that in this particular case the religionist had come across the idea of rebirth as it is expressed in the Maitri Upanishad, then the relevant data might reasonably be considered to be the Vedic writings, for on the question of when the idea of rebirth first occurred in India we are "restricted to the material of the Vedic texts themselves" (103), since archaeological finds as yet cast no light on this matter. So we must return to the study of the Samhitas as our starting point in the attempt to establish the range of phenomena covered by the term "rebirth." Evidence for the concept of rebirth there is, in fact, minimal and uncertain, but there do seem to be certain germinal suggestions (in the three steps of Vishnu, the primitive notion of soul transfer, and the idea of a man's being reborn in his son, for example) which plausibly present themselves as first seeds of the later full blown belief in a samsaric world. Of course in returning to historical beginnings we must remain aware of the very real danger of creating our own "pseudo-seeds", for some degree of eisegesis (reading into the text) is difficult to avoid when we are looking for the roots, in earlier expressions of belief, of important later developments whose
characteristics we are well acquainted with. In other words, we must ensure that in our return to historical beginnings we do not establish elucidating precursors more clearly than is in fact warranted by the texts (or in other cases by archaeological finds).

(2) To see how the world and a human life lived in that world might appear to one who held as true these sort of ideas. The return to beginnings in terms of persons attempts to articulate phenomena through the (critically observed) vocabulary of the committed believer. It is an attempt to see how an adherence to some religious system of world certainty will influence an individual's outlook on (and behaviour in) life. In this particular case such a beginnings theme (in tandem with its historical parallel) would involve an attempt to see successive stages of Hindu eschatological thought from the point of view of the believer. From the "healthy mindedness" of the hymns, with their general (but not unanimous) belief in a benevolent and bountiful world and a Valhalla like after-life with only veiled suggestions of a second death and consequent rebirth, to the "sick-souled" outlook found in the Maitri Upanishad,\(^{(104)}\) where the world is seen as a place of suffering, decay and death, permanent escape from which is the primary goal of the individual, the interpolative religionist must attempt to alter his viewpoint to that of the individuals involved in these particular times and places, taking into account the possible effects which social, scientific, political and economic changes might have had on a person's religious
outlook. If we wish to understand the concept of rebirth as it is expressed in the Vedic texts, we must do our best to trace out in all their multi-dimensional detail what seem to be its main steps, until we reach a point of empathetic informedness where we can share the thirst of life which craved "a hundred autumns, a hundred winters, and a hundred springs" (Atharva Veda: 3.2.4.), and feel the "sharpened razor's edge" (Katha Upanishad: 3.14) press ever closer until it bled such healthy mindedness dry of all its untroubled optimism.

To reflect on how the notion of rebirth might be re-expressed in terms other than those of its original setting (established via a return to beginnings in terms of history and persons) without doing violence to the meaning intended in that original setting. The return to linguistic beginnings asks if the way in which something is expressed by its believers is the only language by which it may be accurately communicated. In a sense, this return to beginnings could be seen as an exercise in testing the flexibility of the meaning involved, testing its stretch and give on various frames of expression in the attempt to establish its full scope (prior to any decision being taken on its veracity). Thus, for example, when we read in Rig Veda 2.28.5, "let not the thread of my life, as I am weaving my song, be torn, nor the measure of my work cut short before season" (106), we might perhaps be reminded of Keats' lines (from his poem "The Terror of Death"), "When I
have fears that I may cease to be, before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain", and feel justified in claiming that, despite their historical, linguistic and cultural disparity, the underlying sentiment expressed in these two passages - i.e. the fear of an untimely, premature death - is identical (although, granted, Keats' poem is not - at least not explicitly - a prayer addressed to some divine power in the same way as the Vedic hymn is). But, moving on from this to more theologically significant possibilities, could the idea of rebirth be seen as similar (and if so to what degree, could we claim identicality?) to, say, the Christian notion of (to use Keats again) a "vale of soul making", or to the concept of purgatory? Could the Christian, as John Hick has suggested, express some of the eschatological notions of his own faith in terms of rebirth? In other words, is the idea of rebirth uniquely and exhaustively expressed in the experience and language of the Vedic texts, or is it found elsewhere too? Do the same religious ideas occur in different settings, their similarity (or identicality) masked by the different ways in which they are described? It is such questions as these that the return to beginnings in terms of language seeks to answer.

(4) The beginnings orientated investigation outlined (and I stress that it is no more than a very sketchy outline) in points 1, 2 and 3 above, must, of course, be undertaken from a standpoint which is evaluatively zeroed at the outset so
as the religionist may be fully receptive to the intrinsic values of the world certainties he is investigating. But if our study were to end here, with the attempt to educate the human cipher, to let it "really know", about the religious systems found on this planet without attempting some sort of decision about them, then we would, in a sense, have gone little further than the factual/descriptive approach whose appropriateness as a terminus for Religious Studies we have continually questioned. (108)

Apart from being in the "same house" as all his racial siblings (I mean race in the broad sense of species here), the religionist also occupies his own unique locus of individuality, his "different world" of outlook upon those specific elements of existence which define his, and only his, brief and perplexing biography. The religionist - like all men - exists not just as an observer but as a participator too, his identity is not wholly expressed in the common cipher of that humanity of which he is a tiny part, but includes the unique integer of selfhood which is his own being. He has a proper as well as a family name. Interpolation could, perhaps, be viewed as the operative interface of meaning which tries to mediate between individuality and shared existence, not simply so as to provide a stage upon which an endless variety of phenomena may be endlessly observed and described, but where an understanding of things in an ultimate sense may eventually be discovered, where world uncertainty may be "given peace". (109) Attempting (momentarily) to untie all the sutures of
uniqueness which hold him firmly in his personal niche (of country, language, time, religion, etc.) by stressing his place in that shared experience of the human situation (his nature as *homo religiosus*, as man in search of meaning) and stressing its inherently puzzling nature (his experience of world uncertainty), interpolation seeks to free the religionist for an exploration of how other brief mites of sentience have viewed things and conducted their (often now extinct) affairs, and how those views have found cumulative expression in the great religious traditions of mankind. But at the end of the day the religionist must return from the anonymity of observer, traveller, human cipher, to the specificity of participator, dweller, unique individual. In that individual existence the religionist is confronted once more with the sense of world uncertainty on whose account his journey was undertaken in the first place (and by the stressing of which much of the distance was covered). But his homecoming finds him changed: not only has his exercise in religious exploration left him with a host of souvenirs and traveller's tales, \(^{(110)}\) but - at least such is the hope of interpolation - with a clearer (if not complete) picture of the nature of the earth as a whole and what his role upon it might be. Just as the man who ventures beyond the immediate confines of his birth-place and finds a volcano nearby, may shift his dwelling place and urge others to do likewise, so the religionist who discovers that the story of rebirth told in some of the grimmer Upanishads is no mirage but a pressing reality, may entirely alter his way of
life and suggest that others do the same. (111) Alternatively he may find his native dwelling adequate, or in need of only minor alterations, or, intoxicated by travel, he may find it hard to settle down again, or he may contract some kind of intellectual agrophobia and seek firm (if blinkering) conceptual walls behind which to take refuge. It is at this point that the course of interpolation and its beginnings orientated path is shrouded from such theoretical reflections as these. Do the ideas associated with the concept of rebirth present themselves with such compelling power when considered with the focus and seriousness of interpolative investigation that the religionist is forced to accept them (or at least some of them) into his world decision? Can any world decision finally be made? Until the exercise is actually and extensively carried out, it is difficult to know precisely what its outcome will be. To that extent interpolation is a journey into the unknown which can be plotted only so far by a methodological structure. It thus threatens to be somewhat hazardous. It does, however, seem preferable to remaining mesmerized in a single spot, unable to do anything except survey with paralyzed amazement the vast tracts of unexplored terrain whose basic features the descriptive process has mapped out.

It may, at this point in our discussion, be helpful to consider some aspects of Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, a work which not only has had an immense influence on the study of religion in general, but which contains certain elements relevant to the beginnings orientated approach which
I have been advocating. It will be instructive for our purposes to critically examine Otto's book in terms of some of the ideas associated with returning to beginnings. This examination ought not, however, to be taken as a straightforward critique. To present it as such would simply be to criticize Otto for something he did not set out to do, and would thus be fundamentally misguided. But no matter how "misplaced" our "criticisms" may be in terms of his original aims and intentions, such a procedure does serve to shed further light on what interpolation attempts to achieve through its concentrated drive towards beginnings.

In terms of returning to historical beginnings and working forwards in time across different cultures, Otto's study does, in a sense, take note of the importance of establishing the range of phenomena subsumed under the categories he employs. Thus when he says of the numinous, "There is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core", this is evidently the result of an attempt to review the entire historical scope of religion in all its varied manifestations, and see if there has been anything which has been a constant central element from the first primitive stirrings of the religious consciousness to the so called "higher" religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, etc.). Otto holds that the experience of the numinous

first begins to stir in the feeling of 'something uncanny', 'eerie', or 'wierd'. It is this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting point for the entire religious development in history. (113)
However, we might want to criticize his lack of specific examples to show how this "crudely naive and primordial emotional disturbance" (114) develops (rather than changes, i.e., is still fundamentally the same thing) into "more highly developed forms of numinous emotion" (115). Also, especially in his section on the earliest manifestations of the numinous, (Chapter 15) Otto's return to historical beginnings occurs at a somewhat generalized level, and is not accompanied (or undertaken in the guise of) any particularly convincing attempts to consider specific points in the historical span from the point of view of its "indigenous population". In other words, despite his call for "penetrative imaginative sympathy with what passes in the other person's mind" (116), Otto's return to beginnings in terms of persons is somewhat perfunctory.

It is perhaps as a return to beginnings in terms of language that Ottó's work is of particular interest to us, for in The Idea of the Holy we find an attempt to see beneath the verbal garb of religious language and discover the underlying experience which generates it, of which it is an account. This is not something we can read about, it is required that each individual religionist attempts to see it himself, for a thing which is pre-verbal must be evoked, must be experienced directly (though, granted, words can be used to effect such an evocation). The sort of beginning which Otto has reached with his discovery of the numinous might be termed a linguistically non-specific awareness, one which allows us to apply the different
specific conceptualizations offered for it by the various religions in order to see if they all "fit" in the same way (i.e. to discover if they are in fact talking about the same thing). It is such a non-specific awareness which the interpolative religionist is attempting to achieve in his return to linguistic beginnings, for an appreciation of the numinous, of this "unnamed something"(117), allows him to see beyond the linguistically conceptualized expression of belief (which is inevitably limited by its language) to the underlying experience. In this way he will be able to determine, more accurately than would otherwise have been possible, what is compatible and what is incompatible with specific statements of belief.

Once this level has been reached the religionist is then in a position to compare aspects of the various religions of man and to look for similarities and differences between them. Thus in one instance Otto notes a common element underlying Isaiah Chapter 6 and the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita(118), and in another he can confidently assert that

Allah is mere 'numen', and is in fact precisely Yahweh in his pre-mosaic form and upon a larger scale. (119)

From such a standpoint the interpolative religionist may, like Otto, decide that one particular religion expresses this essential experience more powerfully than any other (though it is not easy to see how such a decision could entirely escape the charge of merely expressing personal preference). Indeed from the outlook of a successful return to linguistic beginnings which takes him
to the origins of any particular religious language, he could make definite theological recommendations. Thus Otto suggests that Christian theology must correct its tendency to give the idea of God "a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation" and, following Schleiermacher's lead, should

    deepen the rational meaning of the Christian conception of God by permeating it with its non-rational elements. (121)

To make such a suggestion from any kind of standpoint of authority requires, of course, the existence of a powerful "pre-theological" experience.

Clearly if we reach a point of successfully evoking and experiencing directly the pre-verbal core of religion, the vital numen which, according to Otto, both generates and is generated by such texts as the Old Testament and the Bhagavad Gita, then our study of world certainties is likely to be importantly (if not conclusively) influenced. But how does Otto suggest that we (a) actually reach a pre-verbal religious standpoint, and (b) report our successful progress to, and findings at, such a destination? In the opening pages of The Idea of the Holy he invites his reader (as we have already noted) to

    direct his mind to a moment of deeply felt religious experience as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness (122)

and to note the various characteristics associated with such experience (a feeling of "creature consciousness", a sense of awe, and so on). He then proceeds to examine a variety of religious phenomena and suggests that such characteristics
(which are elucidated progressively) are common and essential to all religious experience. In a sense he is "looking for reflections", directing the reader's attention to his own pool of consciousness and then showing him pictures (often masterpieces) of what he may perhaps see there in an embryonic and inchoate form. Such a process does, of course, leave each individual with the right to say that such "pictures" are not good likenesses of what he sees "inside". It is a situation similar to that where the interpolative religionist attempts to examine a range of world certainties from a self consciously critical point of view.

This examination of Otto's thought in interpolative terms is fast becoming strained. But before abandoning it I want to state briefly one further point of interest arising out of the useful (albeit artificial) perspective which it casts on The Idea of the Holy. This point will form a convenient locus at which to conclude this section and begin the next. It concerns the disparity between the reported nature of his subject matter, i.e. the numinous, and his style of writing about it. This disparity becomes clear in Otto's answer to part (b) of our question above. To elaborate: although adamant that "so primary and elementary a datum in our psychical life"(123) as the numinous is "only definable through itself",(124) Otto's actual method of discussing it seems somewhat at odds with the ideal mode which he describes as suitable for such a unique thing, i.e.
It will be our endeavour to suggest this unnamed something to the reader as far as we may, so that he may himself feel it... (it) cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind. (125)

Now to some extent *The Idea of the Holy* does indeed succeed in such evocative suggestion, but it is very much at a secondary and indirect level, one which relies on describing what or where the numinous is, rather than using language which itself contains or expresses in a directly evocative way the phenomenon under study. In a sense, the mode of presentation of the whole work is at odds with the reported qualities of the things described. (126) Such qualitative jarring between content and communication is not likely to aid our understanding. Since interpolation is designed to get beyond the factual/descriptive approach it is especially important that in communicating the results of his beginnings orientated journeyings the religionist does not resort to a merely descriptive form. Having returned to beginnings he wants to report from there in such a way as to encourage his audience to join him there, rather than hearing about it at second hand. We are back to the vital distinction between knowing and really knowing, and are complaining that the insights of the latter risk being obscured if they are presented in the former's factual/descriptive language. It is our contention that the means by which interpolative enquiries should be reported, find a model more attuned to their nature in a certain type of historical fiction than in the "standard" expressive forms traditionally used in the
study of religions. In our third and final section dealing with interpolation I want thus to consider what light may be shed on it from this somewhat unexpected quarter.

(iv) Interpolation in "The Inheritors"

In her study of the work of William Golding (sub-titled with great appropriateness "the dark fields of discovery"), Virginia Tiger sums up well the overall tone of Golding's fiction when she says:

At one pole in (his) aesthetic continuum allegory exists, and at the other pole myth, whilst fable, in Golding's view apparently sits in the centre of the continuum. (127)

However, although I acknowledge that Golding's work is largely of this nature, and believe it to be successful on all three fronts, it is neither as allegory, myth or fable that I wish to consider his novel *The Inheritors* here. It is rather in terms of its possible role as exemplar for how the interpolative religionist might proceed with and, in particular, present the results of a beginnings orientated inquiry, that I now wish to look at this work. I choose *The Inheritors* because as a zeroed return to beginnings in terms of history, persons and language it is, I think, superbly successful in a very difficult area. In it Golding deals with the confrontation between a small group of Neanderthal men and a larger group of Cro-Magnon men—the first true *homo sapiens*—who, in the course of fleeing from their original homeland as the result of a tribal dispute,
make a temporary stop in one of the Neanderthalers' established haunts. There is thus the added appeal of returning to absolute historical beginnings, for it is generally agreed that in Neanderthal man we find the first sure indication of a consciousness which can be called religious. It is not, then, as a novel that I wish to examine The Inheritors here, but as

a fictional essay in pre-history, based on considerable knowledge of anthropology (which is) seeking to substitute a truer picture of Neanderthal man for one distorted by faulty assumptions.

A fictional essay whose picture of a particular world of religious meaning (in both its mode of presentation and its final appearance) provides further reference points by which we may clarify interpolation.

Golding's chosen point of view, which the reader of this brief but fascinating book must adopt if he is to see anything beyond the most superficial level, is one wholly consonant with the idea of seeing another world of meaning as it appears to its own inhabitants - whilst still somehow maintaining a critical faculty (which is, of course, the central desideratum which interpolation seeks to achieve through its beginnings orientated approach). For in The Inheritors we see from the inside out rather than remaining as merely external observers. But since the process of penetration is mediated directly through a special use of a language with which we are already familiar, rather than through some sort of silent a-linguistic descent
to a non-conceptual level, or an indirect programmatic statement of how to get there, a critical awareness of what is happening must be maintained if we are to be aware of what is going on in the first place. Without that critical awareness, the path to such a vantage point as Golding offers simply remains closed. Our main interest here is in how we are lead to it, our secondary one in what we see when we get there. David Anderson has aptly remarked of The Inheritors that

Golding does not merely describe Neanderthalers from the outside, as an anthropologist would do; he attempts to enter their consciousness, to experience existence as they experience it. (130)

And he suggests that

We respond to his skill by recognizing the recess in our own being where we remember that reality was once unfractured, and our minds fill with echoes of primal innocence and lost Edens. (131)

In other words, we become human ciphers and momentarily view our basic situation in a long forgotten (but still retrievable) key. Likewise, David Lodge has described Golding’s study of pre-history not as a novel about Neanderthal man, or set in the Mousterian era, or as one which seeks to describe a long past type of consciousness, but rather as "an astonishingly sympathetic and moving recreation of Neanderthal man" (132).

But is the picture which Golding presents in this recreative mode a true one? Is it better informed than that presented by, say, Wells in The Grisly Folk (the
specific picture "distorted by faulty assumptions" which Golding wished to correct)? If it is to be of any use as a model for the religionist then clearly Golding's study must be accurate in the details it presents. Although interpolation may seek to go beyond "the facts", presented as such in an abstractly formulated way, by taking us to a level of re-implication where they are presented as embedded in a rich and complex web of dense inter-relationships (the level of "really knowing") the elements of that web must still be basically accurate if it is to serve any useful function. Our first task in this consideration of Golding must therefore be to try to establish the authenticity of the factual background of the book. In doing this we will have to consider both the overall "tone" of the milieu in which Golding places us, and the accuracy of specific moments within that milieu. In the course of this exercise I hope to convey in more detail something of the nature of The Inheritors to the reader unacquainted with this work, and to show further why I think that such a study can profitably be viewed as a model for the interpolative religionist's work.

To begin with, what sets the tone of the whole book is that Golding's Neanderthalers do not display the same intellectual/linguistic virtuosity as that found in homo sapiens. Perhaps the main reason why the book is difficult and successful and relevant to our discussion of interpolation is that much of the "action" is told from this standpoint. Golding strictly refuses to take "shortcuts" which would
enable us to realize much more quickly (though at the expense of "really knowing") what is going on. He does not resort to abstract descriptive statements telling us about this particular situation, but instead conjures up that situation and leads us to a first hand appreciation of it for ourselves. In The Inheritors we approach the Neanderthal world from the point of view of a Neanderthaler (what a Neanderthaler might have been being based on a reconstruction of evidence from paleo-archaeology, a reconstruction the accuracy of whose elements we now wish to examine). Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor sum up well the immense problems of style which Golding incurs by writing in this mode, for trying to express the consciousness of primitive man from his conceptually and linguistically limited point of view involves not only intensification of the sensuous imagination beyond the normal, but also continuous and severe self-denial. He had to deprive himself of all analysis, by himself or his characters, and of most of the possibilities of dialogue. (133)

Of course Golding does allow himself one "compromise" - essential if the book was ever to have been written given his "epistemic choice" (134) of approaching things from the Neanderthaler's viewpoint - namely, that whilst acknowledging the conceptual limitations of this creature's outlook, their inability to put their feelings into words, Golding does use all the resources of our language to convey such a situation. However, he uses such linguistic resources only where "these are exactly descriptive of what the
Neanderthalers see, feel, hear and touch"(135). Thus, for example, when Golding describes Lok (one of the Neanderthalers) seeing a companion cry, we read: "Lok watched the water run out of her eyes. It lingered at the rim of her eye hollows, then fell in great drops on her mouth"(136). But this only states accurately what Lok himself observes, even though it requires words totally beyond him to express it. We are not simply told that "the Neanderthalers had a limited intellectual/linguistic ability" or that "she was crying", but are led to see how an event might have appeared to one who could not express it in terms intelligible to us or understand our description of it. To show how such a technique works in more detail and to see further the sort of intellectual/linguistic scope Golding grants his Neanderthalers, let us consider a longer passage:

The man turned sideways in the bushes and looked at Lok along his shoulder. A stick rose upright and there was a lump of bone in the middle. Lok peered at the stick and the lump of bone and the small eyes in the bone things over the face. Suddenly Lok understood that the man was holding the stick out to him but neither he nor Lok could reach across the river ... The stick began to grow shorter at both ends. Then it shot out to full length again. The dead tree by Lok's ear acquired a voice. "Clop!" his ears twitched and he turned to the tree. By his face there had grown a twig: a twig that smelt of other, and of goose, and of the bitter berries that Lok's stomach told him he must not eat. This twig had a white bone at the end. There were hooks in the bone and sticky brown stuff hung in the crooks. His nose examined this stuff
and did not like it. He smelled along the shaft of the twig. The leaves on the twig were red feathers and reminded him of goose. (137)

Translating into abstract descriptive terms: Lok sees a Cro-Magnon man across the river who shoots a poisoned arrow at him but misses. The "lump of bone" in the middle of the "stick" are the man's knuckles grasping the bow, which, because they are, unlike his own, hairless, appear bone-like to Lok. Similarly, Lok thinks that cheekbones and forehead are "bone things" over the man's head, rather than a natural and integral part of his visage. This very basic conceptual level is, of course, reflected in the "dialogue" between the Neanderthalers themselves. Often communication between them is simply stopped by an impassable barrier of incomprehension when their limited vocabulary fails to evoke a visual image which can be shared. "I do not see this picture", is their stock response to each other to indicate such a situation (138). We have already suggested that the viewpoint which Golding constructs is stylistically appropriate to an interpolative endeavour: both are concerned to let us see things directly as they appear in a different world of (religious) meaning. But is what we see from Golding's carefully constructed viewpoint factually reliable? Has it been built on a firm foundation?

The limited speech ability of Neanderthal man has in fact been well evidenced by the researches of Lieberman, Crelin and Klatt, who have reconstructed the supra-laryngeal tract of a Chapelle-aux-Saint's Neanderthal skull and from
this reconstruction established the range of sounds which such a creature could have produced. They conclude that

Neanderthal man did not have the anatomical pre-requisite for producing the full range of human speech ... His phonetic ability was, however, more advanced than that of present day non-human primates and his brain may have been sufficiently well developed for him to have established a language based on the speech signals at his command. (139)

In developing this research, a comparison of the skulls of Neanderthal man, the new-born and adult human and the Chimpanzee was initiated in order to see more precisely how phonetic ability could be determined by related anatomy. The conclusion reached was that "the Neanderthal vocal tract cannot produce 'a', 'i', or 'u'" (140). This may not seem to be a particularly serious deficiency unless we realize that

Human speech achieves its high information rate by means of an 'encoding' process that is structured in terms of the anatomic and articulatory constraints of speech production ... (and the ability to produce vowels such as 'a', 'i', and 'u') appears to be one of the anatomic factors that makes this encoding process possible. (141)

In view of conclusions of this type it has been suggested that Neanderthal man's extinction may have had something to do with his linguistic/intellectual shortcomings in relation to homo sapiens, who became a competitor for the same ecological niche. Thus Ralph Solecki, for example, suggests that articulate speech may have been the "new weapon"
which Neanderthal man's "upper paleolithic replacement
possessed and used with such effect"^{142}.

Golding's overall style is, I think, compatible with
such conclusions, for the confrontation he presents is one
between a superior conceptual ability and an inferior one.
Of course we could not deduce from the Inheritors
that the supra-laryngeal tract of homo neanderthalensis
incapable of producing the vowel sounds "a", "i", and "u",
but by showing us in a specific and appropriate setting
what such conceptual shortcomings could mean, Golding's
work gives us some degree of insight into what the signifi-
cance of such uniquely designating facts might be, and
how the world might appear to an outlook structured by
them.

On a specific level we can, time and time again,
confirm the technical accuracy underlying the Inheritors.
To take just four examples (of particular interest to the
religionist):

(i) In the death and burial of Mal, the "old man"
of the Neanderthal group, Golding's knowledge of pre-
history is well evidenced on a number of points. Thus
when Mal, aware that in his sickness he has misdirected
the group, says, "Do not open my head and bones. You would
only taste weakness"^{143}, we are reminded of those
archaeological finds of Neanderthal skeletons which suggest
some form of cultic cannibalism. Blanc, for example,
describes one of the Monte Circeo skulls as having
"a careful and symmetric incision in the periphery of the
foramen magnum ... and the consequent artificial production of a sub-circular opening about 10-12 centimetres in diameter" (144). Wendt (145) notes a similar phenomenon in the Chapelle-aux-Saints find. The significance of such intentional mutilation is that it is identical to the one presently produced by head-hunters of Borneo and Melanesia with the object of extracting the brain and eating it for ritual and social purposes. (146)

Such purposes are usually an attempt to benefit from the strength or wisdom or courage of the one who has just died - though to credit Neanderthal man with the conscious knowledge that thought and brain were in some way intimately connected would be unwarranted - thus Mal's reluctance to pass on what he sees as his weakness.

When Mal finally dies, Fa and the old woman "lay him out":

They pushed the great gaunt bones of his knees against his chest, tucked in his feet, lifted his head off the earth and put his two hands under it. (147)

And this is in accordance with archaeological findings that, though by no means always, "Neanderthal skeletons were usually buried in the attitude of sleep" (148). In digging the grave under the hearth which the remaining members of the group still live around, Golding is again "true to life". Thus Solecki notes that "the living abode was not shunned as a burial place by the Neanderthalers" (149), and Levy notes "signs of continued habitation" (150) above excavated graves. Moreover, in digging the grave, Lok
passes through several "layers", several different hearth places and bones from previous generations of Neanderthalers who had occupied the same site. This was a phenomenon also found by Solecki at Shanidar (a cave site in Iraqi Kurdistan) and is evidence of the relatively "stagnant" culture of the Mousterian era\(^{(151)}\). Finally, in having the Neanderthalers bury food and water with Mal, Golding is again quite accurate. And if the "mourners" do not add flowers too, it is doubtless because Solecki's extraordinary discoveries on this count were only made a decade or so after The Inheritors was written.

(ii) Golding continually emphasizes the importance and mystery of fire to the Neanderthalers, and casts the awesome figure of the Old Woman as the keeper and tender of the fire. In their journey from a winter sojourn by the coast to their customary spring habitat inland (another point, incidentally, which Solecki endorses, noting that the Shanidar Neanderthalers "probably made a round of their domain seasonally"\(^{(152)}\)), it is the Old Woman who carries the embers in a hollow ball of clay and rekindles the hearth fire from these carefully tended embers. Here we can cite Oakley's point that the Neanderthalers were fire users rather than fire makers, that they "collected this precious commodity from natural conflagrations and preserved it"\(^{(153)}\). Moreover, Sauer suggests that the duty of keeping the "captured" fire alive was an exclusively female role\(^{(154)}\).

(iii) In his "Notes on the Mentality of Primitive Man", F.M. Bergounioux argues that the world as seen by the first
glimmer of human or pre-human consciousness would have been a place of "cosmomorphism", where everything was "impregnated with humanity ... and inhabited and driven by the same life" (155). Many examples of this sort of animistic attitude occur throughout The Inheritors. The awe inspiring glaciers are referred to as "the Ice Women", and Lok, finding a stone at the Neanderthaler's spring habitat which he had used in the previous year, comments, "the stone is a good stone, it has not gone away" (156). The all pervasive life force, which animates and controls all that they encounter, is referred to as "Oa" (which perhaps reminds us again of Otto's tentative theory that the names of divinities began with, and may sometimes be traced back to, what he termed "original numinous sounds" (157)). Oa is seen as

pushing up the spikes of the bulbs, fattening the grubs, reeking the smells out of the earth, bulging the fat buds out of every crevice and bough. (158)

And before his sickness and death (before Oa took him "back into her belly"), Mal, the old man, recounts the start of some sort of creation story:

There was the great Oa. She brought forth the earth from her belly. She gave suck. The earth brought forth woman and the woman brought forth the first man out of her belly. (159)

The numinous and over-aweing power of the Oa, as opposed to its benevolent fecundity, is superbly illustrated when Lok accompanies Fa to the sanctuary in the glacier, to make an offering for Mal, and is overcome by terror (160).
(iv) Golding's treatment of the "New People", the Cro-Magnon men, the first true *homo sapiens*, is also convincing. A vivid example of this occurs when one of the men (dubbed "Pine-Tree" by Lok in his own thoughts) "sacrifices" a finger to the tribe's "totem", the stag, which is represented both by a painting (what Lok calls "the flat stag") and by a man "disguised" in antlers and skin (what Lok calls "the standing stag" - a figure reminiscent of the famous sorcerer in the Trois Frères cave in France). We see the incident through Lok's eyes:

One of Pine-Tree's fingers was stretched along this branch. Tuami stood opposite him. He took hold of the other end of the wood. Pine-Tree was talking to the standing stag and the flat stag. They could hear that he was pleading. Tuami raised his right hand in the air. The stag blared. Tuami struck hard and there was now a glistening stone biting into the wood. Pine-Tree stood still for a moment or two. Then he removed his hand carefully from the polished wood and a finger remained on the branch. He turned away and came to sit with the others. His face was more like bone than it had been before, and he moved very slowly and with a stagger. (161)

Now let us turn to a passage from Giedion's excellent work on the beginnings of art where he describes the hand imprints (usually outlined in black or red, i.e. in charcoal or ochre) found at numerous paleolithic sites around the world. In particular, he discusses the cavern at Gargas in the French Pyrenees where many such "silhouettes" are found:
Most of these hands have been mutilated. In some only the three middle fingers remain, in others only the middle finger itself remains. (162)

Likening this to the ritual self mutilation ceremonies of certain primitive peoples still existing today, Giedion concludes:

this self mutilation betokens a sacrifice to ward off some evil ... (it) has always signified a request for protection. (163)

To the twentieth century reader seeing through Lok's eyes, we realize that what he is witnessing is a propitiatory sacrifice to the tribal totem against himself, for of course to Golding's Cro-Magnon men, the Neanderthalers appear as "devils" (164).

Further examples of Golding's faithfulness to the facts could be given beyond those noted above (165), but accurate though it may be, The Inheritors still could not be relied on as a source-book of information about early man. So what does Golding's study have which the standard text book type approach (on which, after all, it is based) does not? Why should we advocate The Inheritors, rather than, say, Maringer's painstakingly "documented" The Gods of Prehistoric Man, as a model of the sort of approach which the interpolative religionist should adopt, for surely we learn much more about this era of religious history from the latter sort of work? Two points must be stressed in reply here:

Firstly, I am not suggesting that the religionist must choose between a Golding or Maringer style of approach, but
rather that, having reached the stage of informedness accorded by straightforwardly factual/descriptive works of the latter type, he should then proceed to try to give life to his data by attempting (via the former type of approach) to mould them into as complete a replica as possible of the thought-world from which they originally came. Without being factually informed the second exercise would neither be possible nor necessary. It is the step taken by the mesmerized religionist, the multi-religiously informed man, not by the uninformed (or mono-informed) individual. Interpolation is a new beginning for those who have already started, its rationale is not geared to the novice. It is a child of the third stage of methodological self consciousness in Religious Studies, not of the first.

Secondly, I am not recommending the Golding-style approach because of any new information it provides us with, but rather because of the way in which it provides a new depth and perspective from which to understand what we know already\(^{(166)}\). Evaluated in terms of introducing hitherto unknown discretely specifiable facts, The Inheritors would score little. Evaluated in terms of seeing what we know in some sort of integrated context and thus seeing more fully what it means (or in terms of providing a model for how to see what we know in context) its value is immense. Interpolation is concerned with using the elements of basic factual informedness to provide a foundation upon which some sort of total milieu may be built up, not in presenting them in a detached précis describing what the main features
of that milieu appear to be to an external observer. In building up and entering a milieu, a new world of meaning, we suggest that the religionist gains access to a level of "really knowing", as opposed simply to straightforward knowing, with a consequent increase of insight into his subject matter. The main characteristic of writing which provides direct first person entry into (and re-experiencing of) new worlds of meaning, is that of evocation or discovery rather than plain statement. This aspect of Golding's work is certainly something on which he is quite specific - "I don't simply describe something," he says, "I lead the reader round to discovering it anew" (167), and that the mode of The Inheritors is one of successful evocation, exploration and discovery, is something which I think most of his readers would also recognize - at any rate most commentators do (although sometimes they are at odds over precisely what is discovered). Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor, for example, describe reading the book as

a reaching out through the imagination into the unknown ... in (its) dialogue we reach back through history to experience for ourselves how language must have developed in time ... The response (Golding) seeks is essentially the imaginative one of knowing what it is like to look through eyes empty of thought and as innocent of judgment as of hatred. (168)

Likewise, Josipovici describes reading The Inheritors with a "sense of exploration" and thinks that its extraordinary achievement is
that it manages to convey to us precisely ... what it feels like to exist in a state of innocence. (169)

In order to map the different world of these early hominids, to come to a vantage point from which their outlook (including their religious outlook) may be seen in context and in action, Golding "begins his imagination from the inside out" (170) and then constructs (via the text of The Inheritors) a verbal pathway which leads the reader back inside again. This is a direction of thought which the interpolative religionist must also seek to follow, both in pursuing (and in presenting the results of) his beginnings orientated investigations.

In The Phenomenon of Religion, as we have already seen, Ninian Smart suggests that a model for the phenomenological method of studying religions may be found in reading and assimilating a novel. To sum up this section: I would suggest that in interpolation the religionist is called upon to emulate not so much the novel reader as the novel writer of a particular sort. Namely, that sort where the milieu in question is reconstructed, in the way in which Golding suggests, from the inside out (an exercise demanding a comprehensive return to beginnings) and where the insights derived from such an exercise are presented in such a way as to demand that the reader must also return to these beginnings if his subsequent reading of the text is to make any sense. Interpolation, in other words, advocates a mode of communication more compatible with both the nature of its subject matter and of its method of approach than that which
straightforward description can provide.

(v) Some Problems Facing Interpolation

In Chapter Three, when we first tentatively outlined the notion of interpolation as a means of gaining imaginative entry to other worlds of religious meaning, several objections to the very idea of such a mode of inquiry were immediately voiced (what we called "first order considerations"). Now, our elucidation of this idea complete, some more detailed and precisely aimed objections occur—in fact over the past forty or fifty pages I have been aware of their increasing argumentative build up against interpolation, but have deliberately postponed a consideration of them until that elucidation was finished. We must now, therefore, turn our attention to these second order considerations, and also attempt to summarize our findings as regards an answer to the first of the religionist's three primary questions (namely, that which asks how he is to go about establishing which, if any, of the religious world certainties he is confronted with may be accepted as true), for at the end of this chapter we come to a change of direction in our deliberations, as we turn our attention to his second basic query—concerning the origin of the religious diversity whose alternatives of world decision threaten him with mesmerization in the first place.

There are doubtless many second order considerations which have occurred to the reader in the course of this
elucidation of interpolation (171). However, to consider them here one by one would not serve any great purpose save that of a rather stultifying meticulousness. I want, rather, to consider them en masse and unindividuated beneath the rubric of two fundamental objections.

The first and most obvious objection to interpolation is simply that it would not work. This objection provides us with the necessary vantage point from which both to look back along the course of our attempt to answer the religionist's first primary question and to look ahead to the next stage in his endeavours. We will turn our attention to this objection in a moment.

The second main objection (one which I endorse, but query its status as an "objection") points out that in seeking to enter different worlds of religious meaning in the way in which it does, interpolation blurs the line between study and belief, and in so doing gives rise to a situation where religion and the study of religion seem to overlap. This "objection" (more a consequence which simply indicates how interpolation embodies a conclusion of the third phase of methodological self consciousness in Religious Studies, i.e. that both empathy and objectivity must characterize the religionist's inquiries) takes us on to Chapter Six and will be discussed there. It provides an intellectual vantage point from which to view the third of the religionist's primary questions (the one which asks to what extent religions are accessible to study).
A beginnings orientated approach maps out what I take to be the ideal course of events for the mesmerized religionist's work to follow. It suggests an investigative endeavour which avoids the sort of intellectually and spiritually stifling situation envisaged in the hall of mirrors, by pursuing a course of vivid interpolation and decision concerning religious systems of world certainty. And yet somehow this ideal course of events does not seem likely to lead to its intended conclusion, i.e. to the confident making of an eventual religious world decision (or rather a world decision concerning religions, which can, of course, include the rejection of them as providing any acceptable system of world certainty). For, in an important sense, religion seems impervious to the normal processes of intellectual investigation, there seems to be some impenetrable core which reflects back all our efforts to reach it and leaves us at the end of the day confronting phenomena about which there seems to be something disturbingly "special" and mysterious. The religionist may, for example, reconstruct the thought-world of the Hindu with great diligence and sensitivity, and will undoubtedly enlarge his understanding of this tradition by so doing, but what use (in terms of arriving at decisions about world certainty) is such a reconstruction, if a central element in it is Brahman, that which (according to such a centrally important figure as Shankara) is wholly beyond words? Can interpolation - for all its direct suggestion/evocation and
careful re-implicating elaboration of a subtle and complex milieu - bring him sufficiently close to such an elusive thing for him to see it clearly enough to evaluate it, to reach some conclusion concerning it? And if it cannot, then of what use (considering Brahman's pervasive centrality in this milieu) has this process been? Seen in this light, interpolation does not provide an "open sesame" to all the problems traditionally associated with the study of religion and lead automatically to complete understanding. On the contrary, it seems to bring those problems into sharper relief, making the difficulties of reaching any satisfactory conclusion to the religious quest ever more apparent. It is a procedure which seems fated to take us time and time again towards a disturbing encounter with those features which seem to characterize the holy as "wholly other" in all its manifestations. Its application seems likely to lead the religionist not to world certainty but to a disturbing confrontation with the "mysterious", which appears to run like a live wire throughout this whole area of human experience.

That some such mode of investigation as that offered by interpolation is needed, is, I think, undisputed (172). The question is: how far can such a procedure take us? It is one thing to suggest (as I do) that it is the best possible procedure for the mesmerized religionist to follow given the hall of mirrors situation. It is quite another to suggest that it can successfully penetrate into the very
heart of religion which has, prior to its coming (from the point of view of rational investigation) been swathed in impenetrable "darkness" of one sort or another. At present the matter stands thus: in answer to his question of how to approach the diversity of religious world-views facing him (in terms of establishing a world decision), we suggest that the religionist should adopt a beginnings orientated approach to the data which has already perplexed him. Just how far that approach can take him is, however, uncertain - given the ineffable/mysterious core of religious phenomena - and any final assessment must be based on the actual application of interpolative procedures, rather than on a theoretical discussion of them. Nonetheless, it is our hope that in the next chapter further light will be shed on this matter of how far interpolation can take us, when, in the course of attempting to answer the religionist's second primary question (why is there religious diversity in the first place, why is there a range of world certainties rather than one?) the focus becomes firmly set on ineffability.
Words strain
Crack and sometimes break under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

T.S. Eliot:  **Burnt Norton**

To label something ineffable in an unqualified way
is to shirk the job of making explicit the ways in
which it **can** be talked about.

William Alston:  **Ineffability**
(i) Confronting the Many: Diversity in the Hall of Mirrors

We have suggested that even by employing a procedure such as that advocated by interpolation, the religionist may well not arrive at a resolution of the quest for world certainty in which his study seems necessarily to involve him. For even the most penetrative beginnings orientated inquiry inevitably encounters a wall of impenetrable silence which seems to encircle (or constitute) the heart of all religious phenomena. Indeed by following such a procedure he seems especially likely to be brought to points of vivid contact with this central cord of (for want of a more precise word) mystery, which, so we have suggested, runs unbroken throughout the religious realm. Methodological guidelines and theoretical reflections of the sort with which this study is concerned can only plot a course as far as an encounter with this apparent barrier, they cannot guarantee entry beyond its perplexing confines nor predict, in more than barest outline, what the possible outcomes of such an entry might be. It is, of course, our hope that a rigorous interpolative approach will achieve sufficient momentum of the right sort so as to successfully carry the religionist to the very heart of his subject without injury being sustained on either side, but the question of how far interpolation can take us is one which must be answered from a standpoint of extensive application of it, not in purely theoretical terms.

This, very briefly, is our present position regarding the first of the religionist's primary questions. Interpol-
ation is the action we have recommended him to take in the face of a situation of religious diversity, where his multi-religious informedness lays a dazzling range of possible world certainties before his native sense of world uncertainty (thereby increasing it). We have put him on a path designed to break the mesmerization which a straightforwardly factual/descriptive awareness of such a state of affairs threatens. It is a path which may lead to a dead-end (in the form of a conclusion that, beyond such a descriptive level, religions are inaccessible to the processes of investigation and evaluation), but at the same time it may offer the sort of cognitive standpoint regarding religion whose depth and richness is summed up in the notion of "really knowing". In terms of a straightforward advance, our progress now seems halted. For which of these destinations will actually be found at the end of the beginnings orientated interpolative trail is a matter which must be decided by travellers who make that journey, not by those whose business it has been to highlight the unsatisfactoriness of staying at home. Their deliberations give only initial guidance to the desire to find somewhere better to live, they cannot be relied upon for a definitive picture of the destination which may be reached by following their suggested route. In the meantime, then, we will leave the religionist in the position summarized above, and instead of attempting to forge ahead by applying our own principles or trying to see beyond their methodological horizons (the
first exercise would require a thesis of its own, the second takes us into the realms of groundless speculation) we will now turn our attention to the second of the religionist's primary queries. In dealing with this, more light will in fact be cast on the first one also, for both seem to intersect (as indeed does the third) in a consideration of that ineffable/mysterious thread to whose religious centrality we have already pointed. So, although we may now be initiating a slight shift in strategy, our targets remain unchanged. In following the three primary questions of the religionist we are not engaging in three separate inquiries whose concerns (like parallel lines) intersect only at infinity, but with a single woven braid consisting of three closely inter-related components.

It is important to realize that even supposing we were able at this stage to fully answer the first of the religionist's primary questions, the second would still pose its query with undiminished force. For even supposing that a beginnings orientated approach could somehow take him through the difficulties which seem to define the limits of any investigation in this field, and lead him to make a confident religious world decision (which may of course take the form of concluding that in fact no religion provides an acceptable world certainty), the hall of mirrors would still pose a problem. Because, in an important sense, it not only presents a perplexing and problematic situation, but also constitutes such a situation itself, simply by virtue of its existence. Not only is the religionist faced
with a knowledge of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Islamic outlooks, and a consequent obligation to arrive at some sort of conclusion about them in terms of world decision, but he is also faced with the question of why there is such a diversity of religious outlooks in the first place. From asking what to do about the numerous possible religious world certainties which are available, the inquiry is now directed to the question of why such a diversity occurs in the first place. Having already considered how the religionist might approach the problems presented by his knowledge of the variety of religious outlooks, we now turn our attention to the possible reasons for the existence of that variety itself\(^{(3)}\).

At this stage, given our repeated reference to it, we ought perhaps to re-state and refine the hall of mirrors analogy before going any further. The simple model used so far, where the religionist is pictured as confronting the diverse images of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam etc., is inadequate for the complexity of the situation and must be developed if it is to be taken as accurately illustrative of the religionist's dilemma. For the intellectual/spiritual mesmerization with which he is threatened stems not just from a single, but from a threefold source of reflective multiplicity:

Firstly, there is the straightforward inter-religious diversity on which the original model concentrated, i.e. the existence of the viewpoints of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and all the other various religions.
Secondly, there is intra-religious diversity. For the various religions do not simply present a series of single unitary reflections which would enable us to say without qualification, "That (referring to some precisely specifiable collection of phenomena) is Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity or whatever". Rather, within each of these broad (and by no means clear or necessarily exclusive) categories, there are successively smaller divisions (Vedantic, Tantric; Hinayana, Mahayana; Catholic, Protestant) until eventually we come down to the individual and find a person to person variation in belief. Cantwell Smith has pointed to this "further fact (i.e. further to inter-religious diversity) of diversity within each tradition"\(^4\). Every faith, he says, "appears in a variety of forms"\(^5\) to the extent that "it is no longer possible to have a religious faith without selecting its form"\(^6\). Focusing on Christianity in particular, he suggests that the Christian faces a situation - within his own faith - of "open variety"\(^7\) or "optional alternatives"\(^8\) in which he must come to a decision regarding what form his commitment is to take, rather than assuming that this is something which is automatically settled simply by his being a Christian in the first place. Under the general heading of "Christian" (and the same goes for Hindu, Buddhist, Moslem, etc.) there are many possible positions which can be taken.

Thirdly, there is what we might call meta-religious diversity. That is, within the study of religion there are diverse points of view. Both inter meta-religious
diversity and *intra* meta-religious diversity occur (i.e. the different "pictures" of philosophical, anthropological, sociological etc. approaches to religion and the different pictures offered within these various disciplinary strands, for example, the linguistic, existentialist, phenomenological and idealist pictures within philosophy of religion). Here too we encounter progressively smaller divisions until we come down to particular scholars and find again a variation in outlook at an individual level. Thus Paton comments:

> for any serious view of religion it is always possible to find another, equally serious, which seems to be its precise opposite. It looks as if the internal conflicts for which religion is unhappily notorious were mirrored in our dispassionate thinking about it. (9)

And, focusing on the philosophy of religion in particular, D.Z. Phillips notes that the philosophers "vary in their accounts of religious belief as much as the believers themselves" (10). Waardenburg too draws our attention to this "parallism" between Religious Studies and religion, which is evidenced by the fact that when we survey this field

> we are struck not only by the great number of religious interpretations of reality - that is to say by the plurality of religions, but also by the great number of scholarly interpretations of reality - that is to say by the plurality of scholarly approaches. (11)

> Why is there a hall of mirrors rather than a single one, and why do each of its constituent mirrors present such a
myriad of reflections rather than offering a unified image? The religionist, whose discipline includes reflections from all these sources within its bounds of relevance, must not only find some way through such a potentially confusing area, but must also try to discover the roots of its immense plurality.

I am assuming that there is something intrinsic to man's religious experience such as to have occasioned this myriad of different attempts to profess, record or analyse it, attempts which trail out massively behind it like streamers behind a kite, not only attracting and perplexing the observer's inquiring eye but also altering the course (by constituting the content) of belief. It is the purpose of this chapter to try to identify what this "something" might be and to determine what possible effects it might have on the study of religion (12). Now of course it could be argued that I am making an unwarranted assumption here and am simply creating a false problem by ignoring obvious explanations for religious diversity, explanations which would safely "defuse" it (without reference to any intrinsic element) long before it reached the level of critical perplexity which I have suggested it displays. Before answering this objection, however, (or as a first stage in answering it) I want to clarify my position further by explaining at greater length some of its key elements.

To begin with, let me explain what I mean by "religious experience". I use this somewhat contentious phrase simply to indicate that which lies at the root of every religious
phenomenon and, so to speak, gives it life. How, for example, could worship come into being if the worshipper had neither what was taken to be (i) direct awareness of some deity at the moment of worship, nor (ii) memory of such an awareness in his past, nor (iii) knowledge of such an awareness having occurred for others? Without reference to religious experience at some level — whether it be immediate, remembered or traditional — the act of worship could have no sense. Likewise for a place of worship, for prayer, meditation, sacrifice, or any of the diverse sacraments which the religions of man variously embody, without an eventual experiential basis all are ungrounded. Without someone having had what is taken to be (correctly or incorrectly) direct awareness of the sacred, no religious phenomena could make any (religious) sense. As Zaehner has put it,

> if religion is to have any meaning at all, there must be an element of experience in it: there must be some apperception of what, for lack of a more precise word, we must still call the divine, the holy, or ... the numinous. (13)

Investigation of any religious phenomenon will, I am suggesting, eventually come to its original causitive foundation in some sort of experiential root. This much is, I think, obvious. Continuing in terms of the utmost generality, such experience is usually held to consist of an encounter with, or an awareness of, some state or entity considered to be holy which qualifies all other experience as secondary, yet which invests human existence
as a whole with some sort of ultimate meaning. Whether or not religious experience does in fact consist of the elements in terms of which it is commonly described - God, Brahman, Nirvana, Sunyata etc. - is not an issue that I wish to approach directly. Rather I want to focus attention not on these terms but on two characteristic and inter-related features generally associated with descriptions of them, namely, ineffability and "non-finality", for these seem to be the two constitutive elements of that perplexing diversity which forms the hall of mirrors into which the study of religions seems inevitably to lead.

An examination of the logical nature of these two characteristics will lead us to important conclusions regarding the identities given to religious experience - God, Brahman, etc. - and to considerations as to how the study of such identities may best proceed.

Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, the writers of the Vedas - all provide examples of individuals who have had religious experiences of such power and vitality as to leave each generation since them struggling to find an adequate way of dealing with them. Their "conclusions" here have been many and various, and constitute the main part of some of the major world religions. But none have been sufficient to fully satisfy their descendents and leave them theologically replete and silent: the religious experiences of the great holy men of history, at once both ineffable and generative of continual (but non-final) accounts, seem to provide an inexhaustible quarry of possible
interpretations. Such experience, no matter how densely ringed with edifice, art or doctrine of a quite tangible sort, recedes (in terms of meaning) to a central and apparently irreducible opaqueness. Within that opaqueness the heart of religion seems to beat in an endlessly recurring rhythm of systolic ineffability and diastolic attempts at expression, its pulse generating that situation of diversity with which we are concerned.

But although we look to them for its classic and defining instances and for the provision of some sort of specialized vocabulary or set of reference points, such experience is by no means confined to these key figures of our major religious traditions. Although much religious experience doubtless is traditional, if it were all so it would soon fade away\(^{(14)}\). The religious experience of the ordinary man may leave little imprint on recorded history (whether because of its lesser power or his reticence or inarticulateness in dealing with it), but its occurrence may well blaze its way indelibly, if privately, across the path of his own biography, and it certainly serves to re-invest traditional accounts of such experience with an aliveness they could not have were it located solely in an unrenewable culturally remembered past.

I hope that the above paragraphs have been successful in giving the reader some idea of what I mean by "religious experience". The next step in this process of self exegesis is one which insists that I am not attempting any evaluatively
simplistic separation of such experience and interpretations of it. In talking of an experiential root or ground underlying all religious phenomena and in pointing to the existence of interpretative streamers trailing out behind the kite of religious experience, this might well be the impression given. However, I do not want to suggest that there is some essential core, "religion", "the thing itself", "the pure experience", which we must try to separate from all interpretations of it. Such an exercise would, I think, be quite misguided, for within any religious system, far from dealing with a fixed and static collection of clearly authoritative original experiences (whether these are immediate, remembered or traditional) which have somehow become overlaid with obscuring accretions of non-authoritative interpretation, we are concerned with continuing (and usually enlightening) attempts to describe and analyse the content of a limited number of highly valued, and apparently varied, but persistently perplexing historical theophanies(15) which are being supplemented all the time by similar presently felt individual experiences(16). To refine our analogy: the streamers do not "trail out behind", but form an integral expressive part of religion. They are not merely useless decorative appendages obscuring some vital body which we may snip off without consequence, any more than we could snip off a bird's wings and still hope to discover "the bird itself". Rather, they should be seen as intellectual-spiritual navigation devices constructed
and used variously by a particular individual or society to plot a course through their experience of the sacred. As devices which have influenced the height and speed of flight of the whole religious vehicle across the evaluative space of that individual's or generation's consciousness, they constitute en masse the history of religion and cannot as such be regarded as secondary or in any sense peripheral. The question I am interested in here is what the nature of an experience (or series of continuing experiences) can be, such that it displays this kind of history, which involves not only sustaining as relevant an immense volume of suggested accounts of its nature, but also, at the same time, remaining unexhausted by them and so being continually generative of fresh attempts at more adequate apprehension and expression (17). I am not seeking to divorce experience from interpretation, but am looking for a logical beginning which can reasonably account for what we might call the non-finality and continued proliferation of accounts of religious experience, for the sort of situation which can lead Toynbee, for example, to attempt a description of the holy whilst at the same time maintaining an "undiminished awareness that every description always fails" (18), or which can lead to Eliade's conclusion that "every religious expression is ... only a mutilation of plenary experience" (19), a failed attempt (which must therefore be repeated) to net the sacred in words, symbol, ritual etc. Why, firstly, is it apparently impossible to give a conclusive account of religious
experience? Moreover, why (secondly) do the repeated attempts which are made to provide such an account (sometimes in the full knowledge of their own inadequacy) tend to be retained by the religious tradition out of which they stemmed - rather than being rejected as unsatisfactory? And why, thirdly, does the area of experience in question continue to generate fresh attempts to encompass it, given the history of "failure" of all previous attempts?\(^{(20)}\)

My position thus stated in more detail, it is now time to re-consider the initial objection to it. This objection is basically a challenge to the legitimacy of assuming, either that the source of religious diversity may be located in some intrinsic element of religious experience which is uniquely generative yet perpetually non-exhaustible, or that the diversity it gives rise to is in fact problematic. It suggests instead that the origins of such diversity lie not in any elusive and perplexing internal element, but in unproblematic external factors, and that, as such, it need not thus be seen as constituting any particular difficulties, nor be considered as unique to religion. Such an objection might proceed, firstly, by locating various specifiable psychological, sociological, economic, geographical, etc. factors and showing how religion varied according to their presence or absence, and, secondly, by identifying analogous but more everyday situations in which what I have described as non-finality and continual proliferation occur, but in a wholly unproblematic way.
I do not wish to deny that external factors affect religious phenomena such that in some cases what might otherwise have been an identical religiousness is rendered different by the influence of non-religious elements. Psychological and sociological studies are full of well researched examples of how various conditions (age, sex, guilt, fear, wealth, etc.) influence religious outlook(21), and I think it is clear that at least some of the diversity which the religionist encounters can be explained away in this straightforward manner. However, I do not think that such commonsense relativism can render religious diversity into a wholly unproblematic issue in which we have identified all the relevant causes.

Let me stress again that I am specifically concerned with the diversity of religious world certainties, i.e. those aspects of religion which are concerned with the human situation as such, regardless of any variable particularities overlying it which act to pinpoint specific time, place and person(22). Experience of the basic human situation remains uniform, despite variations in terms of personality, culture, time, etc., and this fundamental constancy denies the efficacy of appeal to differences in setting, either as a (total) explanation for differences in the accounts given of this situation as a whole, or (as we saw earlier) as an adequate reason for ignoring the need to arrive at a decision concerning these different world certainties. In an interesting comparison of the art forms of two milieux where vastly different psycho-cultural
influences have been at work, Marcus B. Hester notes that although "Chinese and Egyptian artists obviously saw the world differently in a metaphysical sense" (23), he sees not the slightest evidence in their paintings and sculpture that they literally saw the world in the radically different ways they painted. (24)

Given this kind of similarity in basic perception (our location in "the same house"), what can account for our differences in metaphysical outlook (our location in "different worlds")? To simply point to diversity of setting as a total explanation for diversity of outlook here, is to ignore this fundamental and irreducible initial unity upon which all settings have their common foundation. From a pack of cards we can be dealt many different hands, but to look solely to the differences in these individual hands for a complete explanation of the different ways in which the players view the pack as a whole, seems to demand that in formulating their outlooks they take account only of the face value of each card, not of the cards themselves. Likewise, to try to account for differences in world outlook solely in terms of differences in individual life-setting, would seem to demand a similar blindness or impossible bisection, with the "players" here basing their accounts only on the somewhat superficial level of means of livelihood, income, geographical location, etc. whilst totally ignoring the underlying fabric of finitude, suffering and desire, on which unchanging substructure such things are variously woven. As we noted earlier, Virginia Woolf once observed
that:

The strange thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to everyone for hundreds of years, no one has left an adequate account of it. (25)

In the same sense, so I am suggesting, the interesting thing about religious world certainties is that although the nature of the situation to which they are addressed (and from which they arise) has remained constant for millenia, such originative experience as these certainties stem from has nonetheless issued in no single clear-cut picture, but rather has given rise to several continual, and apparently separate, streams of interpretative attempts to apprehend its elusive vision. There are certainties rather than a single certainty. Such diversity does not seem adequately accounted for solely in terms of external variation. Although some of the immense variety of man's religiousness is of course a result of psycho-cultural diversity, it would appear that something in the experience itself is such as to demand the continual interpretative proliferation found (and to account for the multi-dimensional diversity which the religionist encounters in the hall of mirrors). So far we have only analysed the diversity found in (indeed constitutive of) the hall of mirrors to the extent of pointing to that ineffable/non-final pulse which seems to emanate from all accounts of religious experience, thereby creating a circular rhythm of statement, "retraction" (i.e. qualification as non-final) and retention which acts to build up a corpus of diverse variations on a theme, none
of which seem to state it in a wholly satisfactory way. Yet, at the same time, this unsatisfactoriness is not such as to call for their expulsion from the corpus, rather they are retained as part of the ongoing (and in some fundamental sense unfinished and incomplete) rhythm. The obvious question now is: what sort of experience lies beneath claims of ineffability so as to warrant this claim being made in the first place. For, as we will soon discover, "ineffable" is a somewhat unusual and problematic word.

Given both the extent of their diversity and the nature of the locus from which they arise (and towards explaining/evaluating which they are addressed), I do not think that external factors alone can account for the multiplicity of reflections encountered by the student of religions. Such factors may successfully "eliminate" some facets of the religious polygon, and it remains an important part of Religious Studies to try to establish the extent to which such explanations may be applied, but I would argue that a sufficiently high degree of residual variation will always remain to point to some internal generative element and to prevent religious expression being rounded off to a single uniform circle by the identification of non-religious pressures which are held to be solely causative of those various different facets. Even were all these pressures to be neutralized (which to some extent is what the focus on a diversity of religious world certainties tends towards), the separate streams of religious thought would not merge and stop, coalescing
into one pool which offered the observer a single reflection, rather they would continue to flow unabated (though possibly closer together - perhaps in some cases to the extent of merger) and thus still offer a variety of images. Obviously many different factors are at work in creating inter-, intra-, and meta-religious diversity, and it would simply be both a blindness and an exaggeration to insist that every form stemmed from a single internal causitive force. In this inquiry, however, whilst conceding that a part is played by external factors, I want nonetheless to focus on the internal nature of religious experience as regards this multiplying effect.

The challenge to the legitimacy of locating a central cause of diversity in some uniquely mysterious element intrinsic to religious experience and in seeing that diversity as problematic, cannot, however, be regarded as being satisfactorily answered until we consider two further aspects of it, namely:

(i) The point of view which suggests that the interpretation and re-interpretation of religious experience, which generates so much of the diversity encountered by the religionist, seems to be demanded simply by the contrast between our religious and non-religious knowledge of the world. (Because when advances are made in the latter realm, the former must be revised so as to be "brought into line"). This argument provides a good place from which to begin in earnest our inquiries into the
second of the religionist's primary questions, for in answering it we will be able to move in easy stages towards a conclusion regarding the source of religious diversity. Before starting out on this endeavour, however, I want to reply briefly to the second argument offered here, namely: (ii) The point of view which suggests that other verbally elusive aspects of our experience display an identical pattern of statement, retraction (or statement plus an inbuilt awareness of its own inadequacy) and retention as does religious experience, but with them the diversity thus engendered is non-problematic.

(ii) Religious and Non-Religious Diversity

In seeking to describe religious experience exactly the same process is used as in accounts of the non-religious aspects of experience. Our terms of reference will not, of course, be the same, but the method of "fit" will. The real difference lies in the fact that whereas in the case of describing, say, a Goshawk, we can assume that something like, "it's a bird of prey rather like a large Sparrowhawk", will "hold" with reasonable firmness, with religious experience there is, in the end, no such guarantee of decisive permanence or finality of comparison. In religious discourse all the offered comparisons seem to break down much sooner than in the case of everyday items, they will not take the same intellectual weight, and sooner or later collapse beneath our feet if we attempt to use them as stepping stones leading directly to complete
understanding. It is as if each of the offered elucidating comparisons carried its own in-built self-destruct mechanism ready to be sparked off by any over ambitious or over literal understanding of it, so that confronted by such a reaction (which might, for instance, seek to establish a final exhaustive statement of some religious world certainty, or some element in it) the description in question would simply dissolve back into the problematic experiential nexus from which it arose, leaving us continually on the logical razor edge drawn between seeking new and more adequate interpretations or simply rejecting as meaningless (because indescribable) such things as they claim to be trying to describe. Such accounts of religious experience as are arrived at seem intrinsically provisional and partial, their permanence and completeness always challenged by some resistant and mysterious element which appears to be an irreducible part of the phenomenon/phenomena with which they claim to be in contact. A good example of the puzzlement which can result from the fact that few, if any, of the descriptive attributes given in accounts of the holy can be understood in any normally precise sense, occurs in the Skanda Purana when the writer considers the nature of Shiva, that most clearly ambivalent of all the Hindu deities:

He is not primarily an ascetic, for how can an ascetic bear weapons as he does? And he cannot be counted among householders, for he lives in a burning ground. He is not a brahmacarin, since he is married, and how could he be a forest dweller since he is deluded with
pride in his supreme Lordship?
He belongs to none of the four
classes, and he is neither male
or female. And he certainly
cannot be a eunuch, for his
linga is an object of worship. (26)

None of the ordinary social or sexual categories seem to constitute an exact fit, thus when such words as "ascetic", "erotic", "male", "female", "he", etc. are used of Shiva, they simply cannot be understood in a routinely descriptive sense. Religious experience seems simply to have what we might call a lower threshold of comparative tolerance than those phenomena of more day to day familiarity (27).

Accompanying this low tolerance to any kind of precise comparison or elucidatory analogue is, as we have seen, a retention of almost all past interpretations as still in some way valid and of more than just historical interest. There seems to be a definite reluctance either to unreservedly accept as wholly accurate and reliable, or to conclusively reject as wholly inaccurate and misleading, any account of religious experience (28). Almost all descriptions of the holy seem fated to be both inadequate enough to ensure successors to them (and/or re-interpretations of them) and authoritative enough to ensure their continued presence in the tradition. What men used to think about the shape of the physical globe has become irrelevant. What men used to think about god, or at least what they used to say about god (29), is, by and large, still consulted as theologically interesting. To generalize: whereas non-religious thought seems to shed its history as readily as a snake sheds its skin, religious
thought seems to carry its about as permanently as a tortoise carries its shell, with continued accretions perpetually adding to its thickness and impenetrability. The mass of analyses and descriptions which non-religious thought has offered about the many objects of its varied concern exists largely in the past, the diversity/proliferation is an historical rather than a present one. Putting this in another metaphor: religious thought, characterized by a retention and regeneration of descriptions around a single locus, could be seen as a continual breaking and re-forming of waves against a huge and apparently unerodeable headland, whereas non-religious thought seems more like a river (sometimes fast flowing, sometimes stagnant) moving forwards at varying speeds over new ground and leaving the distance covered behind it. There is a clear difference between formulating accounts of things such as tables, chairs, trees, Goshawks etc. and formulating accounts of religious experience. A sense of conclusiveness, of satisfactory elucidation, attends the former endeavour but not the latter. Non-religious thinking as a whole seems simply to encounter an openness to description and understanding among the objects of its diverse interest which is just not found in the religious sphere (though of course such an openness does not necessarily betoken any easiness).

It may seem plausible enough to suggest that a very low comparative threshold (together with a retention of a large percentage of past interpretations and a perpetual generation of new expressive attempts) provides a basic,
perhaps identifying, characterization of accounts of religious experience which we do not find repeated in accounts concerned with non-religious phenomena, providing, that is, our examples from the non-religious realm are easily observable concrete objects. Thus the difference between describing Brahman and describing, say, a chair is obvious - the former will score low in terms of comparative tolerance and high in terms of retention and repetition, whilst the latter will display a vice versa image. But the distinction becomes less clear when accounts of religious experience (whether these issue in claims of Brahman, God, Nirvana, or whatever) and accounts of less tangible non-religious phenomena are contrasted. Thus an account of love or beauty may "score" a value on our scale of comparative tolerance, retention and repetition similar to that of religious experience, but no difficulties seem to emerge from the ensuing diversity in the same way as we have suggested that they do in the religious realm. Given this similarity between accounts of aesthetic, emotional and religious experience, why is the diversity associated with religious accounts singled out as a special problematic case? What is different about encountering a plurality of views on beauty and a plurality of world certainties?

We have already drawn attention to the problems involved in accepting a situation in which there is more than one world certainty. In such a situation the question automatically arises: which, if any, of the available views can be accepted as true? And it is this feature of world
views, invariably displayed in the face of possible options (what might, perhaps, be called their "cuckoo syndrome"), which must again be stressed in answering the charge that, since such a close analogue has been found for it in our attempts to deal with such things as love and beauty, the religious diversity which constitutes the hall of mirrors is not, in fact, of the (interesting) problematic status which has been suggested. Cuckoos lay their egg in the nest of another bird, whose own eggs or chicks the young cuckoo will subsequently try to dislodge in an attempt to have the nest to itself. In dubbing a feature of schemes of world certainty their "cuckoo syndrome", I have in mind their similar tendency to try to oust other competing schemes (or else to assimilate them within their own outlook). There seems to be room for only one world certainty in the human mind (just as, from the cuckoo's viewpoint, there is only room for one chick in the nest).

A simplistic interpretation of this exclusive attitude may lead to the emotional polemics sometimes, regrettably, associated with religious disputes (the strong feeling behind them usually being based on an external and literalist "understanding" of religions other than - indeed probably including - one's own, rather than on the sort of painstaking interpolative approach which attempts to provide an accurate and insightful internal perspective). There does not, however, seem to be any unavoidable reason why the cuckoo syndrome must have such a destructive outcome. Whilst at the end of the day it is, I think, impossible to
make a world decision which embraces more than one scheme of certainty, there is no reason why that certainty need be selected in an intolerant and aggressive fashion - indeed it is quite likely that an intrinsic feature of a world certainty may be to advocate a patient and tolerant approach towards others' beliefs\(^{30}\). Nor is it by any means self evident that the necessary exclusiveness need be applied in a narrowly partisan inter-religious fashion: given some of the similarities between the different religions there seem to be at least initial grounds for entertain-ing the possibility of its use largely as a dividing line of choice between religious and non-religious outlooks on the world, rather than as a vehicle for denominational imperialism.

I have already said that I do not want to become involved here in the dispute concerning the extent to which religions are fact-asserting. But it is cogent to our present position to note that no matter whether a religious world certainty is understood as a literally true statement about how things really are, or in a more symbolic, personalistic sense as a possible means by which one's spiritual sensibilities may find articulation and support, there is still room for only one such schema in the mind. Unless we are prepared to settle for a situation of complete indecision (not knowing what to accept) or doublethink (accepting two or more incompatible viewpoints) then a choice must be made, regardless of whether we are choosing a statement of objective fact or appropriate fiction. The
need to choose derives its seriousness and urgency from the scale of concern of the options involved. For without some commitment regarding a view of the human situation, how are any of our actions to have more than a passing meaning and, in consequence, how are we to claim the status of responsible individuals? This urgency of choice is not found in trying to decide what we love or what we think is beautiful, despite the fact that many options exist here too.

In reporting experience of love or beauty there is no clear standard to which individual cases have to conform. Beauty is, we are told, in the eye of the beholder, and certainly what one man may love or find beautiful another may dislike and consider ugly, without any particular problems being raised by this disagreement for the feelings they each claim to have experienced. In the case of religious experience, however, there is a definite constraint in terms of its focus which makes any variation somewhat problematic. For if we consider such experience in terms of its providing a world certainty, an explanatory/evaluative/prescriptive picture of the human situation as such, then, given the fact that this is something in which all men are commonly situated, any diversity of outlook inevitably raises the question of which picture is right. Whereas the margins of variation and disagreement allowed for different individuals in terms of their conceptions of love or beauty are very wide, those allowed for any kind
of outlook which claims to be total, to be all inclusive, are, necessarily, narrow. As Woods has shown in his work on theological explanations:

all ultimate explanation is in some sense unitary. We cannot be satisfied with an explanation which concludes with two principles which stand in irreducible opposition. (31)

So the religionist cannot be satisfied with a situation in which not one, but many world certainties stand in opposition, i.e. the situation which constitutes the hall of mirrors in which he finds himself at some point in his work. A diversity of views about beauty does not inevitably lead on to the pressing question of which conception of it is best, but a diversity of world certainties seems automatically to pose such a question for the world uncertain Everyman. In the verbally elusive areas of the non-religious realm diversity/proliferation is not, so to speak, combative (we are not obliged to make possibly exclusive evaluative choices between Shakespeare, Donne, Dante et. al.). In the religious realm, on the other hand, such diversity demands decision, we cannot simply let it stand.

Perhaps the point I am trying to make here can best be summed up by returning momentarily to Wisdom's garden. Suppose that the two disputees there find themselves at odds over the question: "which is the most beautiful flower in the garden?", then although each may consider his own candidate to be best it would make little sense for them to seek to sway the opinion of the other (beyond perhaps making
him recognize that a different opinion may legitimately exist). But when it comes to a disagreement about the nature of the garden as a whole (is its existence due to divine or accidental causes?), then a state of dispute does seem automatically to exist where there can be no question of accepting a situation where both opinions are allowed equal credence. At the end of the day, however much leeway is allowed for an interpretation which stresses mythology rather than ontology, there is still - given the scale involved - a point at issue about what in fact is the case (as opposed to, or as well as, how the two disputees choose to see the world), i.e. either there is a gardener or there is not. Agreeing to differ is all very well when the point at issue revolves around a statement of personal preferences for particular discrete phenomena. It is quite another matter to accept a variation of opinion when what is at issue is an ultimate, all inclusive statement which attempts to encompass everything within the orbit of its pronouncement. Whilst both disputees are entitled to have their own favourite flower regardless of anyone else's opinion (or indeed of any qualities the flower may or may not happen to have), neither is entitled to claim as a world certainty a point of view which allows credence to an alternative outlook without objection. In switching scale from the particular to the total our beliefs take on an element of controversy which will be stirred into life by any alternative. Whilst different views of what is beautiful do not, so to speak, trespass on each other's
authority - there is room for both "a" and "x" to be beautiful without having to decide between them; different views of how things (all things) ultimately are, automatically infringe each other's authoritative space. For instance, it is quite unremarkable and non-controversial that whilst one man may find snakes to be abhorrently ugly another may find them to be sublimely beautiful. Their disagreement neither questions whether or not snakes really are beautiful, nor, in consequence, whether their respective notions of what counts as beautiful are equally acceptable. But if one man suggests that the world was designed and created by a mysterious serpent and the other says that it was not created by any being, but arose simply as an accidental configuration of matter, then each "creation story" questions the other in a way which demands that we choose between them (or, of course, that we reject them both).

As to why we are concerned with whether or not there is a gardener or creator in the first place, i.e. "why do we ask the kind of question which is seeking an ultimate explanation of the world?"(32), I, like Woods, know of no answer other than to affirm that it is our nature as persons to continue our mental quest until a plain answer is reached which requires no further explanation. (33)

I have thus attempted to answer the objection which suggests that religious diversity (i.e. the non-final interpretative stream of accounts of religious experience) does not constitute a special problem case, but finds
analogues in non-perplexing areas of more everyday experience, and that, as such, our assumption of some uniquely generative and mysterious element intrinsic to religious experience which requires further investigation, is simply unwarranted. It is now time to defend this assumption against that explanation of the interpretative streams constitutive of religious diversity which suggests that rather than being necessitated by any mysterious intrinsic factor, such a process is simply required by the need to bring religious thought into line with the continually advancing insights of our non-religious thinking.

(iii) Religious Diversity Considered as Revision in Response to Advances in Learning

At first sight the explanation of religious diversity which points to the continuing need for bringing religious thought into line with non-religious thinking, suggesting that this process of updating is responsible for generating many of the images encountered by the religionist, does have a certain attractive plausibility. For holy and secular viewpoints often seem to be drastically out of step. There is a definite thread of discord, a rift of persistent incompatibility, running consistently between sacred and profane which calls out for some sort of reconciling mediation. If we picture religious and non-religious views of the world as two parallel lines between which is held a lens of some transparent glass-like substance, through which the individual must look in his search for ultimate meaning, then we could picture such incompatibilities as
places where the lines veer sharply away from each other, twisting and fracturing the lens. To take a simple (and somewhat contrived) example: a Christian might begin his biography with little reason to doubt the central insight of his faith which says that God is love. However, supposing that he goes on to experience famine, war, disease, poverty and all the other shocks that flesh is heir to, this expression of his religious experience (immediate, remembered or traditional) cannot then be left in its simple unelaborated form without intolerable intellectual jarring with the evidence so clearly afforded by his day to day life. It will require subtle re-interpretation if it is to retain any credibility. Similar shifts in expressive form and emphasis will be needed in order to accommodate not only apparent inconsistencies with lived experience, but also with more abstract insights associated with the discoveries made in biology, astronomy, history and other specialized disciplines. If the lens of meaning is to remain undamaged and transparent then the religious and non-religious lines between which it is suspended must be maintained in their parallel positions. Re-interpretation acts as a means of smoothing out those points of otherwise shattering divergence found when religious and non-religious outlooks seem completely out of line.

Rather than being isolated obscurities which prevent us from seeing certain limited areas of the meaning of religions, and, in consequence, of our life's meaning
according to their teachings (i.e. according to the world certainties they suggest), such things as the problem of evil (or the notion of divine creation set against the idea of evolution, or the claim of continued existence after death set beside the facts of physical decay, and so on) are simply the more noticeable cracks in windows to the world as a whole, to the human situation as such, which have been shattered to so great an extent that indeed it now seems reasonable to suggest that many of us can no longer see through them with any degree of confidence at all, but can only make out vague and ambiguous shapes and movements on the other side. In this kind of situation, religious diversity might simply be seen as marking our attempts to re-interpret religious experience in such a way as to re-fuse the cracks and make the window of meaning, of world certainty, clear again. The religionist confronts not just one window/mirror in the hall of mirrors but many, and now, to add to his difficulties, it appears that most (if not all) of them may be shattered, opaque (or at best translucent) rather than transparent and clearly reflective.

Of course at some loci religious and non-religious outlooks are (or were) not so violently out of joint (or at least were not seen to be so out of joint) as they often appear to be today. One thinks, for example, of the apparent monolithic steadiness of medieval Christianity, and doubtless in some contemporary primitive societies there
is still no disruptive movement of religious and non-religious knowledge away from their parallel (if not fused) state. Indeed many believers from modern societies would doubtless wish to hold that their outlook too was unobscured by any seriously perplexing incompatibilities. However, the fact remains that the lens of meaning stretched between our religious and our everyday outlooks has, for many people, become increasingly cracked as we approach the present time with its complement of detailed and straightforwardly verifiable knowledge about so many different aspects of the world, knowledge which the interpretative stream that tries to cope with religious experience often seems unable to keep up with. As a result, our non-religious outlook has become dominant over our religious one, and, with its increasingly confident understanding of evolution, astronomy, geological time, genetics, and so on, has dislodged from a central place in our understanding the literal interpretation of "original" accounts of religious experience. It seems clear that as our non-religious knowledge of the world has increased, so the question of how religious experience can be adequately described (and how the world certainties stemming from it can be properly viewed) has become increasingly problematic. The need for the re-interpretation of religions is spurred on as the traditional territory within which their meaning used to be clearly located is whittled away and encroached upon by other more plainly understandable and demonstrably
verifiable points of view. In such a situation attempts must be made to re-align religious with non-religious outlooks, and the result of such attempted re-alignment is a diversity of religious forms (38).

I do not wish to question the plausibility of explaining some religious diversity in terms of the continual re-interpretation which is apparently required in order to keep religious experience parallel with non-religious thinking (so that the lens of meaning suspended between them may be kept unclouded). However, as a complete account of such diversity this explanation fails, since although it may offer good reasons for the proliferation of accounts of religious experience it does not supply reasons for their retention. Furthermore, it is focused primarily on intra- or meta-religious diversity and, whatever its merits there might be, it is difficult to see how it can cast much light on the more basic problem of inter-religious diversity. However, I do not want to pursue either of these two points in detail here. Rather I want to accept this particular counter argument (against my locating the key cause of diversity in some intrinsic element of religious experience) as going some way towards explaining the difficulties encountered by the religionist in confronting the "many" and, more importantly for the course of our argument here, as providing (albeit unconsciously) a good point of departure for his further researches on the subject of such diversity. For, given the exposition of this position
outlined above, the question again automatically arises: what sort of experience would the religious one have to be in order for it both always to need such re-interpretation and to survive a continuing stream of interpretative recensions (which would be fatal to the credibility of any ordinary experience) without being deemed simply mistaken or fallacious or nonsensical\(^{(39)}\)? What sort of experience could bear this load of perpetual reformulation and neither (i) be exhausted by it, nor (ii) ever be stated in a completely satisfactory and permanent way such as to be in compatible parallel alignment with non-religious thought? In other words, what gives rise to ineffability/non-finality in the first place?

I suggest that the answer to the question, "what sort of experience must the religious one be in order for it to 'behave' in the extraordinary way it does?", is that it is one which is **radically unlike** all others in our varied range of consciousness, and the rest of this chapter will be concerned with an analysis of this radical unlikeness of religious experience (focusing especially on its role as an irreducible cause of diversity and on the question of what consequences the activity of such a root element will have for the religionist).

(iv) Like and Unlike: The Cognitive Centrality of Comparison

To begin with, though, let us turn our attention to the vital part which likeness and comparison play in our
understanding of things and consider if anything which lies wholly outside them can be accepted as a possible datum of consciousness. Let us, in other words, consider the difficulties involved in accepting as intelligible the idea of something which is radically unlike all other elements in our experience. If we were not able to make comparisons and establish likenesses it is difficult to see how we could understand or describe anything at all. We would be left speechless, gazing without comprehension at a phantasmagoria of shapes, colours and movements. It is difficult even to imagine such a situation with any degree of conviction since our imagination is itself heavily dependent on precisely the faculty we are trying imaginatively to exclude. We must use our ability to establish elucidating comparisons even in the attempt to describe what our probable feelings in a situation which denies them might be (i.e. we must consider what it would be like, bearing in mind at the same time that in such a state all operation of such comprehension-promoting likeness would be suspended). In such a state we would, I think, be in a predicament similar to that envisaged by Hume for the man who is "brought on a sudden into this world" (40) and is then faced with trying to predict the outcome of cause and effect relationships. In other words, we would be confronted by an unordered chaos of phenomena, a mass of shapes, movements, sounds and colour, of which we could make no sense. But our situation would be like this only if we stayed thus for a few seconds, or if we were deprived
of memory, for inevitably, after the shortest time, (with the aid of custom, "the great guide of human life" (41) — which is basically the ability to notice and remember likenesses) we would begin to establish a network of ordering comparisons. Comparison provides the stepping stones by which we arrive at understanding, and it is made possible by our ability to establish degrees of likeness — similarities and dissimilarities — between all the diverse elements in our experience. As J.L. Austin has pointed out, "like" is

the main flexibility device by whose aid, in spite of our limited vocabulary, we can always avoid being left completely speechless. (42)

Suppose, for example, that someone offers us a description of some object or event which is quite new to us. Unless the describer makes clear some connections between what he is talking about and some aspect of what is already familiar to us, then we shall have to seek elucidation by asking what the thing in question is like, or by offering putative comparisons ourselves and asking him if the thing in question is like any of them. Of course establishing likeness does not automatically lead to understanding, it serves rather as a first step, as a herding into categories of the various experiences with which the world confronts us, into categories which already have a place in our conceptual scheme whether we understand them or not. Thus most of us quite happily relegate all but the tiniest fraction of immediate lived experience or professional
specialization into boxes labelled "science", "medicine", "religion", "history", "economics", "politics" and so on, and leave it at that, confident that whilst possibly outside our particular interests or beyond the grasp of our intellect, the contents of such categories are susceptible to a process of further elucidation. Comparison removes the disturbing instability of the unknown and the unlike, for although we mostly pursue likeness for only the shortest way along the road towards complete understanding or completely exhaustive description, we are confident that such a progression could be made, indeed that its possibility is guaranteed by the establishing of likeness, however basic, in the first place.

Now of course all comparisons are approximate, they are, after all, comparisons rather than equivalents, and as such are bound to contain some degree of unlikeness or difference from the thing with which they are being compared. Such dissimilarity, far from frustrating our search for understanding, is essential to it. It is of little use saying of some wholly new and unique object or event "x" that it is exactly like another object or event "y", for far from having described or explained anything by such "complete" comparison we would simply have duplicated the problem (let alone having contradicted our original claim of uniqueness in the process). In similar fashion, an unknown terrain mapped in too great detail would simply end up being a replica model for which a map would still be needed.
Depending on the terms of reference we decide to use, everything is like some things and unlike others. Indeed a thing's nature and identity seem to be held in constant sense-giving tension upon a subtly changing web of possible referential comparisons which can be appealed to, so that now one thread is stressed, now another. If there were no such tension identity would collapse, and to speak of anything having such a non-nature would be highly problematic. A block of lead is unlike a Jackdaw's feather, but like a gold ingot, in terms of weight and density; whereas in terms of colour it is like the feather, unlike the ingot (or more like one than the other). There are innumerable things which it is like and innumerable things which it is unlike. But nothing can be wholly like or wholly unlike everything, since this would mean that in every case it would neither be more like "a" than "z", letting "a" and "z" stand for any two contrasting elements in our range of experience (black and white, good and evil, large and small etc.). If something was like everything it would simply not get noticed, rather like the "opinion" of the man who tries to agree with everyone(44). Similarly, if it was wholly unlike everything, it would likewise fail to gain any finger hold in our consciousness(45). Unless we can catch a thing somewhere within the web of likeness, then it is difficult to see how we may talk of being aware of it in the first place. For if we cannot select some appropriate candidate of comparison from the innumerable possibilities offered to us in our experience, and say of
something, "it's more like this than that", or "it's most like that", then we have simply exhausted our sphere of possible awareness and it is difficult to see where we can locate an experience of something outside this. The scale of likeness and comparison seems to mark out the range of available areas of consciousness. Once we move off this scale it is difficult to see how we are to avoid talking nonsense.

(v) Radical Unlikeness and Ineffability

I would suggest that comfortably disguised by virtue of their being placed within the apparently ordering category "religious" (at first sight exactly like the categories "medical", "historical" and so on) there are just such elements of radical unlikeness.

Now clearly - to live up to its own definition as it were - the holy must be apart, different, forbidden, unlike the profane, and any action relating to it must take this into account(46). But is it also radically unlike? And if so, how, given what we have said above, can experience of something which denies all application of likeness and comparison be seen as intelligible? Certainly if we consider as vitally central and representative, rather than as eccentric and peripheral, accounts given by mystics of their experiences, then it is difficult to see how we are to avoid giving radical unlikeness a central place in our characterization of religious experience in general. For
a common feature of such accounts is their claim of ineffability, and the only way in which ineffability could legitimately arise, the only situation in which an otherwise literate and articulate person could be at a serious loss for words, would be if there were no threads of comparison between a particular experience and anything else he had ever experienced, if no effective appeal to likeness could be made to stitch together known and unknown. In other words, the only situation in which ineffability can genuinely occur is one in which what is experienced is completely unique, wholly other, radically unlike. But the question remains, how can we make sense of such an experience?

Of course many things are said about religion, even about (indeed especially about) what appear to be its central and most perplexing elements. Thus there is much "talk" of one sort or another about, for example, Brahman, the Christian God, the Tao and so on, i.e. comparison is used and likenesses are established. But sooner or later in all such instances we come to a core of ineffability which denies final sanction to any account of these elements and locates its meaning behind a mysterious opaqueness ringed with silence. Just as Svetaketu, in the famous passage from the Chandogya Upanishad (6.12), searches for the essence of the Banyan tree by splitting a fig from it and then splitting a seed within the fig, to find, at the very generative heart of
this whole impressive growth, nothing tangible, so the search for the exact and final meaning of religious experience encounters the outer casing of symbol, doctrine, ritual, myth etc. (at which level much can be seen and said), but beneath this there is a similarly intangible central generative core which seems to defy verbal expression (and which, so our argument runs at the moment, it would seem impossible to experience in the first place). The mystic gives clearest voice to this inner core of ineffability, and it is in his particular type of discourse that the live wire of mystery, which we have suggested runs unbroken throughout the religious realm, appears closest to the surface. In the examples which follow, then, I take the view that what has been so strikingly and "openly" described by the mystic is "legitimately and necessarily present in more pedestrian varieties and positive forms of religious expression" (even though we may have to look more closely to see it), that mysticism is "an extreme form of what is genuine in religion" rather than being some sort of idiosyncratic or deviant offshoot from it. In mysticism we can see immediately what we will come to eventually in our investigation of any religious phenomenon.

A passage from Eckhart perhaps most clearly identifies radical unlikeness as the source of ineffability:

All words fail ... nothing true can be spoken of God ... no one can express what he actually is. We can say nothing of God because nothing is like him. (50)
This denial of all possible comparisons, of the ineffectiveness of likeness in this area of experience, is a common feature of religious literature. The passage from Eckhart is clearly reminiscent of the rhetorical query posed in Isaiah 40.18:

To whom then will you liken God
Or to what likeness compare with him?

And when Muhammad was asked about the distinguishing attributes of the God he spoke of, the answer he gave (rather, the answer which, according to that tradition, was revealed to him) was:

Say, God is one God; the eternal;
he begetteth not, neither is he begotten and there is not anyone like unto him. (51)

But for sheer thoroughness in excluding all possible forms of comparison, Shankara's account of Brahman is, I think, unparalleled:

There is no class of substance to which the Brahman belongs, no common genus. It cannot therefore be denoted by words which, like "being" in the ordinary sense, signify a category of things. Nor can it be denoted by quality for it is without qualities; nor yet by activity, because it is without activity ... neither can it be denoted by relationship for it is without a second. Therefore it cannot be defined by word or idea, as the scripture says, it is the one 'before whom words recoil'. (52)

But with "like" we can cover our entire sphere of reference, so that if someone insists that they have had an experience which is radically unlike, that is, which is not more like any one thing than any other in this sphere of reference, then surely we must object that to call such a nebulous phenomenon an "experience" (or a "phenomenon" for that matter)
is a complete misnomer, for it would, so to speak, have no handles for us to grasp hold of, but would simply slip through the fingers of our awareness without our ever having been conscious of it (even supposing that "it" did in fact exist). Using "like" we can locate anything in terms of its relationship to other elements in our conceptual/linguistic network. Thus if someone insists that they have had an experience which is ineffable, which is not only not like anything, but not even more like any one thing than any other, then surely we have little choice but to conclude that they are talking nonsense. William Alston argues that if there is such a thing that cannot be talked about in any way then "we can only signalize the fact by leaving it unrecorded" (53). But this is slightly misleading, for we could not even signalize such a "fact" in any recognizable way - if an experience were radically unlike and therefore absolutely ineffable then surely we could never be conscious of it in the first place, our silence would be a natural rather than a deliberately chosen one (54) and would "signalize" that we were having no experience at all, rather than that we were aware of something we could not describe. W.T. Stace makes the point more accurately:

Absolute ineffability...would mean that the something called ineffable would be outside our consciousness altogether, in the same sense in which God is presumably outside the consciousness of a dog. ... If the mystical consciousness were absolutely ineffable, then we could
not say so because we should be unconscious of such an experience; or, in other words, we should never have had such an experience. (55)

It may seem quite reasonable that something which is completely unlike anything else to the extent of being "wholly other" should be impossible to put into words. However, I am not suggesting that those experiences of radical unlikeness which an Eckhart or a Shankhara might speak of as being ineffable, fail to satisfy the description "a situation which would be ineffable". What I am suggesting is that they fail to satisfy the criteria demanded by the description "possible datum of consciousness", or "situation which it would be possible to experience".

Those who claim to have an experience which they are unable to report, beyond the extent of stating its occurrence and noting its conceptually and verbally inhibiting nature, may seek to supplement or justify their resort to such a negative descriptive term as "ineffability" by appeal to the claimed identity of some state or entity, to which such experience is then attributed. But the attempt to invest radical unlikeness and its accompanying ineffability with a degree of experiential credence by means of reference to some named locus - God, Brahman, the Tao etc. - is logically unsuccessful. For if such experience is attributable to some other state or entity - i.e. if it is capable of being placed in relationship to a locus which does not simply share its attributes, which is not itself radically unlike, then the experience loses its claim to this label in the
first place (and cannot consequently be given the status of ineffability). If, on the other hand, such loci as may be appealed to are themselves also radically unlike, then the attempt to provide additional information/justification concerning the ineffable experience is seen simply to degenerate into a re-naming of it, usually in positively evaluative religious terms (56).

I do not dispute that experience of radical unlikeness would provide a valid justification for a claim of ineffability. But such a justification is of theoretical interest only since it is over-ruled by an appeal to the nature of human experience, which is such as to prevent us giving credence to anything which eludes all words and every comparison to the extent of being equally unlike everything. Once we claim to be aware of the ineffable it can no longer be literally described as such (though of course this does not mean that something ineffable does not exist, only that we could never know whether it existed or not). For just as if we could see in the dark it would simply mean that it was not quite dark, so if we claimed to have somehow experienced something radically unlike and absolutely ineffable it would simply mean that it was not completely unlike or absolutely ineffable. Whereas we can easily make sense of something which is unseeable - clearly we cannot see a dog's bark or the scent of a rose - we cannot do likewise with the unsayable. Something which is not seeable may be felt or smelt or touched or heard, but
something which is not sayable, which is not like anything, by what means could we ever experience or become aware of such a thing?

An analogy may help to summarize some of these points in a straightforward pictorial setting. Suppose the police are questioning someone who says he has witnessed a smash and grab raid. The witness is somewhat hesitant in describing the man he claims to have seen running away from the scene of the crime. To each of the detectives' queries ("was he tall, short or average height? Heavily built or slight? Bearded or clean shaven? etc.) all he will say is, "I just don't know how I'd describe him, he wasn't like anyone". If he persists with such a series of denials in the face of all offered comparisons, the police are likely to conclude that the witness had in fact seen no one at all. Similarly, faced with trying to pinpoint a definitive account of religious experience, the religionist seems likewise to have little option but to conclude (in the face of all offered interpretations being deemed inadequate and non-final) that no such experience could in fact have occurred in the way in which it is claimed to have.

Of course the immediate objection here is that the analogy used to substantiate this line of reasoning is shamelessly rigged, that by claiming to have seen a man the witness automatically loses any entitlement to be compared to the case of a person who has had a religious experience, since, if he saw a man, then clearly he did not see something "wholly other" which cannot be described.
If something qualifies for the description "man" in the first place then the possibility of establishing further likenesses has already been tacitly admitted, and a refusal to allow their application must simply be taken for obtuseness. But it would surely be indefensible to say that "God" or "Brahman" functioned descriptively in exactly the same way as "man", in as much as by naming something thus one had automatically to be able to provide further clear defining characteristics. Saying "God is indescribable" is surely allowable (prima facie if no further) in a way in which "man is indescribable" is not.

In answer to such an objection I would, firstly, re-stress my remarks about the difficulties involved in "describing" ineffable experience in terms of some named religious element (God, Brahman, Tao, etc.), hoping by this means to render such experience more intelligible; and, secondly, point out that in any case I am using the analogy here with the emphasis not on the parallel uses of "God" and "man", but on those of "see" and "experience". It is these words, not "God" or "Brahman", that the analogy with the ineffable smash and grab raider can steal from the religious vocabulary without fear of logical apprehension. In short, if we cannot in any way describe a man, beyond claiming that we have seen one, then it is difficult to understand how we can continue to voice such a statement without absurdity. Similarly, if we claim to have had some sort of religious experience, but cannot go beyond this
in any way other than to report the experience in negative descriptive terms (i.e. to claim that it is ineffable), or to reformulate it in apparently substantive language which in fact turns out to be similarly opaque, then it is difficult to see on what grounds we can continue to claim to have experienced, to have apprehended or been in any way aware or conscious, of anything at all. (57)

But if it is concerned with experiences whose existence as described it does not seem logically possible to accept, can the study of religion proceed without absurdity, can the religionist continue his investigations without giving unwarranted credence to what ought to be exposed as fallacious?

(vi) Possible Sources of Radical Unlikeness

As the degree of unlikeness or uniqueness of any phenomenon within our experience increases, so its threshold of comparative tolerance becomes lower and we seem to step ever closer to ineffability. But to actually reach it the degree of unlikeness would have to be absolute, and there are, I think, only two possible sources of such absolute uniqueness or radical unlikeness. The first stems from experience of some entity or state existing wholly outside our catalogue of awareness, quite apart from and independent of anything in the perceivable world, wholly other, standing beyond all possible comparisons which can bridge the gap between known and unknown. The
second stems from all the individually comparable elements of our experience being taken together as a totality, viewed as a single whole outside of which there is nothing. In a world experienced thus, as a single datum, all possibility of comparison would automatically dissolve and we would be left speechless to cope with a single and immense point of uniqueness.

From which source of uniqueness does religious experience derive its ineffability, its claimed experience of the radically unlike? If we choose the first alternative we are left with the seemingly insoluble problem of demonstrating how experience of such a thing is possible in the first place. For, as we have seen, although in theory we can understand that such a state or entity would be ineffable if we were aware of it, it seems clear that there is no possible way in which we could ever become aware of such a completely incomparable thing. If, on the other hand, we choose the second alternative, and see the ineffable core of religious experience as stemming from some sort of all encompassing view of things, from existence seen as an entirety, then we can, I think, save the description "ineffable" (and the claimed experience of radical unlikeness which elicits it) from rejection as senseless. We simply have no stabilizing analogues to refer to when moving from experience of everyday phenomena to claimed experience of some wholly different state or entity altogether apart from and outside their sphere of
operation, and we are thus fated to conceptually capsize if we attempt such a speculative voyage. But we do have such analogues to refer to when moving from a partial to a complete view of things, and it is by virtue of them (because of the elucidating likenesses which they establish) that we can give asymptotic credence to the radical unlikeness which would necessarily be encountered in any total world view. But if such analogues exist, do we not then automatically vitiate our original claims of radical unlikeness and ineffability? Once we can say what something is like, do we not thereby lose the right to claim that all accounts of it are necessarily non-final?

By suggesting experience of some sort of totality as the source for that radical unlikeness which renders accounts of religious experience ineffable and perpetually generative, I would suggest that only in a "sense" which cannot be given credence anyway are their claims of unlikeness/ineffability disallowed. For if we imagine a progressively inclusive view of things, we can, without great difficulty, picture a point on such a scale at which the possibility of establishing likeness would vanish, where all the threads of descriptive comparison would snap, and we would be left confronted by the brute fact of total existence, single, numinous, mysterious and appalling, overwhelming in its uniqueness and comprehensiveness. Such a point would, because of its radical unlikeness, be beyond the bounds of our awareness (and our description of
it must thus be viewed as hypothetical); it could not constitute a possible datum of consciousness. However, the locus of such unexperienceable completeness is clear, it lies at the end of a path of increasing inclusiveness and there seems to be no reason why we should not view religious experience as stemming from the highest possible point on that path, where likeness and effability function at their lowest possible level, in a minimal - almost nominal - fashion, so as only to allow such experience possibility, not to ensure the necessary circumstances for providing exhaustive accounts of it\(^{(58)}\). In such an experience, located right at the very summit of the scale of possible awareness, we appear to have found a means of offering an intelligible account of the religions' experience of radical unlikeness\(^{(59)}\). It is easy to see from the nature of such experience why it would be considered so vitally important as to require continual attempts at formulation and communication, and its vital importance would also encourage the retention of each recognizably flawed attempt at communication, thus completing the sequence of interpretative fecundity which characterizes the religious. For such an experience would provide the necessary perspective from which a scheme of world certainty (i.e. a view of the human situation as a whole, a comprehensively inclusive account of things) could emerge.

In looking more closely at the implications of this
theory, however, we must not forget that we have left unanswered two questions of great importance. Firstly, is the idea of an experience of such all-inclusiveness as to leave the possibility of comparison behind, a defensible reading of existing accounts of religious experience? And, secondly, is it in fact psychologically (as opposed to logically and imaginatively) possible to have an experience with this scale of inclusion? I am concerned here only with finding a possible way out of a logical conundrum (a potentially paralyzing conundrum so far as the intellectual credibility of both religion and the study of religion are concerned), rather than with psychology or the close textual criticism of a wide range of religious writings. However, whilst leaving these tasks for others better qualified to undertake them, we might note in passing that, according to William James, one of the main directions in which mystical states seem to point, despite their ineffability (by way of what he calls their "pretty distinct theoretic drift"(60)), is monism, that is, some form of single unified conception of things. Furthermore, in a short essay based on his own experiences of "very sudden and incomprehensible enlargements of the consciousness field"(61), James suggests that

\[
\text{states of mystical intuition may be only very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary field of consciousness. (62)}
\]

However this may be, if the notion of some kind of apprehension of totality is rejected as the source of
religious experience of the radically unlike, and thus of the diversity encountered in the hall of mirrors, then we are left with the problem of how to make sense of such experience, and, until this question is settled, with the problem of justifying any further study of what are possibly fallacious accounts of absurd phenomena.

(vii) The Consequences of Radical Unlikeness For the Study of Religion

What consequences follow from this account of religious experience which locates the ineffability/non-finality it displays in some sort of encounter with a locus just below the surd of complete radical unlikeness, from which setting access to some sort of all-inclusive total outlook is given? There are, I think, six main conclusions which the religionist might draw for his studies here:

(i) To begin with, referring back to our analogy of the cracked window/mirror of meaning, the idea of radical unlikeness outlined above may be able to suggest a reason for the frequently non-parallel state of the religious and non-religious frames between which it is suspended, and thus enable the religionist to see more clearly through the often opaque perspectives which confront him (opaque because of the tension between unaligned frames). The notion of unlikeness/ineffability stemming from some sort of totality suggests that the non-alignment may be caused not by any difference in type between religious and non-religious frames but by a difference in scale. For whereas
non-religious experience tends to be concerned with often highly detailed information about discrete individual objects, religious experience seems to be concerned with a more holistic view which seeks to include (or to subsume as irrelevant or already accounted for beneath its wider span) all the diverse individuality of everyday consciousness. Partial and limited views\(^{(63)}\) can articulate their varied experiences by virtue of the divisions imposed by the unfused polarity which seems to run through all aspects of ordinary awareness. But if the world can be experienced as something approaching a single totality, then as that totality is approached, all the pairs of contrasting opposites on which our non-religious outlook so much depends cease to have any meaning. It is precisely from the fused polarity implicit in any such perception of complete singularity (in which black and white, good and evil, etc. cease to have any separating and classifying function) that radical unlikeness arises. In attempting to understand those elements which constitute the religious frame of meaning, then, the religionist might consider changing the scale of his terms of reference from that found in their usual mode and be encouraged to see such perplexing phenomena as, for example, the Hindu conception of Shiva, not as muddled extravagances thrown up by an uncritical and over fertile mythological imagination and consisting of a hotch potch of different and incompatible elements, but as attempted expressions of everything, as symbols of totality, and as
such, necessarily ambivalent.

In attempting this exercise of re-aligning religious and non-religious frames by a consideration of scale, the religionist might also conclude that the whole sense of world uncertainty, which has been so crucial in motivating his inquiries, may have its origins in an awareness of the series of polarities which run through existence and seem to preclude any possibility of overall sense being made of it. Love and hatred, cruelty and compassion, life and death, light and dark, etc. — any attempt to find some single sense seems inevitably to be contradicted by its opposite. The "different worlds" we seem to inhabit appear to be largely determined by which side of the basic hope/despair polarity we stress (and the conditions governing our choice of emphasis here would seem to be very much bound up with the complex notion of personality, rather than with the simple catalogue of "external" events which the biographer could chronicle). But religious experience seems somehow to transcend the polarities and to reach a level of meaning which is immune to their perpetual disharmony. The great religious systems of world
certainty seem somehow able to subsume all the opposite poles beneath a unitary sense-giving outlook. Paradoxically, in reaching this level of apparent ultimate sense they lose the ability to properly express their insight.

(ii) The principle of radical unlikeness also suggests
a way in which the historical continuity of the various
religions' conceptions of world certainty (expressed in terms of God, Brahman, Nirvana, Sunyata, etc.) may be accounted for against the discontinuity suggested by the flux of interpretations through which they have all moved. If we compare a scheme of world certainty in any living religion at the dawn of its history and at the present moment, then in each case such convulsive reappraisals have shaken both the faith and scepticism of successive generations that it seems almost as if religious man occupies some sort of intellectual earthquake zone. Most ancient and most recent outlooks seem to differ in many respects, yet, by and large, theologians firmly maintain that it is a single and unchanging tradition within which all the many different accounts are contained. Unless we can point to some common element in each case, which is both specific enough to create some binding sense of tradition, of particular religious identity, yet not completely expressed by any one attempt at a description of this identity, then, given the widely differing interpretations found at different points in the history of any religious tradition, it is difficult to see how we could be sure that in fact they all stemmed from the same source. Radical unlikeness would provide a common element with just these required characteristics: it is what all the accounts attempt to net within their offered interpretations. It is what remains constant - constantly elusive, yet constantly generative - throughout a history of diversity. Bearing
this in mind, the religionist, through familiarizing himself with the whole corpus of retained accounts, might be seen as moving closer to understanding what religious experience involves (rather than as risking missing the point by a non-continuous view of religious history\(^{64}\)). He might also, considering the fact that according to this theory repetition can only be explained within narrow confines of similarity, be led to try to establish parameters of allowable variation within whose bounds attempts to express religious experience must proceed.

(iii) Clearly the analysis of religious experience advanced here is somewhat at odds with traditional religious vocabularies. Many "believers" would, it seems likely, be most reluctant to equate claimed experience of God, Allah, Brahman, Nirvana, Tao, Sunyata etc. with some kind of totality experience. Yet in order to arrive at a logically acceptable account of the ineffability displayed by claimed experience of such entities and states, this seems to be the kind of equation which the religionist is forced to make. He is thus faced with the important question of whether he can reconcile a logical understanding of religious experience (necessary if he is not to deem it unintelligible) with an interpolative investigation of it (necessary if he is to be accurately informed about it). Is understanding the source of religious diversity in this way compatible with the imaginative re-construction of belief which forms the methodological cornerstone of his studies? Moreover, if - as seems equally likely - the ideas found within the various
religions to account for the existence and nature of beliefs other than their own differ from the account suggested by an analysis of that ineffability which stems from the radical unlikeness of totality-experience; can the religionist once more satisfy the demands both of logic and of empathy? How, for instance, is he to deal with claims of unique revelation - which would mean discarding as wholly mistaken any view which suggested a common origin for all religions?

These are important and complex questions. However, rather than presenting us with reasons to abandon the whole interpolative endeavour, simply concluding that religions are inaccessible to study, they might be seen as reminders of the difficulties involved in the return to zero and setting out from there again which interpolation demands prior to any theorizing about what may thus be (interpolatively) discovered\(^{(65)}\).

(iv) Given the idea of religious experience as stemming from some sort of encounter with the radical unlikeness which accompanies totality, can the religionist continue to think of the various religious traditions as truly separate phenomena? In identifying the operation of the ineffability which such unlikeness displays, we may cast much light on the origin of religious diversity, but do we not at the same time undermine any real sense of significant difference between the various constitutive elements of that diversity? From locating a possible means
by which the continuity of separate religious traditions may be maintained throughout the various phases of their development, do we not automatically move on to discover in that means a common element which would threaten to merge particular traditions in religion as such? If religions are indeed grounded in experience of totality, how could they then be viewed as different? For if two (or three or four) views are genuinely all encompassing then they are bound to be identical. At this point the religionist might, perhaps, want to reformulate his second primary question. Instead of asking, "Why is there a variety of religious world certainties?", he may now feel more inclined to ask, "Is there a variety of religious world certainties?"

On the one hand our arguments up to this point would suggest that religions are commonly grounded in an experience of totality which seems to render them in some important sense the same (which allows them to be grouped together as religions in the first place). On the other hand, as the most cursory acquaintance with the hall of mirrors shows, the various religions of mankind seem to offer pictures of the world which, in equally important ways, seem to be different. A question of great significance for the religionist (both for his survey of the world certainties available and for his own decision regarding them) is thus: "To what extent can religions be considered similar and to what extent different?", and a vital part of any future work he undertakes would seem
inevitably to include trying to establish criteria of likeness which could establish the degree of similarity and dissimilarity between the various religions. We can do little more than indicate the need for such an exercise here, for clearly it would be a complex and difficult undertaking. However, two possible pointers to the direction which future inquiries might take may be derived from our deliberations so far on the characteristics of radical unlikeness. Both provide ways to make sense of a situation where a diversity of views arises from a single locus.

Firstly, we might, quite simply, point to the effect which radical unlikeness has in multiplying models without end, and suggest that the different religions are themselves just large scale outcomes of the expressive urgency and "restlessness" which accompanies experience of totality and which is found repeated at secondary and tertiary levels in intra- and meta-religious diversity. To have a single religious world certainty would, according to this view, contradict its claim to originate in a legitimately ineffable experience, in which case religion would lose all element of mystery and become instead straightforwardly expressible. Although neatly making sense of a situation where a common experience gives rise to numerous different readings, such an account would need to give some thought to the question of why the "endless" multiplication of models occurs within the quantitative and qualitative boundaries which it does - for clearly there are not an
infinite number of different religions, nor does "religion" have an indiscriminately wide field of application. Such a problem does not, however, seem insurmountable, indeed we might argue that it simply re-emphasizes that the ineffability involved here is of a qualified rather than an absolute type.

Secondly, we might remind ourselves that sense was made of religious ineffability in the first place by suggesting a near total experience, a point on the scale of inclusiveness which complied with the logical criteria demanded of something for it to be possible for us to be aware of it. We might thus attempt an explanation of religious diversity (in the face of its apparently common starting point) based on an asymptotic unevenness, suggesting that the views of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam etc. acquire their differences from the different elements included in their near totality. Thus, taking totality to be represented by the scale of one to ten, Hinduism might be seen as being grounded on experience of 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10, Buddhism on experience of 1-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10, and so on. The resulting dissimilarities are thus centred not on different types of experience, but on different types of completeness as regards the same experience.

In terms of making a world decision, would it — according to these sorts of views of religious diversity — make the slightest difference which world certainty was chosen (assuming that, at the end of the day, the religionist
did decide to opt for a religious outlook)? The answer here would seem to revolve around another question, and a question which we can, again, do no more than mention here, namely: are the various "models" thrown up by religious experience of equal adequacy? This may be translated into: are the various religious traditions each based on the same degree (as opposed to the same elements) of inclusiveness? (Or, returning to our decimal analogy, might Hinduism offer a model consisting of 1-7-9-10 whilst Islam offers one consisting of 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10?). In making a world decision the religionist must then presumably be guided by the degree of inclusiveness present in, or underlying, the various options before him. But how could this be established? - for to work out accurate evaluative criteria here would require an independent and total (not near total) purview. The third primary question (to what extent are religions accessible to study?) is therefore raised with great force once again\(^{(66)}\).

(v) "Like" is the obvious means by which to anchor something new or to intellectually neutralize the disturbing disruptiveness of the apparently alien\(^{(67)}\). We use it as a stop-gap in the insistent quest for a meaning which each conscious moment potentially promotes. Comparison provides a bulwark against the persistent "why?" which continually dogs our existence as world uncertain beings. Bound up in a cocoon of comparisons we can almost indefinitely postpone exploring the chasm of uncertainty beneath this safety net
of ultimately specious similarities. In a sense, "like" masks the mystery implicit in all being by deflecting the search for ultimate meaning into a search for immediately clarifying similarities. Now a definite danger of comparative religion\(^{(68)}\) to which attention should be brought, is that by concentrating on establishing and exploring inter-religious likenesses it may obscure the radical unlikeness of religious phenomena; and in thus ignoring a central characteristic of religion, offer a seriously misleading picture of it. Of course I am not suggesting that comparison in the study of religion should cease. However, it should be borne firmly in mind that such likenesses as may be established within comparative studies do not win religious phenomena a place within our understanding comparable to objects of more everyday concern. Statements found in the Old Testament, the Qur'an and the Upanishads, for example, may on occasions be alike, but at the end of the day they are alike only in so far as they all display the same radical unlikeness in relation to the non-religious elements of our outlook, and only in such polarity denying\(^{(69)}\) unlikeness can they provide the world certainties which we desire\(^{(70)}\).

(vi) Once more we come to an occasion on which the third of the religionist's primary questions is forcefully raised (i.e. to what extent are religions accessible to study?). For if we ground religious experience in radical unlikeness and locate the origin of such unlikeness in an experience of near totality (which results in an unceasing
round of ineffability and attempts at description), do we
not thereby preclude the possibility of the religionist
himself ever being able to reach any concrete and final
conclusions about his data? Are his studies not thus
sentenced to the same perpetual non-finality of interpre-
tation as is displayed by religion itself? If meta-
religious diversity simply mirrors - albeit at a greater
distance from the unlike and ineffable image - the necessary
non-finality found in religion, then is the religionist,
like the religions he studies, not obliged to "multiply
models without end"(71) rather than construct a single and
definitive picture?(72).

(viii) Summary

To sum up: I have suggested that, at root, religious
experience is "wholly other". That it is fundamentally
dissimilar to non-religious experience because of its
orientation towards (or contact with) the world taken as a
totality (or as near to a totality as is possible) and its
consequent encounter with the radically unlike. Such an
orientation results in the use of "qualifiers"(73) in any
conceptual/verbal attempt to apprehend it. Among those
qualifiers (words which are not normally applied to everyday
phenomena, such as "eternal", "immortal", "omniscient",
"omnipresent", etc.) is "ineffable". I have argued that
legitimate claims of ineffability can only issue from
experience of "radical unlikeness", i.e. from situations where none of our categories of comparison (by which we can normally build bridges from the known to the unknown and thus extend the ambit of our understanding) can be applied. There are, furthermore, only two possible situations to which radical unlikeness can legitimately apply. One is experience of a "wholly other" state or entity which is completely outside and independent of our cognitive territory, the other is experience of the totality of that territory seen in some sort of holistic and immediate way. There are no other possible loci in which the likeness on which comparison is founded could be denied all application. The former source is rejected on the grounds that we could not possibly experience such a thing, or point in any way to what such a thing would be like, whilst the latter is advanced as a logically feasible alternative since it occurs at the (albeit unreachable) end of a scale, rather than occurring completely out of context. If we accept the importance of the ineffable/mysterious element in religions, and if we locate its origin in an experience of perpetually generative radical unlikeness (which, being constituted by some sort of holistic experience, fuses all the polarities whose multiple twinned tendrils snake their way through the very fabric of existence, simultaneously shaking our cognitive system and creating a sense of world certainty), then a situation of religious diversity is to be expected(74).
The religionist might reflect that just as he and his kind create various interpretations of religious phenomena in an attempt to understand them, so such phenomena are, in their turn, also interpretative endeavours geared towards making an adequate statement of world certainty. Both encounter and respond to some underlying and generating experience of radical unlikeness at differing levels of directness. We could, perhaps, picture the whole sphere of mankind's religious experience as a yantra-like diagram, with the various aspects of Religious Studies mapping and testing the directional reliability of that always multiplying mesh of interweaving triangles (provided by the religions) which draw the inquirer ever inwards, pointing to, but unable to intrude directly on, the unmapped (though located) generative emptiness at centre. There all the opposing poles seem fused and confused. Confronting such a locus, where the two hands of polarity seem clasped mysteriously together in an impenetrable but fecund totality,

Words strain
Crack and sometimes break under the burden
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.  (75)

Whether such a point can actually be reached through study remains uncertain. But though we may have left our interpolative religionist halted at the doors of the ineffable - and thus scarcely inside his subject - we have (via a different door, i.e. through answering his second,
rather than continuing with his first, primary question) sought to provide him with a clearer understanding of what the origins of the barrier which he faces may be. Once he goes beyond its portals (perhaps even if this is the intentional direction of his inquiries) it becomes unclear whether his utterances are to be taken as those of the scholar or those of the divine, for the holy seems to reside in (or perhaps to consist of) the radical unlikeness of totality. It is to this question of the relationship between being religious and studying religions that the next chapter is addressed.
"Dr. Mackenzie, you don't believe all this do you?"
"No, of course not. But Mr. Tolland, in Edinburgh we have a philosophers' club. At our dinners we talk a great deal about what others believe and have believed; but if any member uses the verb in the first or second person of the present tense, he has to pay a fine. He has to put a shilling in a skull on the mantel. We soon get out of the habit."

Thornton Wilder: The Eighth Day

It is one thing to believe in a reality beyond the senses and another to have experience of it also; it is one thing to have ideas of "the holy" and another to become consciously aware of it as an operative reality, intervening actively in the phenomenal world.

Rudolf Otto: The Idea of the Holy
(i) Preamble

This chapter is addressed specifically to the religionist's third primary question, namely that which asks: "To what extent are religions accessible to study?". More generally, it also considers the broader (and, of course, related) issue of the nature of the whole relationship which exists between studying religion and religion itself.

The third primary question consists of two interrogatory threads which must be carefully followed out in turn before any final answer to it can be given. They are:

1. What do we mean by "study"?

and

2. How can we gauge the accessibility of religions to it?

In attempting to reach answers here we must try to identify what the goal of Religious Studies is and then decide, given the nature of religion, whether or not (or the degree to which) it can be achieved. By juxtaposing aspiration and outcome in this way we will be able to establish the extent to which (if at all) the assumption of accessibility (on which all our endeavours must presumably be based) is in fact a legitimate one. I will thus turn my attention, firstly, to a consideration of what the religionist's goal might be taken to be, and, secondly, to suggesting possible criteria which might be applied in order to gauge the successfulness (actual or potential) of studies aiming for it. Only when both this goal and an evaluative scale showing our proximity to it have been established, will we be in a
position to determine the extent to which religion is open and the extent to which it is closed to study (and thus the extent to which engaging in such studies can be seen as an intelligible endeavour).

In a sense, the part of this chapter which deals with the third primary question (i.e. sections ii and iii) is simply a matter of making clear where the religionist stands after his attempts to answer the first and second of his primary questions. It is more an examination of conclusions already reached, a detailed re-tracing of our steps and a closer consideration of where they have led us, than a process of further advance and new discovery. For we have already suggested what we mean by study (interpolation); what the religionist's goal is (world decision); and we have also indicated something of what he might take the nature of religion to be (a scheme of world certainty based on some sort of totality-experience and thus possessing a central thread of ineffability/mystery). An answer to the third primary question has, in fact, already been given and could, it might be argued, simply be repeated here without further ado: religions are accessible to study (i.e. to interpolation, to "study" as it is understood by the mesmerized religionist attempting to solve the hall of mirrors dilemma) to the point at which we touch this ineffable/mysterious aspect of them, for, as we have seen, it is this aspect which seems (at least from our current theoretical standpoint)
to prevent our efforts at interglobal travel between the various religious worlds of meaning from penetrating to the heart of the diverse phenomena of which such worlds of meaning consist. Moreover, this same aspect is largely responsible for creating the problematic situation of the hall of mirrors in the first place. However, although we will arrive at the same conclusion eventually, our taking of the long way round ought not to be seen as a digression or as mere repetition. Rather it is a deliberate increase in magnification so that we may tease out, on a more detailed level, the implications which underlie such a conclusion but which would have been invisible to us in passing. In this way we seek to make more precise the scope and operation of those logical boundaries within which the religionist is located.

In view of the fact that — on "low power" magnification — we have covered this ground once before, what follows may have a certain air of artificiality in the way it poses and investigates questions which have, in one sense, been answered already. Any distorting feeling of déjà vu or of retreading old ground, which might therefore arise to test the reader's patience, must be set against the fact that knowing what the answer is does not necessarily mean that we realize precisely what it involves. It is to this latter issue that my focus of attention is directed here.

The second part of this chapter (i.e. sections iv - vii) is concerned to sketch out some important features of
the relationship between religion and Religious Studies, and this it seeks to do largely via a discussion of the "personal equation". This is an important factor both in terms of its influence on the outcome of specific studies and on the identity we subsequently give to the study of religion as a whole. One identity sometimes voiced for it, which attracts our particular attention, is that which sees studying religions as in some way being a religious endeavour itself, a view which gives this question of how study and area studied ought to be seen in relation to each other a special urgency. We attempt to sum up our standpoint here by offering a brief characterization of "religionist" and "religion", thereby suggesting an overall mapping between student and subject from which the important points of their relationship may be read off. To the extent that this discussion tends more towards providing a detailed statement of how this relationship obtains in the situation which we have summed up in the analogy of the hall of mirrors, rather than towards suggesting any generally valid schema, we are - as with our answer to the third primary question - once more concerned with consolidation rather than straightforward advance. In justifying such apparent "marching on the spot" (though I would vigorously deny the analogy's connotations of stagnation) I would remind the reader that the next step directly forwards is one which demands its own full scale work - namely the application of
interpolative principles of procedure to particular areas of interest. The present study is simply a methodological prolegomenon, a theoretical testing of the ground before such a venture is actually embarked upon. As such, it can only go so far and ought not to be expected to reach a final destination\(^1\).

Of central relevance to this chapter is the area of discussion commonly referred to under the heading "Neutrality and Commitment", for both the success of any inquiry into religious phenomena and the attempt to provide any sort of demarcation between being religious and being a religionist would seem in some quite important way to depend upon the proportionate existence and influence of the two basic factors indicated (roughly and inadequately) by these terms. It is my contention that there are more links between so called neutrality and commitment than might be imagined and that if we view them simplistically as two irreconcilably opposed elements, one characteristic of student and discipline, the other of believer and subject (i.e. according to what we called the "bisectionist fallacy" in Chapter One), then we risk paying a tithe, in terms of understanding, to a deadening notion of methodological objectivity, the application of which without supplement cannot be considered adequate either as a method for our explorations of the religious realm or as providing an accurate pointer to the nature of our inquiries in that realm. Rather than filling a skull on the mantel
with a miser's hoard of silver, I suggest that we use the wealth of our own feelings to breathe life into our inquiries (yet without at the same time simply creating subjective doppelgängers to haunt and obstruct the search for truth). In the course of the following pages I hope to further substantiate this suggestion, which the procedure of interpolation - discussed in Chapter Four - seeks to embody in its work.

(ii) What do we mean by "study"?

I do not wish to offer a definition of "study" which sets itself up as a standard point of reference outside of whose catchment area nothing can legitimately claim that title. My aim is rather to locate a fixed point on an otherwise sliding scale so that a clear estimation of value relevant to the present discussion may be reached. I have no wish to substitute for this sliding scale any rigid system which allows only a single calibration. Our fixed point will be of use to the religionist as I have presented him here in assessing the degree to which his endeavours are possible and, if they are possible, whether they are heading in the right direction. It may not likewise serve those who seek to operate outside the context of the hall of mirrors (and who may thus have quite different goals in mind). Although we may reject as circumscribed, incomplete, impoverished, inadequate, or inaccurate - as ignoring vital aspects of their own data and practitioners - those
studies of religion which take no notice of the mesmerized religionist's dilemma, but instead focus all their efforts on amassing descriptive catalogues about religious phenomena, without concern for questions of truth or value, it would seem unwarranted to deny them the title of "study" if this is the identity they claim. For the word "study" has two basic senses relevant to this realm of discourse, to either one of which any particular study may look for validation of its status as such. Although clearly inter-related, the two senses do not overlap completely. The first - "To think intently, to meditate, to reflect upon" - is that from which our own understanding of what is involved is derived. The second - "Pursuing one's education at a university or some other establishment" - is that from which, so we must assume, understandings of Religious Studies which seek a purely descriptive or historical field of interest stem. In the sense of study as "thinking intently about something", a study of religion which drew the line at discussing questions of truth and falsity might be considered ill qualified to merit this title - since to prevent thinking from focusing on the implications of its own findings would seem inevitably to blunt its intensity and so to that extent it would fail to satisfy the definition of study involved. But in an academic sense it is important, on the other hand, (for purely practical purposes) to set definite limits within which particular areas of education are to be pursued.
Thus, as we have already seen, the specialization involved in institutionalized learning sometimes obscures that "aboriginal" interest which lies at the root of any discipline. In Religious Studies, however, such obscuring seems to have particularly serious consequences.

Although arising out of the context of an academic setting, my concern is not to provide a curriculum for, or to critically examine and map out, what the aims and activities of Religious Studies at a university level are or should be (beyond, perhaps, suggesting that for it to ignore the hall of mirrors dilemma altogether may be more a blinkering than a focusing of interest). My approach (concerned as it is to re-establish the sometimes forgotten sense of Religious Studies as a natural endeavour of Everyman set amidst a perceived diversity of beliefs) derives its understanding of "study" more from its general than its academic sense - thus my reluctance to suggest any constraints in terms of engaging in an evaluation of the data, constraints which would be quite incompatible with this understanding. In short, assessing the degree to which religions are accessible to study depends a great deal on how we view "study" in this context, and different answers will be forthcoming according to how we define it (and, of course, according to how we define religion too). Rather than trying to lay down an immutable and unvarying standard to which all efforts must apply, I want only to clarify what study must be if it is to be considered
adequate by *homo religiosus* in offering an answer to the first (and most important) of his primary questions. It is, perhaps, arguable that the mesmerized religionist's interpolative endeavours would be *better* described by some word other than "study", and it might make an interesting future exercise to try to find some generic term for them which did not have a genealogy of tension between our natural and organized interest in religion\(^2\). But in the meantime it serves as a quite legitimate sobriquet and it is one which I will continue to use. It may, however, be as well to stress the reflexive element in our present sub-heading - "what do we mean by study?" (not what is meant by study, what does study mean etc.). This denial of claiming some sort of general authority made, what, then, do we mean by this word?

I think the clearest and easiest way to establish this is to identify the goal which is being aimed for under the heading "studying religions", and it is in the method which is sought or practised that we will find the clearest indication of what that goal might be (for, at the end of the day, method is simply a systematized programme for the efficient reaching of some desired goal). In Chapter Four we drew attention to two strata of concern which seem to animate the search for a method in the study of religions and which can be seen in different tensive alignments throughout the history of the subject, rendering most attempts at formulating a method liable to a sense of
unsatisfactoriness and indeed being largely responsible for "the methodological quagmire that threatens to confuse and sometimes undermine the field of study"(3). The first seeks to establish or ensure the academic integrity of the discipline (variously named Religious Studies, Comparative Religion, Science of Religion, etc.) in terms of the accuracy it can bring to the understanding, collection and dissemination of its chosen area of information, whereas the second seeks more to establish or ensure the integrity of the individual considered as homo religiosus, in face of the amount and diversity of information about religions which this discipline has uncovered. Although part of the difficulty in locating a satisfactory method in Religious Studies (and thus in seeing clearly what its goal is) lies simply in its need for many contributory methods rather than a single one, perhaps a more substantial barrier to the establishment of a sound methodological basis for the subject - beyond a first stage level of naive fact gathering - lies in the tension which is generated by the different directions in which these two strata of concern tend to pull: one towards objectivity, neutrality and uninvolved description, the other towards subjectivity, commitment and imaginative re-enactment. They present, in other words,

a tension between our need to believe and our concern to keep our beliefs from standing between us and the truth. (4)

But how, in the face of such tension, are we to formulate
a method (and thus identify a goal, which in turn will point to the nature of study in this field and so enable us to determine the degree to which its subject matter is in fact accessible to it)?

Perhaps the easiest (and certainly the most common) way to resolve this method and goal disruptive tension is to separate the two elements involved and choose to follow the beckonings of one set of demands under one heading and those of the other set under another, setting between them the bared sword of definition so that, for example, Religious Studies will be undefiled by theology (and, of course, vice versa). In this way we get two separate lines of inquiry altogether, each with its own carefully staked out territory. Thus the study of religion might be seen as having a focus of interest which is quite distinct from that of theology:

not our own religion but foreign religions in all their manifoldness are its subject matter. It does not ask the question 'what must I believe?' but 'what is there to be believed?' (5)

And the methods employed will diverge from each other according to which of these goals is sought. Thus while Religious Studies seek to describe how people have been, and are, religious, the task of theology is to prescribe how people ought to be religious. (6)

According to this sort of view the theologian might be seen as someone who prays, the religionist as someone who watches (7) and once these roles of participator and
spectator are accepted then the stage is set for that bisection of concern which Cantwell Smith suggests:

    Heaven and hell, to a believer, are stupendous places into one or other of which irretrievably he is about to step. To an observer, they are items in the believer's mind. To the believer, they are parts of the universe; to the observer they are parts of religion. (8)

Thus a wedge is neatly driven between the concerns of religionist and those of believer, and study (academic or theological in nature) may apparently be pursued on each side of the divide without the disrupting tension of two apparently opposing aims being felt. Study becomes descriptive or prescriptive according to which goal we are aiming at (i.e. discovering how to be religious or discovering the different ways in which it is possible to be religious).

Another way in which to resolve the tension between our need to believe and our desire to keep our beliefs from obstructing the accumulation of information and the search for truth, is to try to find some means of approach which steers a mediating course between the two sets of demands and somehow satisfies them both. In contrast to the division between Religious Studies and theology which results from separating religionist and believer, the result of attempted mediation between the concerns of both is that these disciplines tend to converge. Thus we find Donald Heinz confidently asserting that
we must theologize if we are to
match the dimensions of our
subject matter. (9)

And in Paul Wiebe's three stage recommendation of the path
which Religious Studies ought to follow, the final and
constructive phase is that of theology - which must
henceforth be seen as

that area of the study of
religion in which the question
of truth is asked and answered. (10)

Such points of view receive support from Charles Davis's
important paper "The Reconvergence of Theology and
Religious Studies" (which perhaps offers the most
interesting recent discussion of the relationship
between these two disciplinary standpoints). According
to Davis:

the insistence upon the distinction
between theology and religious
studies has served its purpose.
It is now out-dated. The chief
reason for the insistence was
institutional, namely the need to
make clear to academia on the one
hand and the church on the other
that the study of religion in the
universities was independent of
external ecclesiastical control
and governed by internal intellect-
ual criteria. Apart from
anachronistic survivals and
pockets of prejudice the point has
now been carried. (11)

And he explains his contention that the unification of
theology and Religious Studies would be of mutual benefit
to both parties (in terms of an increase in the clarity
and honesty of their procedures), by arguing that in such a
convergent state.
theology would acknowledge that the other disciplines studying religion are carrying out an indispensable part of its own theological task: religious studies would admit that the questions of truth and value raised by theology can no longer be evaded without contamination by bad or inadequately examined philosophy and theology. (12)

A systematic discussion of the merits of each of the possible strategies for resolving that method-disruptive tension in Religious Studies which stems from our need to believe and our desire not to let our beliefs stand in the way of our search for truth, would simply take too long to consider going into here. The outcome of such a discussion would, I think, be one of polarization between two standpoints, for, from the point of view of homo religiousus, pursuing study in the sense of thinking intently about religions, the resolving strategy chosen would seem unlikely to fit in with that of homo academicus, pursuing study in an academic context (and vice versa). For in one case we are faced with a concern of such centrality as to find it impinging on the territories of theology, philosophy, psychology, history, etc. and in the other with a concern to establish clear disciplinary boundaries each with its own area of inquiry and authority. Although to see man thus in separate religious and academic guises is to go along with the bisectionist fallacy, we must distinguish between ideal and existing states of affairs and remember that there are very good historical reasons for
most of the fallacious "bisections" found in this field. Davis's argument draws attention to these reasons by reminding us that in its university setting the nature of the study of religions (Religious Studies Comparative Religion, Science of Religion etc.) has been importantly influenced by the need to disassociate itself from theology in terms of the methodological presuppositions with which it begins its work. Being independent of external ecclesiastical control and being governed by internal intellectual criteria has meant, in particular, that the claim of any religion to uniquely validating revelation has been disregarded, at least in terms of its automatically establishing at the outset of any inquiry the ultimate and perfect truth beyond which (or into which) no investigation has any need or right to go. However, we might do well to consider whether it is not now time to seriously question whether this disassociation, necessary for the very establishment of Religious Studies, has not itself become something of an anachronism which threatens to cloud or circumscribe our understanding. Obviously some elements of some theologies are still quite unsuitable to consider placing under the rubric of "studying religions", but other elements are not and it would seem unproductive to insist on separating what might in fact be a single interest for the sake of continuing a blood feud whose relevance is now past. At the same time it would clearly not be easy to persuade religionists that theology forms the final stage
of their studies, or to convince theologians that their work must be grounded on the prolegomenon of Religious Studies.

However, this is merely noted in passing, for, as I have already pointed out, it is not my concern to try to define what Religious Studies (or theology for that matter) ought to be for the purposes of a coherent university curriculum. I am concerned, rather, to determine the choice of strategy for resolving the tension between need to believe and desire to investigate which will be adequate to the situation of the mesmerized religionist, such choice of strategy being indicative of the goal which he seeks (and so serving to define the nature of his study). For such a figure there is no question of which strategy to adopt. If he had successfully taken the first (divisive) one he would not be in the predicament in which I have portrayed him. If he wishes successfully to resolve the dilemma of mesmerization then clearly he can neither opt for a method which tells him only what there is to believe without suggesting what from among the options he ought to believe, or for one which tells him only what he ought to believe without having mapped out and carefully considered all available alternatives. One without the other is simply useless for his particular plight. His predicament, his being in the hall of mirrors in the first place, suggests most strongly that
the science of religion ... if it is not to end in sterile opposition of different options, has to be completed by philosophico-theological discourse. (13)

And, conversely, such discourse - if it is not to end up discussing a single option in ignorance of the alternatives - must be prefaced by the science of religion. In other words, the figure of the mesmerized religionist in the hall of mirrors questions the usefulness of adopting a bisectionist strategy and thus points us in the direction of a "reconvergence" between Religious Studies and theology, whether or not this is seen as trespass by those for whom the concerns of study and belief are separate and irreconcilable, and regardless of the difficulties such a move may have for the subject (and for the student) in terms of organization in a university setting. It was in accordance with this choice that the methodological recommendations of the procedure we have called "interpolation" were formulated.

What, then, is the goal which such methodological recommendations seek to reach? Taking both elements of the tension underlying our interest in religion into account, I think it might be formulated thus: to reach a standpoint of informedness from which a world decision may legitimately be made in terms of adopting (or continuing to hold) one of, rejecting all of, or engaging in a process of selective acceptance and rejection concerning the constituent elements of, the various world
certainties offered by the religions. The goal is one where the search for truth (about the human situation as it is viewed religiously) and the search for what to believe about, and therefore how to act in, that situation seem to reach a point of natural convergence. For clearly until we have covered all the relevant ground we cannot make a valid world decision and once that ground has been covered then the need for a decision about what to believe follows on automatically. It would simply be inadequate to the conditions of this setting to believe in something without having taken all the relevant data into consideration, or to survey that data and then refuse to take anything but a neutral stance. Huston Smith may talk of a tension between our need to believe and our concern to keep our beliefs from standing between us and the truth (see the quotation above), but it is important to remember that the tension is focused on the danger of arriving at a belief before we have arrived at the truth (i.e. in subscribing to a fallacious belief), not between the two concepts as such, which, ideally, from the standpoint of homo religiosus, ought to interlock in binding unison. The principle of interpolation seeks to suspend belief until we are in a position to see what there is to believe. It does not seek to permanently sunder investigation and commitment. It would, moreover, be a mistake to imagine that once we had arrived at a conception of what was true our beliefs were then set rock hard and became immune to any change. For the possibility always remains
that we have been insufficiently perceptive or inclusive in our meditations. But the realization that we could be mistaken is not incompatible with making a world decision. Thus as Trigg points out,

I can be totally committed and at the same time admit that I might be wrong. I am, however, basing my life on the assumption that I am not. (14)

World decision (or commitment) on which to base a life is an ambitious goal, perhaps even an over-ambitious and unrealistic one which will not be particularly useful to us, for if the success of a study of religion is to be gauged according to whether or not it has been achieved, then clearly almost all work done to date must be seen as having failed, religion must be deemed inaccessible to study and the chances of the mesmerized religionist ever escaping from the hall of mirrors must, in consequence, seem somewhat slight. But what other goal would do? How else, except by making a world decision, could he escape? Rather than abandoning this goal in view of the immense difficulty in reaching it, I want instead to suggest a means of gauging the degree to which a study of religion might be considered successful in relation to it, or, more importantly, to what extent it may be said to be aiming in the right direction to attain it. For in attempting to provide criteria of success (in order to ascertain how far it can be claimed that religion is accessible to study) my intention is more to provide a means by which we may discover
whether any particular endeavour is correctly on target, rather than to dole out places in a scale of honours according to who has shot bulls'-eyes and who has missed the target altogether. The main point, then, of establishing criteria by which to gauge the accessibility of religions to study (criteria which will be suggested in the next section), is to establish clear reminders of the direction in which the Religious Studies of homo religiosus ought to be heading.

And, as regards the difficulty of this goal, we might, perhaps, bear in mind that - regardless of its particular suitability - if a less difficult one was chosen we could well be left in the interesting (if somewhat embarrassing) position of having to explain why students who had achieved it were still pursuing their studies. For surely the natural end of any inquiry is marked by the achieving of the goal which it was aiming for. Not only has a crucial point been reached with the question "when is the study of religion to be considered adequate?", as Waardenburg quite rightly notes (15), but also when we ask "when is the study of religion to be considered complete?". For, without some sort of evaluative or directive criteria with which to judge our work, we would be in the strange position of not knowing when to stop and when (and to what extent) to go on. We would, in other words, risk making our inquiries aimless.

I am suggesting that, from the point of view of the mesmerized religionist, neither concern for study without
concern for what to believe, or a vice versa arrangement, can provide intellectual or religious options adequate to the dimensions of his dilemma. The concerns of each are intermeshed to the extent that if he seeks to tear them apart both will sustain serious damage. His religious education has taken him to a point where study without concern for what to believe can only proceed if he ignores vital aspects both of his subject matter and of himself (i.e. the whole nexus of world uncertainty and world certainty in which man and his religions seem to stand in dynamic inter-relationship), and where belief without concern for the findings of his studies could only be maintained with a deliberate recourse to ignorance. In terms of making a world decision, in terms of being religious or non-religious, we might even consider taking the view that so much more complex and difficult is the decision required of the man who has traversed the multi-reflecting length of the hall of mirrors than that of the man who is, in comparison, religiously uninformed, that their ensuing religiousness (or non-religiousness) will be importantly different. In discussing two such different individual world decisions (or rather, since the world decisions could be the same, two such different sets of conditions behind them) would we simply be talking about intellectual and non-intellectual believers or about a more profound distinction - educated and uneducated, responsible and irresponsible, justified and unjustified?
At this point we would do well to remember Cantwell Smith's thought provoking comment:

Unless a Christian can contrive intellectually and spiritually to be a Christian not merely in a Christian society but in the world; unless a Muslim can be a Muslim in the world; unless a Buddhist can carve a satisfactory place for himself as a Buddhist in a world in which other intelligent, sensitive, educated men are Christians and Muslims — unless, I say, we can together solve the intellectual and spiritual questions posed by comparative religion, then I do not see how a man is to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist at all. (16)

To sum up: our answer to the first interrogatory thread of the religionist's third primary question is that by "study" we mean in this context the disciplined interpolative effort of the mesmerized religionist to reach a world decision. We must now move on to examine the second interrogatory thread, namely, "how can we gauge the accessibility of religions to study?" (to study viewed, that is, as work aiming for this goal).

(iii) How Can we Gauge the Accessibility of Religions to Study?

Under the title of "interpolation" we grouped together a number of methodological proposals which sought to provide a procedure which offered a synthesis between those foci of concern from which the method-disrupting tension in Religious Studies first originates. Interpolation is geared to achieving that goal which alone, so we have
suggested, can adequately solve the hall of mirrors dilemma. It is aimed, in other words, at reaching a standpoint of sufficient religious informedness, of "really knowing" about religions, from which a world decision might legitimately be made. It involves going back to the data, to the constituent mass of diverse information which makes up the many images with which the religionist is confronted, but rather than attempting merely to acquire further information about them it focuses its inquiry - via a beginnings orientated approach - on showing how particular world certainties offer to their adherents a compelling picture of the human situation, allowing the religionist himself to feel something of that compulsion in his own attempt to see things according to their outlooks. Throughout this inter-global travel between different worlds of religious meaning it is borne in mind that the religionist is affected by, and interested in resolving, the conflicting impulses of world uncertainty and world certainty which his study taps (from both the data and himself).

Interpolation was advanced neither as a method nor as the method (in line with the need for poly-methodicity in this field), rather it was presented as a methodological overview, as a procedure (perhaps almost a code of conduct) which might inform, integrate and direct all the religionist's particular inquiries and provide a means by which he might reach his goal of world certainty.
However, although thus apparently satisfying the initial methodological requirements needed for the study of religions to proceed beyond its own potentially divisive inner tensions, interpolation would appear (from our theoretical standpoint; certainty must await application) to encounter an impasse in the shape of the ineffable (as indeed any investigative approach would seem to do). The element of ineffability/mystery found in religion is, we have suggested, vital for a proper understanding of it - for it is from somewhere within this element that, at the end of the day, the meaning and significance of all religious phenomena seems to stem and from which the perplexing diversity encountered in the hall of mirrors also derives its source (ineffability acting to "repulse" the sort of neat finality consonant with singleness).

The question is thus bound to be raised "to what extent are religions accessible to study?", for if the procedure which we design specifically to overcome the tensions implicit in this field (and to take us towards a satisfactory goal) cannot itself move beyond a certain point in the data (and if, moreover, that point in the data seems also to be the originative locus of its mesmerizing multiplicity) then it is clear that the possibility, perhaps even the intelligibility, of our studies is seriously challenged. Granted, religions are accessible to study to the extent of such an endeavour discovering that about them which leads the religionist
into the hall of mirrors in the first place, but are they accessible beyond that? Can the religionist hope to progress (via interpolative study) from a point of being informed about a series of possible world certainties to a standpoint of decision concerning them?

Given our identification of the tension which seems to underlie our interest in religion, its resolution for homo religiosus at a point of convergence between information and decision (towards which our recommended procedure of interpolation aims) and our casting of the ineffable/mysterious in so central and perplexing a role, the scale upon which to measure the success of our study (and so to measure the accessibility of religions to it) would appear to be that which is marked out by degree of acquaintance with, or proximity to, this central element of ineffability/mystery.

Our success in satisfying the desiderata of the two strata of concern operating in this area may, I think, be assessed against slightly different calibrations (whilst still remaining with the same basic unit of measurement and remembering that aimed for singly they lose their relevance for the mesmerized religionist in the hall of mirrors). Thus concern for the discipline, for acquiring systematic information about religion, would be best evaluated according to how clearly and how widely it mapped out the extent and location of ineffability in the phenomena under study, showing its pervasive, if not
generating, influence on them. Apart from the degree to which the ineffable (or the mysterious, or the holy, or the numinous - again I am using these terms roughly and interchangeably) may be mapped out amidst the assemblage of history, myth, symbol, philosophy etc. which constitutes a single religious tradition, a second "marker" for the success of the first stratum of concern is that of acquaintance with the diversity of religious beliefs. For, as we have shown in Chapter Five, this diversity also stems from the ineffable, although its action here is not so immediately obvious. In short, we might consider an exercise in Religious Studies to be successful in satisfying its initial stratum of concern if it leads the religionist to encounter the ineffable "directly" (in terms of its underlying particular religious phenomena) and "indirectly" (in terms of its underlying religious diversity).

The second stratum of concern (that is, concern for the individual religionist as homo religiosus, concern to make a legitimate world decision) cannot be satisfied simply with a knowledge of the extent and influence of the ineffable/mysterious element in religious phenomena, it needs rather to experience at first hand what that element contains, for it is from its translucent centre that the meaning of the phenomena he has investigated seems finally to come and from which point alone the religionist may thus see what is really there. The second stratum of concern seeks not so much to map out the course of the ineffable/mysterious stream(s) which seem(s) to run beneath the whole religious realm, rather it seeks by following that map to
descend to the level of generative immediacy (to study roots rather than branches) and consider from there the nature of the world certainties offered. For the compelling nature of world certainty, the reason why people become committed to it, seems to stem from what Otto described as constituting the "real innermost core"\(^{17}\) of religion, rather than arising from the superstructure erected around it. Or, to go back to our analogy of the yantra, the religionist is concerned with any particular religious outlook (i) to map out the lines leading ever inwards, so that (ii) by following these he may eventually discover for himself the nature of the eye of the religious storm. It is only from here that he will be able finally to appreciate the meaning and judge the appropriateness of the lines which, stemming from it, seek to present a picture of the world certainty which experience of radical unlikeness seems to result in.

I would stress again that in assessing whether or not - or the degree to which - any particular study is to be considered successful, the aims of both strata of concern must be taken into consideration. Thus, if from the outset a study concentrates on only one of these, if it attempts, say, to be purely descriptive concerning the location of the ineffable, or if it seeks to make a world decision without first considering the options involved (or, analogically: if it insists on endless mapping without any travel, or on arriving at its final destination by sticking a pin in an unmapped area, or, indeed, if it
simply remains exactly in its original position) then however successful it may be on that count it can, at the very best, only be thought of as scoring half marks - and this providing it is done with the intention of attending to the excluded stratum of concern eventually (and subjecting whatever results it may have reached to the questions which that stratum may raise), otherwise it scores zero. For, from the point of view of the religion-ist in the hall of mirrors, it is simply useless to stress one side of the endeavour only.

In the study of religious phenomena (as it is of use to the mesmerized religionist) two sets of hopes, values, designs and expectations are in mutually sense giving operation side by side, merging to suggest a single goal. We could, perhaps, see them as attempts to apprehend at first and at second hand a single thing - i.e. the nature of radical unlikeness - and it is according to how far we can expect the goal of world decision to be reached via a process of interpolation (aimed at understanding experience of the radically unlike) that we may answer the question "to what extent are religions accessible to study?". It is in terms of the criteria of knowledge concerning or direct experience of the ineffable/mysterious, that "extent" can here be calibrated more finely. How far, then, in terms of these criteria, might interpolation be considered to succeed and might we thus assess the accessibility of religion to it? It seems reasonable to assume that the
first stratum of concern might be satisfied reasonably completely, since it relies on plotting out the location and influence of ineffability indirectly, by a process of negative implication, i.e. by studying what can be said about that which is essentially unsayable. However, the possibility of satisfying the second stratum of concern seems less certain, for this relies on experiencing (on "feeling the living power of" (18) to use Smart's phrase) something which by all accounts although powerful (perhaps all-powerful) is also peculiarly elusive. Again we must be content to provide the framework of conditions within which any final answer might be given, rather than providing an actual answer (for that we must wait and see how interpolation works in practice). In the meantime, though, we might take fright or consolation (it is difficult to know which reaction is more appropriate) from the accounts of those investigators like David Kinsley who, through their work, (which embodies some of the elements of interpolation in its methodology) do seem to come - uncomfortably/blessedly - close to some aspects of the tremendum which is apparently at work in this area.

Our answer to the religionist's third primary question is thus: religions are accessible to study to the extent that that study can deal with the ineffable thread central to this area. Although perhaps coming perilously close to the tautologous (religions are accessible to study to the extent that religions are accessible to study) I think
that at this stage in our endeavours this is the best answer that can be given - and the one most likely to be of use in keeping our inquiries correctly on course once they have begun. For if we lose sight of the centrality of the ineffable our inquiries risk becoming historical, sociological, psychological, etc. rather than Religious Studies.

Before going on to consider something of the overall relationship between studying religion and religion itself, I would like to close this section of our discussion by briefly stating and replying to five possible objections to the way in which I have suggested the accessibility of religions to study may be gauged:

1. **Objection**: A criterion for the success of studying religions which is based on proximity to the ineffable seems to invite a dangerously anarchistic view of Religious Studies, one in which historical accuracy and philosophical rigour would be sacrificed to the vagueness and vagaries of a process of mystification where claims that "nothing can be said" would replace any sort of reliable religious informedness.

**Reply**: We can avoid this potential pitfall by being careful not to confuse the process of locating the ineffable with the ineffable itself. Just as it requires a lengthy process of learning - as opposed to untutored ignorance - to appreciate how little we know, so the recognition of the centrality of the ineffable in the religious realm
requires a comprehensive and detailed acquaintance with (an extensive "talking about") those multi-various phenomena which it underlies and generates. To reach the centre, to see where the otherwise invisible heart beats, we must first map out and then traverse an extensive and inwardly spiralling periphery, and such a process will require all the scope and incisiveness of historical and philosophical investigation if it is not to go astray. To voice the "conclusion" of ineffability apart from the steps needed to locate (and, perhaps, experience) it, or, more seriously, to voice it as proof that the steps lead nowhere and may be dispensed with altogether, is — from the point of view of the religionist in the hall of mirrors — simply unfounded. As de Lubac put it, "nothing is worse than a premature negative theology" (19). We may eventually decide that such a theology provides the most adequate structure within which to articulate the insights of religious experience, but in the meantime there is a great deal which can be said about religion in spite of the centrality of the ineffable and the logical difficulties which attend it. (Moreover, such an objection ignores our requirement of becoming acquainted with the ineffable "indirectly", via a knowledge of diversity.)

2. Objection: Supposing that religion were wholly accessible to study in the sense of allowing the religionist to feel directly that "innermost core" from which the power of particular world certainties seems to stem,
supposing, that is, that interpolation was completely successful in taking the religionist to a point from where a world decision might be made, where he could experience some node of radical unlikeness directly, would our process of investigation not then be stopped? Are we not, in other words, advocating as our goal (and as the criterion by which to gauge the accessibility of religion to study and thus determine the success of our methodology) the reaching of a situation in which the two strata of concern underlying our interest in religion (whose potential tension we have been at pains to resolve) are automatically set in opposition again?

Reply: Any reflections as to what might happen if the religionist were, through his studies, to be brought into direct contact with some absolute state or entity, if he were to experience directly some node of radical unlikeness, must remain somewhat speculative, since this is an area of which it can quite literally be said that it is shrouded in mystery (not to say anything of the philosophical controversy which also accompanies it). It is here that we come near to the very roots of man's religiousness and the deeper we go the more disrupting pressures and impenetrable complexities seem to be exerted upon our search for understanding. To suggest guidelines for an encounter with the holy may be on the same level of usefulness as advice given on how to survive a nuclear explosion. At the same time, presumptuous, useless or misguided as they might be, certain remarks do seem to be relevant. We
must, for instance, remember that if the religionist does experience that variously named source of religious experience for himself (rather than at "second hand" through his reading of accounts of it) he does so from a standpoint of poly-religious informedness. He is, in a sense, numenistically multi-lingual and the way in which he may conceptualize such an experience might well be different from that of someone approaching it from a standpoint of mono-religious informedness. He may, for example, be less likely to treat such experience as irrefutable proof of the correctness of a single religious language, seeing it rather as an indication of the common silence beneath the many names of God (in which case there is no reason to suppose that his endeavours to satisfy the first stratum of concern would be lessened by any sudden dogmatism).

Certainly our analysis of religious experience in terms of radical unlikeness would seem to suggest grounds for there being some sort of shared experiential basis beneath the various religions' claims of ineffability (for if we are really dealing with totality-experiences then any differences are automatically subsumed beneath the scale of inclusion), but clearly the whole question of whether there is a basic similarity or difference between the world's religions is an extremely difficult one which cannot be answered without extensive study. In a sense, I suppose the objection is asking if personal religious experience does not automatically make us religious in a way which automatically prevents us from being religionists.
(if only by taking away any need for us to be such). Any reply here must indicate the apparent variety of ways of being religious (this variety is underwritten by the experience involved), pointing to the different levels of compatibility between them and continuing study. Moreover, we would do well to remember that world uncertainty - which provides an important impetus for studying religions - is endemic to the human situation and is not liable to easy silencing by any experience, however "absolute" it might be.

3. Objection: Given our suggested goal and criterion of success for study in terms of acquaintance with (leading to direct experience of) the ineffable/mysterious thread which weaves through the religious phenomena encountered in the hall of mirrors and plays so vital a part in the pictures they reflect, are we not in fact concealing a value judgement about religion itself (indicating its goal and a way in which we may measure the extent to which it has been reached)? To put it bluntly, how can we escape, as a corollary of our suggested scheme, the idea that the more clearly, quickly or extensively ineffability is revealed in any religion/religious phenomena then the "better" that religion/religious phenomena must be?

Reply: If this objection were to be directed specifically against our choice of ineffability/mysteriousness as offering the best element by which to assess the success of Religious Studies and to calibrate the accessibility of
religions to such study, then I would suggest that it is simply mistaken (for with what could this element be adequately replaced?). If, on the other hand, the objection were to the fact that whatever way we choose to measure the success of our studies (and/or the accessibility of religions to them) we would also be implicitly judging religion, then I would suggest that it is incoherent - since this would be to demand a logical impossibility for the objection not to occur. Identifying the ineffable as the centrally important element of religion might, perhaps, be questioned. It does, however, seem beyond objection to take this central element (whatever we decide it may be) as the unit by which to calibrate our scale of success/accessibility. If we did otherwise we might find ourselves in the ridiculous position of assessing the state of study on its treatment of peripheral aspects of the data. Likewise it seems unavoidable to take as being the most important aspects of religion those which most strongly display this characteristic. Our criterion for success/accessibility, if it is to be reliable, is bound to be calibrated according to what we think most important in religion, and it follows that the presence or absence of that element in religion itself will indicate where we would range any particular religious phenomenon on a scale of value\(^{(20)}\).

4. **Objection:** Supposing that religions turned out not to be accessible to study, in the sense in which accessibility
has been outlined here, would the religionist then be obliged to abandon or modify his work in order to escape charges of unintelligibility?

Reply: If it could be conclusively demonstrated that interpolation did not in fact take us to (or towards) a point from which a world decision could be made, then clearly the mesmerized religionist would be well advised to abandon it and adopt some other procedure. However, it would be important not to abandon it prematurely and, given the extent and complexity of the religious phenomena which need to be investigated and the difficulty of the methodological principles necessitated by an interpolative procedure, we would need to be highly circumspect about accepting any outright rejection of interpolation if we did not want to confuse inaccessibility of subject matter with the ineptitude or impatience of the investigator. Making a world decision is not something we ought to expect to do easily.

5. Objection: In this section we have discussed what we mean by "study" and considered how the extent to which religions are accessible to it might be measured. Taking the second element of the chapter's title, it might, perhaps, be interesting to ask, using the same criteria, "to what extent are religions accessible to belief?". And, given the nature of the goal towards which the interpolative religionist is aiming, to consider whether there is any real difference between the aims of study thus conceived and belief.
Reply: I do not wish to offer any exhaustive analysis of "belief" here, it is a difficult and complicated concept any serious discussion of which would demand a lengthy aside. Moreover, I have already declared my intention of using "study" to cover the mesmerized religionist's endeavours, postponing until some later work the search for a title which might give more explicit attention to those dimensions of them which do seem to stand at least as close (if not closer) to the concerns of belief as to those of study (as this latter activity is commonly understood). Bearing these points of limitation in mind, I mean by "belief", for the purposes of this study, having taken a world decision. A religious believer is thus someone who has adopted a position of commitment as regards a religious world certainty. Such a position, if it is to be seen as a seriously grounded commitment, would seem to demand experience of the ineffable/mysterious aspect of religion which goes beyond that available to straightforward descriptive study, but towards which interpolation aims. As such, interpolation may lead to belief - indeed if it is successful it will lead to belief in the sense of some world decision being taken (although it may well be a non-religious one). Belief does not guarantee the accessibility of religion to the believer, in the sense of automatically informing him about all there is to know concerning his religion. It is obvious that a scholar of Hinduism will know more about Shaivism than the village
devotee. But in the sense of having experiential access to, in terms of "feeling the living power of" his religion, the devotee has access beyond that of the (non-interpolative) scholar. It is towards this point of access that interpolation aims, not with the intention of believing (although this may be the outcome) but with the intention of investigating further the nature and truth of any particular belief. It is important to note that, according to this understanding of belief, not all those who describe themselves as Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, or whatever, can be accepted as such by the religionist on equal terms. If experiential access to some manifestation of the radically unlike (God, Brahman, Tao, etc.) is taken as the mark of grounded belief, then the standpoint of some believers seems far less secure than that of others (and far less able to cast light for the religionist on the nature of that belief). As Otto pointed out, "it is one thing to believe in a reality beyond the senses and another to have experience of it also" (21). However, although it may seem unpalatable to try to "grade" believers in this way, it seems clear that Religious Studies must focus its attention on the experiential spearhead of the various traditions, rather than on what follows in their wake.

As Miguel de Unamuno remarked,

strictly speaking in Spain today, to be a Catholic, in the vast majority of cases, scarcely means more than not to be anything else. A Catholic is a man who, having been baptized, does not publicly abjure what is assumed, by a
social fiction, to be his faith; he does not think about it one way or the other, either to profess it or reject it, either to take up another faith, or even to seek one. (22)

If the religionist seeks an understanding of the world certainty of Catholicism, his attention must not be restricted to this majority of "believers". He is interested in world certainties, not in social fictions.

Although the "personal equation" (which is discussed in the next section) ought not to be seen solely in terms of belief understood in the straightforward sense of allegiance or commitment to some particular religion, such belief does nonetheless form an important part of it. I hope that our fifth objection may thus receive further elucidation there.

(iv) Solving the Personal Equation

This section derives its title from a term used by Morris Jastrow and it will be structured according to the answers it attempts to give to four questions arising from his contention that:

in the study of religion a factor that may be designated the personal equation enters into play. So strong is this factor that it is perhaps impossible to eliminate it altogether, but it is possible, and indeed essential, to keep it in check and under safe control. (23)

The four questions are:
- What, precisely, is this factor?
- Why is there a need to control it?
- How can it be controlled?

And, with special reference to our particular focus of interest,
- What part does it play in the context of the hall of mirrors?

What the Personal Equation is

The personal equation, as it is explained by Jastrow, refers to an individual's predilections (in particular his religious ones), to convictions of a type which query the possibility or desirability of an absolute impartiality of approach on the part of the student of religions, to mental dispositions which constitute a possible threat to the accuracy of any inquiry in this field yet which may in some way also provide invaluable reference points for our understanding of religion\(^{(24)}\). In short, the personal equation, as defined by Jastrow, might be summed up as belief prior to study, as the presence in one's outlook of those already existing religious elements which constitute the setting for potential prejudice against, and for potential insight into, religions which suggest an outlook different from that already held. Which of these settings is actually realized when we come to engage in Religious Studies will depend both on the precise nature of the elements involved (and these will be different in different individuals) and on the steps taken to control their influence.
It is all too easy to stress only the potentially prejudicial effect of the personal equation, whilst ignoring its possibly insightful aspect, or to operate a vice versa emphasis and stress only this insightful aspect whilst ignoring its possibly prejudicial influence - thus my underlining in the paragraph above seeks to draw attention to both aspects involved. To see only one side of the personal equation in this way leads to the kind of simplistic arguments which suggest that only someone who is uncommitted to any particular religion can be fair in a study of religions, or that only the religiously committed individual can hope to understand what religion is really all about. In other words, if we adopt such one-sided views we will soon be led to that point where an uncompromising divide is made between "believer" and "non-believer", with the former being seen to possess a personal equation and the latter not to possess one, so that, according to the value given to this equation (i.e. according to whether we decide that it acts in a prejudicial or insightful way), one of these classes of person will be deemed (en masse) better qualified to understand religion than the other and any methodology which we attempt to formulate for the study of religion will seek the straightforward advocation or elimination of this equation in its investigators. The separation of homo religiosus from homo academicus is likely to involve this kind of division, against which
we would do well to set Barnhart's conclusion that

the old debate regarding who 'truly understands' religion - the insiders or the outsiders - seems pointless in as much as it is obvious that we who study religion today are able to enrich our understanding by consulting both insiders and outsiders, both believers and unbelievers. (25)

Clearly the deeply religious man of inquiring mind who adopts an attitude of reverence towards the beliefs of others will be better placed to study and understand religions than the wholly secularized individual whose attitude towards religious beliefs is one of dismissive contempt (to take an extreme contrast), but it is not so much the religiousness of one and the non-religiousness of the other which are relevant here (although they cannot be altogether discounted), but the extent to which such attitudes are allowed to obtrude in the subsequent investigation. An attitude of respect or reverence is preferable to one of contempt or dismissiveness. Without the personal equation, i.e. without some stance of commitment or belief, we would simply be uninterested in and unresponsive to religion, rather than being somehow left in an ideally investigative position from which to set out on our explorations, and with the personal equation left wholly uncontrolled we would be in a similarly unsuitable state of mind from which to embark on a study of religion, being unable to see any outlook but our own. Once more it is balance rather than a straightforward positive or negative outcome which the religionist must aim for.
Although Jastrow depicts the personal equation largely in terms of our overtly religious beliefs, i.e. as the possible influence on our studies accruing from the fact of our being Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Moslems, etc., it is, I think, more useful to see it as applying to a wider range of convictions. For whilst it is clear that we are not all "believers" in a religious sense, we do all have some personal equation which is relevant to our studies in this field. To simply equate personal equation with religious belief risks masking the influence of non-religious attitudes. As Edward Hulmes has pointed out, it is no less important to take into account - as regards possible distortions arising from vested interests - "the hidden commitments of those whose ideologies masquerade behind slogans of objectivity and impartiality" (26) than it is to take note of the more obvious commitments of self confessed believers. Along the same lines, Donald Heinz has suggested that "it would be an oversight to omit the autobiography of people who inhabit religious studies departments" (27) in our attempts to assess the nature of the work which such departments are trying to do. It would be an oversight to omit their autobiographies (rather than simply their religious beliefs) because at any given point in any individual's life his personal equation will show some reading which will be relevant to the inquiries which he undertakes, whether or not that reading takes the form of an overtly religious belief. The fact of our displaying uninterest in, antipathy towards, longing for,
or belief in, world certainty (and the factors responsible for such attitudes) can only be ignored at the risk of impairing the accuracy of our work. The most important thing for the religionist to do here would seem to be, quite simply, to attempt to become aware of his own equation and to try to arrange it such as to maximize its potential for insight and to minimize its potential for prejudice. The question of what personal qualities make for successful Religious Studies is an interesting one, but the recipe for the ideal religionist is one of sufficient complexity as to make a nonsense of any simplistically generic reply (the believer, the impartial observer, the Christian, etc.). Given the degree of variation in personal belief and attitude which can exist beneath such general headings, it would, I think, be misguided to try to construct a scale of values whereby a coefficient of insight or prejudice could be automatically attached to anyone belonging to such broad categories who was also engaged in Religious Studies. Let us stress the personal of personal equation and suggest that, rather than being determined by one's race, religion, culture and other such generalized factors, it is individually determined by the host of different variables (race, religion, culture, etc. included) which make up any biography.

To sum up, the personal equation might be seen as one's receptiveness, or sensitivity, or general attitude, to religion, and it is a quality which may be determined
by many aspects of one's thinking and experience.

Assuming that religion is a common human concern, that at some very basic level all men share some sort of fundamental nature as *hominem religiosi* (no matter what particular form their fundamental "religiousness" may take), then it seems reasonable to assume that no one will possess a complete insensitivity to this area of human experience. At the same time, however, given the variety of human types, it seems similarly reasonable to assume that we will find a range of sensitivities and insensitivities in operation here. The point at which any individual falls on this range would seem to be determined by many complex elements of his personality over which we have little, if any, control (as opposed to being dictated simply by his being a "believer" or a "non-believer").

Thus we leave unanswered the question of what ingredients are required for the "ideal" personal equation (ideal, that is, for Religious Studies) and focus our attention instead on making clear the one general requirement which is demanded of every personal equation, regardless of its particular content, namely, that it must not be allowed to obscure those areas which we wish to explore by interposing its own view in front of every other. Waardenburg puts the matter well:

> It is the student's aptitudes for research, not his religion, which determine the quality of his work, ... a given religiosity, a-religiosity or anti-religiosity on the part of the student may be
a handicap as well as a help to accomplishing a given research task. It all depends on what form this religiosity, a-religiosity or anti-religiosity assumes in the mind, and especially whether it is rigid and its form fixed ... We are not concerned with whether a student believes or not, has faith or not, but whether his particular (ir)religion or (un)faith generates presuppositions which are favourable to accomplishing his research or strip it from the very start of its positive meaning. (28)

In other words, the danger to which the study of religion may be exposed in the form of the personal equation comes not from theology or commitment as such but from the kind of theology or commitment which is 'closed' (the popular sense of 'dogmatic') as against that which is 'open'. (29)

If the personal equation is "closed" then no matter what elements it contains it is hard to see how it can escape the charge of prejudice. Being "open" and insightful does not, we ought perhaps to stress, render one's commitments weak or unserious or in some way only partial, rather it gives them a depth and seriousness appropriate to the perplexing polarities which exert so powerful an influence on the sense of world uncertainty. Such openness involves

a critical attitude towards one's own commitment so that one moves between the poles of subjectivity and objectivity, or theology and religion, or passion and apathy, or however we indicate the tension aroused by thinking about living. (30)

The religionist, like the historian, must learn to curb a
self-centredness that is "one of the intrinsic limitations and imperfections of all life" \((31)\), he must "consciously and deliberately (shift) his angle of vision away from the initial self-centred standpoint natural to him as a living creature" \((32)\) and see how others have seen the world. Unless he does this then he will simply remain incapable of responding to other points of view and, as such, will see only a single reflection in the hall of mirrors. In doing so he would, as Toynbee observed \((33)\) be making both a moral and an intellectual mistake.

The Need to Control the Personal Equation

That it is necessary for the religionist to try to control the personal equation ought already to have emerged from what we have said above. Basically he must attempt to steer a middle way between those two horns of potential dilemma which the personal equation can result in if it is left wholly unchecked or if it is smothered beneath too rigorous a control which allows it no expression whatsoever. In other words, in dealing with the personal equation the religionist must avoid both:

1. That state of affairs in which existing ideas and beliefs may "sabotage" any examination of alternative viewpoints on the areas they claim to cover already (by simply refusing such rivals any credence as genuine options which it would be possible to adopt); and

2. That state of affairs in which impartiality, i.e. the deliberate holding in check of ideas and beliefs, is
taken to such an extent that the personal equation is wholly masked or neutralized, thus removing from the investigator that element of likeness which (however specifically dissimilar it may be from the phenomena under study) provides the indispensable point of contact which allows empathy and imaginative re-experiencing to proceed. Going back to a passage from Van der Leeuw, to which we have already drawn attention, the religionist must avoid that sort of crippling neutrality which "prevents the investigator's complete personality becoming engaged in his scientific task" (34), in particular he must not blot out that aspect of his personality which includes him under the general title of homo religiosus.

Unless these two possible outcomes of the personal equation are avoided, we will be faced with the choice of contributing to the expression of prejudice or the inculcation of insensitivity. These may be different skulls on different mantels, but the choice is one between equal evils – propaganda and religious frigidity. Either way, at least from the perspective of the mesmerized religionist, we end up paying tribute to a death's-head methodology whose procedure can be of no help at all in escaping from the hall of mirrors. Clearly what must be sought is that state of balance where existing beliefs and ideas can be held in a delicate control geared to maximizing their potential for insight and minimizing their potential for prejudice. It is precisely this sort of balance which
the beginnings orientation of interpolation aims for.

We have already noted Gilmore's observation that lack of information and prejudice are the two main factors which stand in the way of any sort of serious development of Religious Studies. These two factors are, of course, inter-related and indeed might be seen as forming a vicious circle of ignorance, where failure to control the personal equation leads to an inability to see things from any viewpoint other than one's own - so that any new information which is encountered will then fail to appear as such, and, in consequence (since no outlook except one's own is then apparent), the need to control that outlook in order to appreciate how others see things will simply not be recognized. Thus Marshall notes how the eighteenth century Europeans tended to create Hinduism in their own image, simply because of their "inability to describe a religious system except in Christian terms".

Similarly, in a fascinating study of European reactions to Indian art, Partha Mitter notes how accounts of what the first travellers discovered in the East were presented almost entirely in terms of things with which a European would already be familiar, rather than being couched in any more suitably novel mode. So, for example, in reconstructing the difficulties of communication faced by the painter Boucicault in illustrating Marco Polo's account of Indian consecrated maidens dancing before an idol, Mitter writes:
The problem before him was the method to be chosen for translating a purely literal description into a visual image. The particular solution he reached, which he no doubt felt would be meaningful to his audience, was to follow the text faithfully. The Venetian traveller had mentioned nuns in charge of abbeys in South India. He had also implied that the function of Christian nuns and Indian consecrated maidens was the same. The logical outcome was the picture of Indian nuns dancing before a nun-like idol. The utter incongruity of the whole situation hits us with great force. Yet the incongruity hits us with great force only because we, with our access to fuller facts, are in a position to judge. (38)

It would be fascinating to trace out how our increasing access to further facts finally broke through that circle of ignorance formed by lack of information and prejudice, and in particular to see how our recognition of the existence, effect of, and need to control, a personal equation has developed through history (for this is a factor relevant to all intellectual endeavour rather than just to the study of religion). The importance of our accurate and extensive informedness about "other" religions must not be underestimated. Without it the hall of mirrors fades to a single point of light and the personal equation is left as an unselfconscious (because unopposed) attitude which, since we are unaware of it, requires no control. If for each new image we encountered, we were simply to see a reflection of ourselves (if consecrated maidens became nuns) then clearly the personal
equation would be all that we would know. As such, we would never become mesmerized, but nor could we claim to be properly educated. Certainly it is difficult to see how any religious outlook held under such conditions today could be regarded as being anything but primitive.

As Jastrow realized, echoing Gilmore's analysis, until such time as we become aware of the influence of the personal equation (and seek to control it) there cannot be any serious study of religion in the sense in which we now understand this activity. Left entirely unchecked the personal equation forms "an insurmountable barrier to the progress (of such study) beyond certain narrow and sharply defined limits"(39). But at the same time Jastrow suggests that "the source of the strength displayed by man's (religious) activity in the early civilizations" derived precisely from this unchecked state of the personal equation (40). Perhaps as an example of such strength we might consider the comparison between Israelite and Mesopotamian religion offered by the anonymous Old Testament prophet known to us as Deutero-Isaiah:

on the one hand stood a religion worshipping the true God who 'sits throned on the vaulted roof of the earth', who had 'weighed the mountains on a balance, and the hills on a pair of scales', and to whom 'nations are but drops from a bucket', and on the other a religion centred on idols cut out of trees - and not even sacred trees at that, but trees of which the part left over from making a god might be used as fuel to cook a meal. (41)
As Saggs has remarked,

Deutero-Isaiah's invective was splendid but his comparison was methodologically unsound. He was highly selective in his evidence; he presented the data in a manner which made him guilty of conscious distortion; and he placed a phenomenological description of Mesopotamian religion alongside a theological one of Yahwism. A Babylonian could, by using corresponding methodology ... have turned the tables on (him). (42)

Methodologically defective as we may find Deutero-Isaiah's comparison to be, we must yet recognize along with Jastrow that such (to our eyes reprehensible) use of the personal equation, such complete confidence in the rightness of one's own religious outlook and the mistakenness of another outlook, such an a priori confidence (independent of any real inquiry), does give the appearance of a certain rugged religious strength. Clearly if it is to be successful - indeed if it is to survive - any religion or ideology must be able to refute those competing systems which threaten to replace it. But it seems clear that importantly different criteria for what counts as a successful refutation will be accepted by the "devotee" and the "observer". For instance, as Peel has pointed out,

\[
\text{convinced communists are able, to their own satisfaction, to show how those who disagree with them are prisoners of their own social situation. (43)}
\]

Yet it seems unlikely that those who find their outlooks so explained will agree with this sort of interpretation.

Given a situation of multi-religious informedness, given
the context of the hall of mirrors, it is clear that the religionist cannot accept as valid those refutations of alternative which are convincing only within the reference points of a particular option. The reason why he is mesmerized in the first place is because the religious elements of his own personal equation have (through design or accident) lost this kind of a priori self sufficiency. So, if he is to regain religious self confidence, he cannot simply take a step back and opt for the "security" of a single outlook. Rather he must find some evaluative system of comparison, acceptance and rejection which will be valid for a multi-religious standpoint (i.e. whose conclusions can be recognized as legitimate from any particular point of informedness). Unless some sort of direct experience of the radically unlike intervenes and makes a particular outlook irresistible, then until such a system is worked out it is difficult to see how any world decision can be made. But at the same time it is, of course, difficult to see what form multi-religiously valid criteria of evaluation could take. Again, this is something which may become clearer after applying the interpolative procedure. In the meantime, though, we might do well to consider the pros and cons of a situation where the world uncertain religionist accepts as valid a system of multi-religiously applicable evaluative criteria which are not accepted as such from the standpoint of commitment to any particular world certainty.
Although we might prefer to think of our recognition of the personal equation and the need to control it in terms of our desire for more accurate information about other viewpoints, or as an aspect of the attempt to make our existing outlook more rigorous, I do not think we can divorce it entirely from a dawning self-consciousness that is inextricably bound up with a feeling of doubt. In a sense, the need to control the personal equation only emerges with any real force when we cease (for whatever reason) to have faith in it and realize the possibility of our being if not actually mistaken then at least insufficiently informed (and it is interesting to speculate on the roots of this loss of self confidence, particularly as regards the possible influence which Religious Studies has itself had on the now common absence of confidence in matters to do with religion\(^{(44)}\)). But although a concern for controlling the personal equation may thus be a more important feature of the study of religions than of any standpoint of commitment to a specific world certainty, it remains a permanent challenge to any such commitment to be informed rather than ignorant - yet at the same time to resist the doubt which the process of acquiring accurate information beyond the confines of its own boundaries seems likely to awaken. Some kind of difference in attitude as regards the personal equation would seem inevitably to separate a position of world certainty from one of world uncertainty, but a straightforward contrast between a state
in which it is uncontrolled and one in which it is controlled would be an inadequate characterization. We must take care not to mistake polemic with strength or to confuse susceptibility to doubt with weakness - to do so would risk making the simply unsophisticated our paradigm of sound religiousness.

Our present concern is with the mesmerized religionist and must, as such, be focused on the need to control the personal equation in order that we may see clearly the many images which the hall of mirrors portrays. As Stuart Piggott has put it in his well known study of the Druids,

we have the Druids-in-themselves, whom we can never reach, but for whom we have literary evidence from which we infer our Druids-as-known. There has also been a process of manufacturing Druids-as-wished-for going on since classical times. (45)

If we are to avoid expending our energies on studying religious fictions, on studying figments of our own imagination, prejudice or ignorance (such as Druids, or Hinduism, or Christianity, or Islam, as-wished-for surely are) then we must find some way to keep our focus of interest firmly fixed on re-constructing to the best of our ability religions-in-themselves. To do so we must learn to keep ourselves from getting in the way of the picture, without at the same time going to the extent of seeking to methodologically absent ourselves - for in that case there would simply be no one left to see the picture and appreciate what it means. As Cook was quick to see,
the "ultra-impartial mind that drifts away from its values, that has not firm elementary principles"(46), i.e. the mind in which the personal equation has been smothered, runs the risk of passing from a "hyper-critical attitude to one that is really non-critical"(47). And it is when impartiality becomes elimination of concern that we can find some justification for the rejection of such a stance as "either an affectation or a confession of incompetence"(48). For we are surely ill-equipped to deal with something which apparently awakens no spark of interest in us, nor does it seem plausible that such total uninterest in religion could be accepted as a humanly possible attitude. Our "threshold of vulnerability"(49) to the human situation may have been raised enormously, but despite staggering advances in science and technology we still belong to that situation and are faced with its fundamental and unavoidable experiences - we are all inhabitants of the "same house" and, as such, the universal principles of religion are addressed to us and seem likely to awaken our interest. There has, perhaps, been a tendency (Nygren has called it a "cultural menace"(50), Kim an "inhuman obsession" or "Cartesian aberration" which has "infected Western thought for centuries"(51) ) to try to eliminate rather than control the personal equation in the interests of accuracy. In such a scheme complete neutrality and objectivity are taken as constituting rationality, so that their "opposites" - commitment and subjectivity - appear as irrational. But
such a position is, to say the least, strained, since in a sense it leads to a situation "where the only issues capable of being termed intelligible (because rational) are the ones we are not concerned with" (i.e. the ones we are not committed to). Thus in suggesting that there is a need to control the personal equation we must be very careful not to see this as a call to attempt its annihilation. Objectivity ought not to be seen as the elimination of commitment, but rather, as Barnhart has put it, as "the commitment to let one's expectations, beliefs, convictions or affirmations be put to the test" (53). If we do not allow them to be put to the test - if we insist on their unquestionable correctness from the outset - then we run the very real risk of letting belief degenerate into prejudice.

The mesmerized religionist seeks to maintain an "open" rather than a "closed" commitment and it is difficult to see on what grounds the believer could opt for a different choice without automatically denigrating his beliefs (although of course the state of mind of a world uncertain religionist would seem likely to place a greater sense of urgency on the need to put world certainties to the test than the believing religionist would presumably experience). The contrast is between a state of intellectual/spiritual discontentment and one of contentment, where it is important not to let discontentment issue in indifference (or excessive criticism) or contentment to become complacency.
The religionist must, in short, learn how to balance his personal equation so that it does not tip over into any "closed" extreme. We must now turn our attention to the question of how such a delicate control is to be achieved.

How to Control the Personal Equation

According to Cook,

the correct balance of sympathy and critical detachment each investigator has to find as best he can. (54)

However, whilst acknowledging that the difficult and delicate task of attuning the personal equation to that setting most suited to studying religions is something which, at the end of the day, each religionist must do for himself, there are nonetheless certain basic guidelines he may find it useful to follow. These do not add up to anything so specific as a method\(^{(55)}\) for studying religions, rather they are commonsense reminders of that "one general rule" which Bleeker\(^{(56)}\) suggests the religionist must adopt as a basic methodological ideal underlying any specific method which he subsequently uses - an ideal which demands that a balance be struck between objectivity and empathy. Just how the personal equation is to be held in a balance which avoids toppling over into either "closed" commitment or neutrality of such exaggerated "openness" as to become indifference, seems largely to be a matter simply of becoming aware of its existence and influence. Thus as
Haydon rather clinically put it,

the first step for the student of religions is to analyze his own personal prejudices, presuppositions, and wishes and to list them among his facts. A bias recognized is a bias sterilized. (57)

And we have already noted and complied with a similar plea by Saliba to make a declaration of interest at the outset of our inquiry(58). It cannot be stressed too strongly that we are not seeking any sort of elimination of convictions by this recognition of their existence and the attempt to control their influence on our work. Rather than aiming for any sort of complete neutrality we ought simply to recognize our own likes and dislikes and "register our commitment to free, fair and disciplined debate"(59). As Pye has put it, "the study of religion will no doubt always be somewhat inexact and subject to the personal interests of researchers"(60), we are, after all, men rather than machines (and religious men at that), but simply because we cannot be completely unbiased is no excuse for not trying to be - for clearly there is "an important difference between trying to be value-free and not trying to be value-free"(61). In suggesting how to control the personal equation we can go little further than advocating a lively self awareness of its existence by drawing attention to the sort of things which happen when no attempt is made to control it, or when we attempt its complete annihilation. Thereafter it must be left to the individual's conscience (and, of course, to the critical response of his colleagues)
to decide if his inquiry has successfully steered a course between the various potential perils it is prone to and has achieved that balance which will ensure that his outlook on religions is not one-sided. Bernard E. Meland states the position particularly well:

> there is no such thing as purely objective inquiry; that is, inquiry in which the interested, centred existence of the inquirer plays no part, (62)

rather what we ought to aim for is

> a disciplined use of our powers in which the bias of interest and conditioning are brought reasonably under control. Self-awareness and self-understanding contribute to such disciplined effort. (63)

Indeed, in the end, self-awareness and self-understanding (as they are manifested both in the individual religionist's own approach and in the "communal" voice of his intellectual peer group) are all the religionist can rely on to keep the "one general rule" of Religious Studies untarnished. So important are these elements that in his preface to The History of Religions, Essays on the Problem of Understanding, Jerald C. Brauer suggested that perhaps this work might have been sub-titled "Essays on the Problem of Self-understanding" (64). In the religious realm, understanding self and understanding others seem to be extensively intermingled.
The Personal Equation in the Hall of Mirrors

I think that the operation of the personal equation in the study of religion (and in particular as regards the hall of mirrors setting) may best be summed up if we consider man's religiousness (what makes him homo religiosus) as a stream running through his life. Cognate with our ideas of "world uncertainty", "world certainty", and "world decision", we might dub such a stream our "world concern", for although its influence (either positive or negative) will be seen expressed in day to day living rather than appearing solely in terms of abstract "world" concepts, its currents are nonetheless attuned to an ultimate rather than a mundane scale. It acts to structure biography according to the presence or absence of an ontological overview (i.e. according to world certainty or world uncertainty) and ought not to be confused with - although often underlying or undermining - the sphere of commonsense epistemology. By presenting the personal equation thus as "world concern" we minimize the risk of seeing it solely in terms of positive religious belief or of seeing only its potentially prejudicial or potentially insightful nature, and instead arrive at a more accurately balanced picture of its place in our outlook.

In the world uncertain individual the stream of world concern flows apparently without course or direction, threatening all areas of his life with flood and the consequent paralysis and distress which such indiscriminate
swamping may bring. His concern is to find some channel which may serve to bring irrigation to this flood. The world certain individual, on the other hand, is one whose stream of world concern flows clearly and forcefully through his life in an organizing and containing channel whose course provides a sense of purpose and direction for his existence. His concern is to let his actions be directed by the currents of this directive stream, rather than by social or instinctual norms - supposing these suggest different courses of action(65). The situation with which the religionist as multi-religiously informed man is confronted in the hall of mirrors is that which shows him a wide choice of possible channels in which the stream of world concern could run. In such a situation, where many channels are seen, any particular one which his own stream may hitherto have followed may seem somewhat arbitrary. Unless this feeling of arbitrariness can be refuted and the specific channel justified as being better than the rest, then the religionist's world concern may break the banks of the channel which up till now had contained it and overspill into areas previously untroubled by the sense of world uncertainty, indeed he may become subject to a situation of flood. Alternatively, supposing the religionist had begun his studies uncommitted to any particular world certainty and untroubled by any very profound sense of world uncertainty, a state of perceived optionality, a knowledge of the many available channels,
may render him more reflective in outlook. His studies may encourage flooding where before there had been drought.

Religious Studies might, in the first instance, be seen as an attempt to map out the various channels which exist - or which have existed - for the stream of world concern. But such an exercise is only the first part of a two stage process, the second stage of which is concerned to discover which channel, if any, we ought to adopt in order to irrigate our own lives. Generally speaking most attention in Religious Studies has been focused on the first stage only - indeed many workers in the discipline would argue that this fully defines the scope of their interest and activity\(^{66}\). I have been more concerned with suggesting (in what can only be regarded as an introductory and inchoate way) methodological guidelines by following which the religionist may satisfy those concerns of the second stage in his inquiries (having taken for granted that his work in stage one, whilst not in any sense complete, has nonetheless progressed sufficiently far for him to realize the need of a qualitative change in directive impetus).

We could, perhaps, suggest that whereas a descriptive approach (orientated towards observation) was a walking along the banks of the various religious channels containing man's stream of world concern, an interpolative approach (orientated more towards imagination) is one in which our
inquiry seeks to become water-borne. It becomes water-borne not simply in order to accumulate more data which a land-based inquiry could not reach (though this is, of course, an incidental benefit), rather we take to the water in a methodological surrogate of ourselves (i.e. as the human ciphers of the interpolative return to beginnings), testing the various channels - for temperature, strength of current, acidity, etc. - prior to a decision whether or not to make the plunge of a world decision (and if so into which particular channel to make that plunge, if indeed we conclude that the channels are significantly different). Interpolation might, perhaps, be seen as an extensive toe-testing of the various world certainties (i.e. religiously channelled streams of world concern) with which the religionist finds himself confronted. As such, it is clear that whatever its original channel may have been, the religionist must keep a firm check on his own stream of world concern if he does not want to be led into those backwaters which an unchecked bias would inevitably create.

In the case of both descriptive and interpolative approaches it would seem over-confident to suppose that the course of the various streams of world concern was co-extensive with the paths (walkable or navigable) taken by investigation of them. For sometimes the water seems to pass through conditions which make "pursuit" impossible (rapids, rocks, shallows, waterfalls, marshes, etc.). Ineffability, as we have seen, seems to constitute a
particularly important (and apparently impassable) barrier beyond which only the water of each stream seems able to go (67).

Clearly, then, unless we have some sort of "world concern" to begin with, the study of religions will simply be a closed book, to whose contents we will be entirely indifferent. Such a complete absence of world concern would make us immune to mesmerization, since we would simply fail to notice the many images in the hall of mirrors or pass them by as phenomena of no concern to us. At the same time, if our world concern runs blindly (albeit deeply) in a closed channel we will not perceive the existence of (or problems attending) a situation of plurality; whilst if our stream of world concern attempts to flow through every available channel indiscriminately, we will quickly become drained and intellectually/spiritually exhausted and confused. This is simply another way of saying that our basic religiousness will be influenced according to how certain elements in our personal equation are aligned, according to how (or if) our stream of world concern is channelled. Clearly such an alignment could, if left unnoticed and uncontrolled, exert a subversive influence on our studies. If he is to keep to the "one general rule" demanded of his work, the religionist must take care to ensure that he does not inadvertently alter the course of the various channels in which world concern can run, by allowing his own otherwise directed current of
interest to erode and shape their banks. He must consider the course of any channel according to how it appears to investigation, rather than to predilection.

James Harvey has suggested that

he who professes to stand outside religion and view all the religions of the world in impartial detachment will never wholly understand any of them.  (68)

In this sense of impartial detachment, such analogies as Yinger's (69) of seeing a stained glass window (its colours are only properly visible from the inside) and McClelland's (70) of overhearing a telephone conversation (unless we are one of the speakers we only hear half of what is being said), do properly separate the viewpoint of believer and observer, such that the former has access to vital information unavailable - except in a reported sense - to the latter. But such divisive analogies are, I think, only useful if the observer's impartiality is taken in this radical (and, I would argue, fundamentally mistaken) sense of standing wholly outside the sphere of religious concerns, if, in other words, it is taken as a denial of the observer's status as *homo religiosus*, as a denial that he too is an inhabitant of the same house as the believer. But so long as we allow a basic level of religiousness common to all men (believers or not), then some such metaphor as that suggested by the stream of world concern surely offers a more accurate picture of where religionist and believer stand in relationship to each other (and to
religion) in terms of what Jastrow referred to as the personal equation.

Given the picture of Religious Studies suggested by the notion of exploring possible channels for a stream of world concern, such claims as Pummer's - that "there is no one who pursues comparative studies of religion without changing, in one way or another, his personal religious outlook" (71) - and Widgery's - that "it is extremely improbable that a sympathetic consideration of the various religions will not in some way affect the student's ... general attitude towards religion" (72) - gain credibility. We have already seen how study in this field may enlarge the "glance of the spirit" and heighten our awareness of the sensus numinis, but at this point it is, perhaps, possible to deduce from the way in which one's outlook is changed whether or not the inquiry was undertaken with the personal equation properly balanced and controlled. In the case of Browne our conclusion must surely be that it was not, since for him

the comparative study of religions has served my understanding of Christianity in two ways. Where there is similarity between Christianity and other religions, the evidence for the truth of the doctrine concerned is strengthened. Where there is opposition, the contrast has emphasized the importance of the truth of that particular Christian doctrine. (73)

In such an "understanding" what we win on the swings we apparently win again on the roundabouts. But such gains
are surely suspect because of the very uniformity of the way in which they are amassed (which suggests a gain paid to oneself in the counterfeit currency of a "closed" commitment). On the other hand, McDermott's analysis of the more uncertain influence of studying "other" religions on one's existing faith, seems to betoken the "open" commitment of a more sensitively controlled personal equation. His observations are, I think, worth quoting at length - since apart from providing an antidote to Browne's account of how Religious Studies influences a Christian outlook, they may also serve as a conclusion to this section of the chapter.

Perhaps the surest way to develop a critical attitude towards one's religious position is to journey religiously - if only by reading the scriptures and other revered literature of another religious tradition. While no body of religiously revered writings can adequately reveal a religious tradition in its entirety, it can introduce a person to ideals and experiences most esteemed by the community of believers. If one becomes familiar with other aspects of that tradition, one's own tradition will consistently come under more careful and more fruitful scrutiny. There is no way of predicting, of course, just what affect one's study of another religious tradition will have on one's position; rather, the more proper question is whether the Socratic adage is as applicable to a religious position as to one's world view. For once it is admitted that 'the unexamined religious position is not worth living', then a critical reading of one's religious faith and tradition - preferably aided by the study of another position - must be considered an ideal as well as a responsibility ... The Christian position, of course, has rather consistently - and effectively - been confronted by secular or naturalistic humanism. It might be
even more rewarding, however, if Christians were similarly informed by one or another religious tradition. This is so because a religious faith or affiliation stands to benefit most from a tradition which includes mystical, philosophical and socio-historical elements comparable to one's own tradition while resting on totally different presuppositions. The denial or revision of one's idea of God, after all, is only one part of one's personal religion: sympathetic understanding of another religious tradition, however, reveals an alternative for every part of one's religion. (74)

(v) Religious Studies as Religious

Waardenburg has pointed out that "there is a basic structural symmetry between religion studied ... and scholarship" (75). In particular,

both have to do with facts which they interpret: the first in order to assign meaning to them; the second in order to reconstitute that meaning in a scholarly way. Religion, in this kind of approach, is largely seen as an interpretation of reality; it poses meaning in, above, beyond or beneath it. And the study of religion ... is the endeavour to uncover and find out that interpretation of reality which religion has given. (76)

We have noted this basic structural symmetry between religion and Religious Studies from the very outset of our deliberations - suggesting in Chapter One that rather than being irreconcilably different phenomena which were poles apart, religion and the study of religion ought rather to be seen as two sides of the same coin. Moreover, we have drawn attention to a particularly striking feature of their apparent parallelism in the way in which studies of religion mirror the "non-finality" which religion itself
displays in the face of the radically unlike, this feature
giving rise (on both the primary level of religious
phenomena and on the secondary and derivative level of
studies of such phenomena) to the "multiplication of models
without end" which is the root cause of that perplexing
hall of mirrors into which the religionist seems inevitably
to be lead.

We would, of course, expect a certain degree of
symmetry or parallelism to exist between any study and
the object of its interest - for as the discipline in
question stalks the steps of its subject matter it will,
by such close investigative pursuit, inevitably create a
kind of methodological reflection or shadow of the "real
thing". But it often seems that the parallel lines of
religion and Religious Studies come so close together that
they break out of this neat expected sequence to touch and
intertwine, to the extent that scholarship may appear not
so much as study but as the "sacrament" which Goodenough
suggests it is(77). Certainly the whole trend and tenor
of our arguments against the bisectionist fallacy suggest
that such inter-twining depicts a more accurate picture of
the relationship between religion and Religious Studies
than any eternally distanced parallelism can offer; and
our remarks concerning interpolation and the personal
equation may sometimes have sounded more "religious"
than we might have expected in a methodological context -
indeed the whole presentation of the religionist in the
setting of the hall of mirrors suggests a series of problems which might be described as "spiritual/religious" instead of "intellectual". Thus some sort of statement about the relationship between study and religion seems called for if our vocabulary is to escape accusations of simply confusing reflective symmetry and qualitative similarity.

But however much a clear statement of their relationship may seem called for, it would simply be inappropriate (and would go against the whole drift of our arguments) to seek to provide this in the form of a neat formula which showed in clear-cut black and white terms how religion and Religious Studies inter-relate. Rather than giving any such straightforward yes or no reply to the question "is Religious Studies religious?", I prefer to suggest in the course of the next two sections a series of remarks geared to elucidating the sort of ways in which religionist and religion might be defined and from which some idea of their relationship, with all its individually variable points of contact, may be derived. I choose this strategy in favour of the formulistic one not out of any desire to be long winded (quite misguided at this stage) or to somehow "dodge the issue", but simply because it seems more in keeping with the nature of the situation as it has appeared so far. To give an unqualified yes or no answer here might provide a pleasing sense of decisive finality. But the decisiveness it offered would be illusory, its apparent finality woefully inadequate in a
state of affairs where we are not so much dealing with a confusion which needs to be resolved by neatly separating two mixed up elements, as with a complexity whose elements need to be mapped out carefully and patiently, avoiding the temptation of short cuts to clarity which strict and divisive definition may seem to offer. Before turning to such "notes towards possible definitions", however, I want to spend a short while in this section discussing where various scholars in the field stand on this matter and in identifying the important differences between something being a religion and its being in some sense religious.

There is, as might be expected, no unanimity on this issue, with opinions ranging from outright (if not outraged) denials of Religious Studies' religiousness to enthusiastic (if not crusading) acceptance of a positive religious element in this area of study. Representative of the former view we might point to Dougherty, for whom the notion that Religious Studies involves being religious as well as studying religions "is simply absurd"(78), a result of the reprehensible solecism whereby we "mistake its subject matter for its methodology"(79). Representative of the latter view we might point to Oxtoby's conclusion that - particularly in its phenomenological strand - "the science of religions has in effect become a religious exercise itself"(80). Rather than being indicative of two entirely different ways of studying religion or of two understandings of what is meant by
"religious", I think such conflicting opinion stems more from the particular religionist's own attitude towards an area of common interest and methodology. Such an attitude can render his work "religious" or "non-religious" without this leading ineluctably to the overall (and highly emotive) labelling of Religious Studies according to one or other of these headings. In other words, just as the pursuit of learning in any field (whilst using exactly the same techniques) may be a good or evil endeavour depending on the use to which such learning is put (the same knowledge of chemistry may be used to heal or to poison), so the study of religion may be a religious or a non-religious endeavour depending on how it is used by its various practitioners. To see Religious Studies as intrinsically religious or non-religious is, I think, to make the mistake of according predicates which are only properly applicable to individual religionists, to the collection of information and technique which they use to engage in this activity, it is like calling chemistry rather than individual chemists good or evil. Some varieties of "studying" religion - apologetics, theologies, philosophies of various sorts - will, of course, be intrinsically religious or non-religious in the sense of their conclusions automatically furthering the outlook from which they began. They will, in other words, be aspects of some system of "closed" commitment where no attempt is made to control the personal equation. But Religious Studies understood in the sense of non-partisan
inquiry undertaken from a standpoint of "open" commitment need not necessarily be either religious or non-religious. Rather, such studies occupy a mediating position which serves the interrogatory aspect of our stream of world concern, a stream which may follow either a religious or a non-religious course. Although such studies may themselves be an essential part of any "open" commitment to a scheme of world certainty (i.e. they may be a required element of belief understood in this sense), this is not to say that to undertake study in this way is to adopt any particular stance of world decision. It is, perhaps, best to view the principles of such inquiry as a moral attitude whose value can be recognized from any particular stance of (open) commitment, for as Northrop Frye puts it,

the persistence in keeping the mind in a state of disciplined sanity, the courage in facing results that may deny or contradict everything that one had hoped to achieve - these are obviously moral qualities, if the phrase means anything at all. (81)

But such a moral attitude - which is basically the respect for free and fair inquiry - whilst not in itself religious (for it may be adopted by an atheist or a Marxist as easily as it may be by a Christian) can of course be used with the intention of furthering ends which are distinctly religious in nature.

The religionist's intention in studying religion can vary considerably, as the most cursory glance at work done
in this field shows. For example, in an early article devoted to discussing the practical value of comparative religion, M.M. Snell proposed that as well as attending to missionary work in foreign lands the clergy "must not neglect to fortify themselves to resist the blandishments of paganism in our own midst"(82) and, according to Snell, the only way in which they could do this effectively was "by as thorough as possible a study of the science of religions"(83). Religious Studies, according to this view, acts to purify one's own faith against alien (and apparently insidious) elements. More recently we find Radhakrishnan, who has been described as "perhaps the greatest comparative religiologist of the first half of the twentieth century"(84), concerned to establish the foundations of the "Sanatana Dharma", the eternal truth or universal religion, which would satisfy the millions of religiously displaced persons for whom he expressed such a deep compassion(85). Such eternal truth Radhakrishnan saw best expressed in Hinduism, so that in his work the study of religion is geared to elucidating those elements of a particular tradition which apparently make it fit for universal status. Such "universal faith" may also be sought in terms of collecting together an amalgam of the best parts of the various different religions, rather than emphasizing the elements of a single one. In such a scheme Religious Studies/Science of Religion becomes the effective means of operating such selective spirituality.
The kind of sentiments behind such an endeavour (which are, of course, somewhat at odds with Woods' claim that the Science of Religion "has no intention of creating a religion"(86)) are well summed up by Max Müller, editor of the epoch making Sacred Books of the East and often dubbed the "father of comparative religion":

Every religion, even the most imperfect and degraded, has something that ought to be sacred to us, for there is in all religions a secret yearning after the true, though unknown, God. (87)

And, in a letter to Renan, Müller claimed that the Sacred Books of the East would in the future become the foundation for a universal religion(88). Similarly, according to Evans-Wentz "the hope of all sincere researchers into comparative religion"(89) ought always to be

to accumulate such scientific data as will some day enable future generations of mankind to discover truth itself, that universal truth in which all religions may ultimately recognize the essence of religion and the catholicity of faith. (90)

Contrasting starkly with such religious motivations for undertaking Religious Studies, we find Van Baaren suggesting that far from being concerned with establishing the truth or propagating some sort of universal faith,

systematic science of religion ... only studies religions as they are empirically and disclaims any statements concerning the value and truth of the phenomena studied. (91)
It is, perhaps, tempting to see the sort of ambitious (if naive) idealistic credo voiced by Evans-Wentz as belonging to an earlier age, and to accept as one of the facts of the history of Religious Studies that those future generations whom he had in mind have, like Van Baaren, often turned out to be (professionally) indifferent to the discovery of the universal religious truth he sought. Certainly Klostermaier seems to adopt some such reading of the development of thought in this area when he somewhat wistfully observes that

a scholar whose main concern in studying world religions is directed towards the promotion of mutual understanding, the development of a world community, and the strengthening of the spiritual dimensions of the life of mankind, has to realize sooner or later that the majority of the representatives of Religionswissenschaft (and its English or French equivalents) demonstrate indifference if not outright hostility towards such 'unscientific' goals. (92)

However, to see Religious Studies as having moved en masse from an idealistic and positive religious phase to a more prosaic, "scientific" and non-religious one, would, I think, be a somewhat risky generalization to make in the face of some present day conceptions of what the subject is all about. We have already pointed to Cantwell Smith's prophetic claim that the religionist may become a participant in the religious history of the race (rather than an observer of it) and that comparative religion might become "the disciplined self consciousness of man's
variegated and developing religious life"\(^{(93)}\); similarly, Eliade suggests that the study of religion be accepted as a sort of therapeutic device which acts to stimulate and broaden the spiritual dimensions of human life, rather than as some sort of neutral academic exercise, indeed it ought to be seen as "a new form of maieutics"\(^{(94)}\) which will help in "bringing forth a new man, a man who will be more authentically himself and more complete"\(^{(95)}\); Heinz, in his sketch of "two possible models for a re-visioned religious studies"\(^{(96)}\) portrays it as, on the one hand, "a repository for transcendent symbols"\(^{(97)}\) and, on the other, as "a school of the prophets for the civil religion"\(^{(98)}\); and Michaelsen (going to the opposite - and, I think equally mistaken - extreme of assessment to that of Klostermaier) suggests that "objective, detached, scientific scholarship is now out of fashion. The watchwords are involvement, commitment, subjectivity"\(^{(99)}\).

To present Religious Studies as a religion would, quite clearly, be unjustified. Of course one could, in purely metaphorical terms, identify its prophets, its holy books, its rituals, devotees and so on. But one could, as Dougherty points out\(^{(100)}\), do this for any discipline and to move from the metaphorical to the literal here would involve a leap from the analogical to the ridiculous. Such a leap would involve taking as primary what can only be secondary and derivative categories. It would be akin to imagining that the flower of youth was a
literal bloom. It is, however, a different matter to suggest that Religious Studies may be undertaken religiously, or that it may be used to further some religious end. In fact it is, I think, possible for Religious Studies to be "religious" in three senses:

1. In the sense suggested by the example of Snell or Radhakrishnan, where studying religions is undertaken in the hope of promoting an existing position of commitment.

2. In the sense suggested by the example of Müller or Evans-Wentz, where studying religions is undertaken in the hope of promoting religion (in a non-denominational sense) in order to elucidate and convey the universal truth(s) which is/are involved in this field. We could also, without undue strain, include in this category those versions of Religious Studies suggested by Cantwell Smith, Eliade and Heinz, i.e. where it becomes a sort of repository for the key elements of man's religiousness. In both these senses care must be taken that hopes do not colour conclusions - in other words, that an "open" commitment is maintained.

3. In the same sense as someone might say that football or golf was their religion, I suppose it is conceivable that, undertaken with a certain attitude, Religious Studies might be seen as being religious for a particular religion-ist. It could not, as I have indicated above, be accepted as being his religion, since this would involve overburdening the metaphorical such that it became ridiculous (for clearly one could never find all the many
dimensions which go to make up a religion adequately represented in the study of religion). One might approach that study in a manner similar to that in which one approaches religion, but to confuse a similarity of approach with a similarity of thing approached is to risk substituting destructive nounal chaos for useful adjectival comparison. For example, a man may be terrified both by rational and irrational things, by, for instance, poisonous snakes and open spaces. We can say that he is similarly terrified by each, but to try to equate the two objects of his terror as identical (because of his identical attitude towards them) would lead to a somewhat bizarre conclusion. Similarly, a man may treat religiously two different things without their being identical (and, moreover, as in the case of his terror, we might want to suggest that in one case his attitude was appropriate and that in the other case it was not).

Conversely, whilst it would be ridiculous to see religion as study, it is possible to see it as containing various studious elements. In a fascinating (if perplexing) article entitled "The Religion of Study", Klaus Klostermaier points to the importance placed on study in Judaic, Christian, Islamic, Vedic, Buddhist and Confucian traditions. However, despite his definition of it as "Concern for the Wholeness of Reality"(101), and his contention that it is "the true basis of cross-cultural religious understanding"(102) and "the raison-d'être of the academic study of religion"(103), it remains unclear
just what "the Religion of Study" is and how it is significantly different from the elements of study found in and advocated by the various religious traditions.

(vi) Notes Towards a Definition of Religionist

In these pages I have tried to restore something of that sense of Religious Studies as being an activity focused on exploring issues of quite basic concern to Everyman, rather than seeing it solely in the distanced descriptive guise so often characteristic of its academic manifestation. Obviously the two senses are connected. Perhaps the best way to picture their relationship is in terms of the occurrence of a spark of interest and concern and the subsequent attempts to discipline and structure its potential, so that its flames may be contained and directed - issuing in intellectual/spiritual warmth - rather than allowing it to catch haphazardly, resulting in the chaos of an inferno (religious fanaticism and persecution are with us still), or simply to go out. One without the other is likely to leave us in a situation of having a fireplace but no fire, or having a fire but nowhere to let it burn safely, yet despite this interdependence it is easy for either spark or structure to capture our full attention singly, leading us to imagine that instead of having only half the materials necessary for a coherent and responsible approach to religion we have them all and can proceed to conclusions without
further postponement. In particular, the connection between natural interest/concern and academic study may become blurred as the specialization of the latter endeavour leads us further away from those immediate questions which set us on such a course to begin with. Sometimes, as we have seen, such specialization denies its own roots and, seeing its own descriptive inquiries as ends in themselves, fails to appreciate our need to arrive at some sort of conclusion about what to believe. It ignores, in other words, our nature as homines religiosi. If what I have referred to as "making a world decision" is ruled out of court as "unscientific", "emotional", as "a purely personal concern", or whatever, then although the study of religion may proceed for a while with no apparent difficulty - buoyed up simply by the immense interest of the intrinsically fascinating phenomena it will uncover - it will eventually result in a profound disquiet with its own declared limits, a sense that some vital dimension relevant to this field of interest has been left out. It risks appearing not as a tool for performing an intellectual/religious task which needs to be done but as a mere intellectual pastime (albeit an exciting one) which does little justice to the seriousness of its subject matter.

How, then, are we to define the religionist, the individual who pursues the study of religion? In the sense in which I have presented him here, such a figure appears to be someone engaged in a sort of pre-religious (and pre-nonreligious) exercise, someone concerned with the
composite question of whether or not to be religious and, if so, how to be religious (such a question containing within its ambit the problem of what we are to take religion to be in the first place). As such, the religionist appears to walk a tightrope strung out between the poles of settling for unreflective (because uninformed) acceptance or rejection of his own indigenous belief system and postponing indefinitely coming to any decision about religion whilst he attempts to gather together sufficient data about it. He ought not to be seen as being "neutral" in the sense of having no inclinations about religion one way or the other, but rather as an individual concerned to test whatever inclinations may happen to present themselves by a process of extensive and intensive inquiry. The religionist is one who through reflection, environmental circumstance, or as a result of study in an academic context, is likely to slip between actual and possible belief into the realm of world uncertainty. Finding himself in the hall of mirrors he is concerned to find out which, if any, of the numerous images reflect an accurate picture of the human situation and his place in it (moreover, given the extent to which diversity occurs in this context, he will have to discover precisely what he ought to take the Hindu, Christian, Islamic, etc. images to portray, rather than relying on straightforward observation to reveal this). He is concerned to answer the question "what is religion?" in a manner which will do
justice to the impulse to explore and describe and to the impulse to evaluate and decide, both of which are equally operative in a setting of perceived diversity. At the end of the day, the religionist is one who is concerned with his own (and perhaps with others') religious education, for, as Edward Hulmes has remarked, "religious education is, ultimately, about choosing sides" (104).

(vii) Notes Towards a Definition of Religion

It is my intention in this section to pull together some of the threads which have run throughout the preceding pages (explicitly and implicitly) in the form of our continuing attempts to establish what religion is. This will not result in the definition of religion, but rather in a statement of one way in which religion may be viewed - namely, that way which is most relevant to the mesmerized religionist in the hall of mirrors. I attempt no survey of the considerable literature devoted to defining religion, nor are those references which I do make representative of the range of opinion found there. They have been chosen, rather, for the light they shed on the conception of religion which has been in operation here. Bibliographically, this section is - quite deliberately - featherweight. It seeks neither to provide a catalogue of attempted definitions of religion, nor to direct the reader to places where such lists may be found, nor does it offer more than the most minimal comment on what problems are associated with attempting such definitions (105).
The problems of defining religion are notorious, with any attempt having to run the gauntlet between, on the one side, accusations that it is too inclusive and, on the other, that it is too exclusive, i.e. that it fails to delimit the territory of religion precisely, tending instead to make it either ridiculously extensive (so that all the black sheep of the "pseudo-religions" - nationalism, communism, humanism, etc. - are allowed access) or too restricted (excluding from its boundaries some elements which we want to include). The trend away from seeking some single "essence" of religion to discussing it in Wittgensteinian terms of "family resemblances" (as, for example, Smart does in his notion of the six dimensions of religion\(^{(106)}\)) has, perhaps, done something to make the problem of definition less extreme. However, it still seems worth noting two simple points which help us to see the whole issue of defining in the right perspective. Firstly, although it may seem that if we cannot define religion we must be critically perplexed concerning its nature, to the point of not really knowing what it is, this is simply to confuse the questions "what is religion?" and "what is the definition of religion?". But whereas knowing what religion is is a necessary precondition of being able to say what it is, a vice versa arrangement simply does not hold\(^{(107)}\). Unless in some sense we already know what something is, it would be impossible to define it. Definition has to do with ordering what we already know, rather than with marking out the
extent of our knowledge. Secondly, although we may not be able to reach a clear-cut definition of something, this is not necessarily any reason to postpone further study of it. As Smart puts it,

we do not abandon the project of studying cities on the grounds that you can't really tell where a city ends and where the countryside begins. Nor do we abandon French studies though parts of Switzerland and Alsace are ambiguously French in culture. (108)

So, likewise, "we should not be depressed by the impossibility of providing an absolutely sharp and clear-cut definition of religion" (109). But at the same time, whilst noting the problems associated with making a clear-cut definition, it is also important to note that

in all these cases despite the vagueness of the concepts, their shadiness on the edges, it is possible to find the unambiguous example. Nobody would say that Manhattan is rural, or that Ben Nevis is urban. Likewise, no one would say that a priest saying mass is a secular activity. (110)

Central to the understanding of religion which I have adopted here have been the concepts of world certainty and world uncertainty. It is, perhaps, important to stress the difference between these terms and their mundane or naive equivalents. Mundane certainty is simply an acceptance of things as routine and everyday which does not probe beneath commonsense answers to questions of purpose. To the question "what is the purpose of your life?", mundane certainty will reply, "to get a good job,
to find somewhere pleasant to live and bring up a family, to become rich and famous, to travel round the world" - or in terms of whatever else may be considered to be a worthy goal. World certainty, on the other hand, involves accepting an account of things which goes beyond the commonplace. To the question "what is the purpose of your life?", world certainty will reply, "to escape from the eternal round of karma and rebirth, to achieve Nirvana, to love my neighbour as myself and obey God's commandments, to follow the teachings of the Qur'an" - or in terms of whatever other world view it accepts as being true (I have confined myself throughout to religious world certainty, but it ought to be borne in mind that certain political ideals may provide something similar). We might, perhaps, define a religious life as one in which day to day actions are performed in accordance with a view of ultimate meaning which sees some significance in them over and above their immediately observable consequences, a non-religious life as one in which day to day actions and ambitions are performed without reference to anything beyond themselves (though of course we would still be left with the problem of establishing criteria to distinguish between goal-directed and religious behaviour). Moving on to uncertainty, mundane uncertainty is simply that doubt or indecision which questions specific elements in our biographies (what career do we want to follow? how ought we to vote? where do we want to live? do we want
to marry? and so on), whereas world uncertainty, on the other hand, questions the sense of life itself and asks in a profound and basic way, "What ought I to do? How ought I to lead my life?". The need for a world certainty occurs when we find our lives confronted by this fundamental and disturbing feeling of uncertainty which seems to open our eyes to the human situation of brief mortality and to render pathetically circumscribed and impotent all our little everyday surenesses and doubts. Here our understanding of religion is in accord with Barnhart's view that it is "concern or preoccupation with one's own finitude"(111).

But how does mundane certainty fall prey to the radical questioning of world uncertainty in the first place? Clearly for most of the time we are content to operate on the level of outlook offered by commonsense. We eat, sleep, work, and pursue whatever other business we are engaged in, without particularly worrying about issues of ultimate meaning and sense. But sometimes such an outlook simply does not seem sufficient to account for our experience. The mundane certainties and uncertainties which characterize much of our existence seem suddenly overtaken and transcended by issues of an altogether different scale. The conditions under which world uncertainty assails us are many and varied. But often this sense of radical doubt, which results in our asking "why?" in a particularly persistent way, arises out of an encounter with sickness, suffering or death - with
some event which stresses our transient finitude and seems to make a nonsense of any identity and rationale offered to us by considerations of occupation, intelligence, wealth, social standing and so on. It arises when the states of organization on which we rely for life itself threaten to break down, when we realize (to quote from what are reputed to be the Buddha's last words) that "decay is inherent in all composite things". Thus as Anthony F.C. Wallace puts it,

the essential theme of the religious event is ... the dialectic of disorganization and organization. On the one hand men universally observe the increase of entropy (disorganization) in familiar systems: metals rust and corrode, woods and fabrics rot, people sicken and die, personalities disintegrate, social groups splinter and disband. On the other hand, men universally experience the contrary process of organization: much energy is spent preventing rust, corrosion, decay, rot, sickness, death and dissolution... The dialectic, the 'struggle'...between entropy and organization, is what religion is all about. The most diverse creeds unite in the attempt to solve the sphinx riddle of the relationship between life and death, between organization and disorganization; the ideas of the soul, of gods, of world cycles, of Nirvana, of spiritual salvation and rebirth, of progress—all are formal solutions to this problem, which is indeed felt intimately by all men. (113)

Much of our literature is concerned with chronicling our attempts to cope in various ways with the impingement of world uncertainty upon our lives. In Those Barren Leaves,
for example, (a novel in which mundane certainty and world uncertainty are juxtaposed with great comic effect)

Aldous Huxley has summed up well the relationship between these two sides of our humanity:

All one's daily life is a skating over thin ice, a scampering of water beetles across the invisible skin of depths. Stamp a little too hard, lean a shade too heavily and you are through, you are floundering in a dangerous and unfamiliar element. (114)

It is from that dangerous and unfamiliar element that the relevance of religion becomes clear, for it is in those "ultimate moments"(115) of which this element consists (when he realizes the inevitability of death and the briefness of life, when he becomes aware of his apparent insignificance in the tide of the human multitude, when he sees the suffering which has attended human history) that man "recognizes the true nature of his existence which everywhere impinges upon impassable boundaries"(116). Religion has importantly to do with attempts to deal with such boundaries without despair, it is concerned to provide ways in which, for example, "people can be healed in relation to the irreversibility of time through (such) procedures (as) penitence, confession, expiation, forgiveness (and) absolution"(117). Religion might thus be seen as "the consequences of the ways in which men have scanned the limitations ... which surround them"(118), and in particular those limitations (such as death) which science cannot remove. It involves the attempt to scan
boundaries and limitations within which the individual's life is led (and which cast an obliterating shadow across any sense of meaning which might emerge from a standpoint of mundane certainty) in the attempt to find some glimmer of hope in what is otherwise an apparently hopeless situation. In this view, "religion is a close relative of medicine as an institution for the deliverance of man from evil"(119) - the evil of finitude, of the human situation with all its striving, helplessness, weakness, suffering and remorse. Religion is thus very much the "quest for completely satisfying life"(120) whose central concern "is nothing less than soteriology"(121). As Koestenbaum put it, "salvation is the religious answer to the problem of the meaning of life"(122), a problem which is raised most forcefully by a sense of being confined by threatening boundaries of disorganization, decay and annihilation. Kinsley puts across well this point about the importance to religious thinking of a sense of confinement:

Bound by limitations of desire, appetite, and circumstance, aware of his limited position, man seems to possess a kind of psychological or spiritual claustrophobia. He is not content to remain a prisoner, bound by his own limitations. He seeks to participate in something 'other', something outside or beyond himself, something that can explode the limited condition of his species, biography and society. An almost universal characteristic of man's religious activity, therefore, is a vertical referent, an indication of a dimension that transcends the ordinary and hints at the extraordinary. (123)
We have suggested that this dimension - which "hints at the extraordinary" - stems from the radical unlikeness of some sort of comprehensively inclusive experience, an experience of near totality which points to a state of affairs in which the polarities which are necessary for entropy and limitation are transcended, leaving an ultimate outlook on the world which (although difficult to understand and highly problematic to describe in any kind of detail) does serve to highlight the inadequacy of any mundane viewpoint and offer in its place some sort of spiritual security.

Bearing these points in mind, the study of religion can be seen to have various implications about which it is as well to be aware. Whether or not it is undertaken from the standpoint of an initial sense of world uncertainty, the acquisition of knowledge about the religions of the world is likely to make such uncertainty a live issue. For when we are confronted with a series of different accounts of the nature of human existence, such as those offered by Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and so on, which suggest that our everyday outlook on the world ought to be seen in the context of some scheme of ultimate sense, then we are bound to feel the need to look again at our mundane certainties in view of these apparent alternatives to them. It is one of the paradoxes of religion that it offers both world certainty and world uncertainty, for in order to set the stage upon which to present its sense giving overview of human existence it
must point to those features of such existence which call out for its perspective in the first place. As Michael Novak has put it,

religion is a conversion from the ordinary, given, secure world into a world of nothingness, terror, risk - a world in which nevertheless there is a strange healing and joy. (124)

In other words, religion increases that awareness of our precarious and vulnerable existence which sees it dwarfed by the immensities of time and space and perpetually threatened by the prospect of separation and extinction, and, at the same time, it offers solace for such a daunting prospect by offering some scheme of ultimate meaning, by suggesting a world certainty. This "double action" of religion is clearly identified by Winston L. King:

one may generalize and say that religious traditions always go out of their way to paint life in its darkest colours and to stress the precariousness and evil condition of human existence. 'Religion' may be defined in this context as the awareness of a basic wrongness with the world and as the technique of dealing with that wrongness. (125)

If any specific religion offers both a threat to mundane certainty at the same time as offering a deeper and more comprehensive certainty in its place (its experience of radical unlikeness effecting both these ends at once), then I would argue that a knowledge of a range of religious teachings constitutes a greater threat whilst at the same time offering the possibility of a more cogent
and resilient certainty. As such, the study of religion is a particularly exciting activity, but one that is not without its risks (as Michaelsen put it, it contains "subtle dangers to the soul"\(^{(126)}\)).

This thesis has been concerned to plot a course through a state of multi-religious informedness in which our sense of world uncertainty is heightened by the knowledge of a range of possible ultimate accounts of things. I have been concerned with stating the nature of the dilemma in which the student of religions finds himself as regards his knowledge of many world certainties (a dilemma referred to analogically as "the hall of mirrors"); with suggesting possible ways in which he might seek a way out of this situation; with selecting what appears to be the best of these possible ways (and developing it in the procedure I have called "interpolation"); with considering why there are many religious world certainties rather than a single one; and with assessing how far study in this field may proceed given the uniquely "unlike" (and therefore ineffable/mysterious) element in its subject matter. This is the position in a nutshell, it is now time to offer a more substantial summing up and conclusion.
If there are things that ought to be believed, this being the whole meaning of truth, there are also sides that ought to be espoused: this is the burden of goodness. To remain neutral in the face of these, or to be over-hesitant in deciding where they lie, is not wisdom but its opposite.

Huston Smith: The Purposes of Higher Education

Where are you going? How shall you confront life and death, virtue and fear? All the race takes refuge in your breast; it asks questions there and lies waiting in agony.

Nikos Kazantzakis: Spiritual Exercises
(i) Summary

The research presented here has attempted to isolate and discuss what I take to be some of the central difficulties involved in the non-partisan study of religions. In particular, attention has been focused on the question of how the religionist is to deal with the problems posed by that acquaintance with a situation of religious diversity which is an unavoidable concomitant of his work.

Taking "world certainty" as an important characteristic of all religions (meaning by this term a comprehensive and prescriptive view which claims knowledge of the ultimate nature of the world and suggests the way in which human life should be lived in accordance with that knowledge), and taking "world uncertainty" (i.e. an unsureness about these issues) as the natural condition with which homo religiosus begins his quest for meaning, I suggest that the traditional non-judgmental approach which subordinates evaluation to impartiality, and which has been favoured by the History and Phenomenology of Religions, must not be continued indefinitely. If it is to take seriously such fundamental features of its subject matter and its students as I argue world certainty and world uncertainty are, then the study of religions cannot be adequately defined by a "neutral" methodology which preaches personal non-involvement in its own findings. The History and Phenomenology of Religions provides an indispensable descriptive prolegomenon
by means of which the central problems of Religious
Studies as a whole may be staked out, but its work
constitutes an initial stage rather than the final goal
of the religionist's inquiry.

I have not, then, been concerned with making a direct
collection to the straightforwardly factual and descrip-
tive side of the subject. Rather, my discussion has
assumed sufficient acquaintance with the vast collection
of data about religions (mostly accumulated over the last
century or so) for the religionist to feel more concerned
with the *implications* of his multi-religious informedness
than with simply adding to it. Given his nature as
*homo religiosus* susceptible to world uncertainty and
desirous of world certainty, and given the nature of his
subject as providing access to various suggestions
concerning that world certainty which he desires, the
religionist might give voice to the consequent disquiet
which he will inevitably feel in the course of his work
by asking three questions:-

1. How is he to go about deciding which, if any, of the
world certainties offered by the various religions is true?
2. What causes this situation of religious diversity?
(For not only is the religionist faced with a knowledge
of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic etc. outlooks
and a consequent intellectual/spiritual obligation to
arrive at some sort of conclusion concerning the world
certainties which they proclaim, but he is also faced with
the question of why there is such a range of world certainties in the first place).

3. To what extent are religions accessible to study? (His third question does not occur immediately, but arises as a result of his attempts to tackle the other two).

If the religionist is to answer these questions successfully, a temporary respite from information is needed. A suspension of simple data gathering seems to be required, in order to allow a period of reflection in which he may consider how best to escape from a situation which threatens possible ontological and moral paralysis through mesmerization by religious plurality.

CHAPTER ONE presented the above situation in detail (largely via the analogy of the hall of mirrors) and dealt with some of the more important objections to the mapping of religion and Religious Studies which this image suggests (3). Thereafter the thesis was concerned with discussing how the mesmerized religionist might go about answering these three primary questions.

(1) How Are We to go About Deciding Which, if Any, of the World Certainties Offered by the Various Religions is True?

In CHAPTER TWO I suggested that, faced with the vast range of alternative world certainties offered by the religious experience of mankind, the religionist must begin by finding a reliable means by which to see clearly what each of these world certainties involves. Until he finds
some such means he cannot tell whether his dilemma is real or illusory (for perhaps beneath their cultural and linguistic forms the religions are essentially the same and in fact offer only a single world certainty), nor can he hope to shift his intellectual/spiritual position from one of mere informedness about a situation of religious optionality to one of effective critical assessment concerning which, if any, option it is best for him to take (for no useful evaluation can be reached until we have a clear picture of what we are evaluating\(^{(4)}\)). I suggested that there are three possible senses of "see" according to which the religionist could focus his mental energies in the attempt to see clearly what is there. The various directions in which such modes of sight would lead his gaze were set out at length, with particular reference to an attempt to deal with the Shiva Nataraja, a central image of Shaivite Hinduism.

It was suggested that in the phenomenology of religion such modes of sight (or something closely akin to them) may already be found in operation. The work of several phenomenologists of religion (Van der Leeuw, King, Jurji et. al.) was thus considered in terms of providing possible operative paradigms for each of our senses of "see". But although there are certain parallels between our notion of seeing and various aspects of phenomenology, such that some of the problems attending the different modes of sight may also apply to a discussion of certain elements of
phenomenology (and vice versa), the whole area of phenomenology of religion is so pervaded by an aura of terminological confusion that any comments relating to it are invested with a definite tenuousness. However it is conceived (and there are many different conceptions of it) there seems to be considerable variance between phenomenology of religion in theory and in practice, and no normative concepts yet exist by which order might be brought to this field of thought. Such factors led us to the conclusion that – whether or not it would be accurate – it would certainly be unwise to present our discussion of seeing in phenomenological terms. We are, after all, concerned with constructing guidelines of procedure starting from, and designed to aid, a specific situation, not with offering a general treatment (critical or apologetic) of an abstract methodological corpus. Such overlaps of relevance as may occur with this (ill defined) corpus are simply incidental to our main concern, thus no attempt was made to trace them out in detail. At best phenomenology provides a source of analogical (as opposed to paradigmatic) referents from which a certain cross fertilization may be derived, whilst at worst it supplies a highly confused and confusing vocabulary which it seems prudent to avoid.

In CHAPTER THREE the various possible modes of seeing were critically evaluated (from a pragmatic rather than an absolute standpoint, i.e. considering them in terms of
their usefulness to the religionist in tackling his first primary question). It was decided that what is required is an imaginative mode of sight based on "interpolation" i.e. which is concerned to place the religionist as an empathetic observer as thoroughly and intimately as possible in the various different worlds of religious meaning (rather than a mode of sight based on reduction which would be more concerned to trace the origin and development of some religious tradition as an historical entity, or to try to get beneath the "externals" of linguistic and cultural manifestation to some sort of abiding essence\(^{(5)}\). What is being sought is neither an abandonment of the data about religions which has already been accumulated (this recourse to ignorance was rejected as an intellectually unsound, if not dishonest, way of "dealing" with the problems of poly-religious informed-ness) nor is it simply some super-descriptive endeavour designed to gather more facts more efficiently (for whilst acknowledging the need for continued descriptive information this does not seem to be the religionist's most pressing need). Rather, what is needed is a fresh means of approach which will take us further "into" the information we already have (and will in future acquire) than can the level of insight offered by the straightforward descriptive means used to collect it. Various general guidelines were offered to show how such a mode of seeing would work, and an attempt was made to anticipate and
forestall those objections which might immediately challenge it\(^6\).

The situation of religious diversity from which such seeing must set out was re-stated and enlarged in terms of a metaphorical picture based on a remark which Max Müller made concerning those who were sceptical about the Christian teleology he believed in, namely: "If you say that all is not made by design, by love, then you may be in the same house, but you are not in the same world with me"\(^7\). In terms of our basic humanness, our unavoidable involvement in the round of birth, ageing and death, with all the web of thoughts and feelings which such a process involves, we can say that all men are in the same house. And yet the extent of our differences in outlook often makes it seem appropriate to say that we are nevertheless in different worlds. The religionist, whilst increasingly aware of the diversity of world views, suspends his right to say that someone occupies a different world in any sort of distancing or dismissive way which would preclude further discussion (as did Müller's original utterance). Rather, his work might be pictured as an exercise in extensive inter-global travel in which he explores the various religious viewpoints voiced by men across the centuries. "Interpolation", the name we gave to the procedure orientated towards "third level" sight, is based on the premise that our underlying similarity (our location in the "same house") provides a basis from which to
investigate "different worlds" with reasonable hope of understanding them. It gives the religionist a methodological vehicle by which he may do this without it resulting in the mesmerizing kaleidoscope of abstracted information occasioned by a descriptive approach. Further problems and consequences facing the interpolative religionist which are brought to light through this metaphorical image were stated and discussed\(^{(8)}\).

In **CHAPTER FOUR** the operative mechanics by which seeing via interpolation can achieve the vision which we claim it offers were discussed in detail, and we located where such a procedure stands in relation to the mainstream methodological debate in Religious Studies. Three main stages in the growth of methodological self consciousness in this field of thought were identified (stages which, I suggested, occur at both a phylogenetic and at an ontogenetic level). It was argued that the individual religionist who finds himself perplexed by his acquaintance with a situation of religious diversity (and, broadly speaking, the subject as a whole today) may be said to be at the third such stage, which is characterized by two main features: (i) a loss of faith in the possibility (or desirability) of establishing any kind of single and definitive all-purpose method which could successfully bear the full investigative burden of the study of religion (the sort of thing which early pioneers of the subject had in mind when they envisaged a "science" of religion);
(ii) a conviction that, although it may be difficult to specify in explicit terms of concrete procedure, the general ethos which ought to pervade the various methods of Religious Studies is one which attempts to blend impartiality and empathy. The rift between these two categories is a serious one in this field of thought and is occasioned by the (unavoidably) bi-focal nature of inquiries into religious phenomena. For on the one hand we are concerned simply with accurately plotting out particular areas of human experience, whilst, on the other, we are seeking answers to such questions as "what sort of life ought I to try to lead?" which inevitably arise out of an excursion into the territory of religion. We suggested that this tension between objective and subjective concerns in Religious Studies has been most clearly identified by Michael Novak.

Interpolation recognizes both main features of the third phase of methodological self-consciousness. It was not put forward as the method by which the religionist must gather all his data, rather it should be seen as a procedural overview which suggests how he ought to use the data gathered by the various independent methods whose operational autonomy is not substantially interfered with. Moreover, it offers a definite and systematic way in which he may achieve an ideal blending of objective and subjective concerns without doing injury to either, for it is equally at pains to establish a standpoint of intimate and
comprehensive empathy and to retain an acutely critical faculty. Precisely what is meant by interpolation (for up to this point it has been presented largely in terms of its functional locus as that device by which the religionist's chosen mode of seeing can progress) was made clear using four elucidatory strategies:

(i) by developing an analogical comparison to it in "complete" reading; (ii) by stating its main principles in terms of its central thematic nerve, i.e. the need to return to beginnings; (iii) by suggesting - in a very brief and inchoate fashion - how it may be applied to a specific example; (iv) by offering a paradigm occurrence of interpolation in action in a novel by William Golding.

However, even such an apparently ideal method as interpolation does not seem able to take us to the heart of the matter from where we could see with complete assurance whether or not any particular religious option was in fact viable in terms of its proclaimed world certainty. A certain definite resistance to the rational investigative process seems centrally inherent in religion. Such resistance is seen expressed in the mystical or ineffable strand which seems to pervade all religious phenomena (though at varying depths). Thus we pointed out that although the religionist may, for instance, reconstruct the thought world of the Hindu with great diligence and sensitivity, and would undoubtedly enlarge his understanding of this tradition by so doing, the use
of such a reconstruction in terms of arriving at decisions about world certainty is seriously questioned if a central element in it is Brahman, that which (according to Shankara) is wholly beyond words, for how could the religionist understand or evaluate such a thing? The application of interpolation would seem to lead him again and again to a confrontation with the "mysterious", which appears to run like a live wire throughout this whole area of human experience. If he accepts that it is as "described", in terms of being experiencable (and of central importance) but not open to description, then it seems to constitute an extensive and opaque barrier through which even the most penetrative methodological mode of sight cannot gaze. This is the first occasion on which the accessibility of religion to study may seriously be doubted. But before turning our attention to this issue we first considered the second of the religionist's primary questions (i.e. "why are there many religious outlooks rather than one?").

(2) What Causes Religious Diversity?

In CHAPTER FIVE we began by indicating the extent of religious diversity. The simple model used so far, where the religionist is pictured confronting the different world certainties of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc., is inadequate for the true complexity of the situation. For the intellectual/spiritual mesmerization which an acquaintance with religious plurality threatens,
stems not just from a single but from a threefold source of diversity. **Firstly** (and of course most seriously) there is the straightforward **inter-religious diversity** to which attention has already been drawn. This is constituted simply by the existence of the different sacred traditions. But it would be misleading to imagine that these traditions each presents a single unitary identity such that we could say without qualification, "**that** (and give some precise definitional statement) is the Hindu/Buddhist/Christian/Islamic or whatever world certainty". Rather, within each of these broad (and by no means clear or necessarily exclusive) categories there are successively smaller divisions (Vedantic, Tantric; Hinayana, Mahayana; Catholic, Protestant; Shia, Sunni) each offering a variant outlook, until we come down to the individual and find (to some extent) a person to person difference in belief, so we are thus faced (secondly) with **intra-religious diversity**. **Thirdly**, there is what might be called **meta-religious diversity**. That is, within the study of religions there are diverse presentations of the same phenomena. Both **inter** meta-religious diversity and **intra** meta-religious diversity occur (i.e. not only do we have the different "pictures" offered by philosophical, anthropological, psychological, sociological, etc. approaches to religion, but within these different disciplinary strands different "sub-pictures" appear. Thus in philosophy of religion, for example, we find
linguistic, existential, phenomenological and idealistic accounts of religion). Here too we encounter progressively smaller divisions until we come down to particular scholars and again find a diversity of outlook at an individual level.

I suggested that the most obvious answer to the question "what causes this religious diversity?" points firstly (and especially in the case of inter-religious diversity) to historical, cultural, geographical, and other such constitutive factors of milieu, and claims that the differences found there automatically account for the differences which occur in the religions arising out of such milieus; and secondly (and especially in the case of intra- and meta-religious diversity) to each time's, culture's, discipline's and individual's need to consider the world for themselves, in the light of their own experience and knowledge (rather than relying solely on what was learnt in the past), this perpetual re-evaluation necessitating a continuing diversity within every tradition.

I did not dispute that such factors do play an important role in creating the diversity of religious phenomena through which the religionist must attempt to find his way. However, such commonsense relativism and appeal to the advance of learning cannot render religious diversity a wholly unproblematic affair. I stressed that we are concerned specifically with religious world
certainties i.e. those aspects of religion which are addressed to the basic elements of existence, which are concerned with the human situation as such, experience of whose salient characteristics remains uniform regardless of variations in milieu and advances in knowledge. Given this fundamental uniformity, why do we find such diverse accounts of its ultimate meaning and significance? (9)

The next answer we considered begins by accepting that advances in learning necessitate a re-interpretation of religious experience but goes on to inquire what sort of experience the religious one (10) must be in order for it both always to need such re-interpretation and to survive a series of interpretative recensions (which would be fatal to the credibility of any empirical proposition) without being deemed simply mistaken or fallacious. From there the argument progressed in stages to a tentative identification of the source of religious diversity in general. To take the simple (and somewhat contrived) example which we used: a Christian might begin his biography with little reason to doubt the central insight of his faith which says that God is love. However, supposing that he goes on to experience famine, war, disease, poverty and all the other shocks that flesh is heir to, this expression of his religious experience cannot then be left in its simple unelaborated form without intolerable intellectual jarring with the evidence so clearly afforded by his life. It will require subtle re-interpretation if it is to retain
any credibility. Similar shifts in expressive form and emphasis will be needed in order to accommodate discoveries in biology, astronomy etc. Assuming the elements of his Christian experience are not simply rejected as mistaken (11), what sort of experience could it be in order to bear this load of perpetual re-interpretation (for this is, of course, an ongoing process: witness the history of Christian theology) and neither (i) be exhausted by it, or (ii) ever be stated in a completely satisfactory and permanent way (for if a satisfactory/permanent form was reached the process would be halted)? We argued that the only feasible source of such apparently endless interpretative fecundity lies in that ineffable/mysterious strand of religion against whose opaqueness our interpolative inquiry seems to be stopped in its tracks. It is in that opaqueness that the generative heart of religious diversity appears to beat in an endlessly recurring rhythm of ineffability and attempted expression.

At this point in the discussion it might have appeared that the religionist's third primary question was answered automatically in a negative and pessimistic way which precluded the possibility of Religious Studies ever leading us to an understanding of religion. For, at first sight, ineffable experience appears to be a logical surd whose claimed occurrence must be derided as an impossibility from any rational standpoint. However, after demonstrating how one reading of ineffable experience is absurd, we went on to suggest a way in which it can be made sense of without
(logical) objection. I argued that legitimate claims of ineffability can only issue from experience of "radical unlikeness" i.e. from a situation where none of our categories of comparison (by which we can normally build bridges from the known to the unknown and thus extend the ambit of our understanding) can be applied. There are, furthermore, only two possible situations to which radical unlikeness can legitimately apply. One is experience of a "wholly other" state or entity which is completely outside and independent of our cognitive territory, the other is experience of the totality of that territory seen in some sort of holistic and immediate way. I suggested that to locate the source of radical unlikeness in some external, alien state or entity is to involve a reading of the ensuing ineffable experience which is such as to query its own possibility (i.e. which queries the possibility of experiencing such a state or entity in the first place). If, on the other hand, we locate it in some sort of experience of totality, this involves a reading of ineffability in which it can be accepted as an intelligible account of a possible experience. The argument here hinged around the notion that in order to claim awareness of something, in order to accept it as a possible element in consciousness, we must be able to offer some indication of what it is like (whilst at the same time, if we wish to maintain that such awareness is of something ineffable, that indication must be "incurably" minimal). If radical
unlikeness is said to stem from experience of near totality it satisfies these criteria, if it is located in "experience" of an alien state or entity it does not. At this point a critical watershed in the study of religions is reached, for, if we opt for the former source of radical unlikeness our investigation may proceed unhindered by the accusation that it is giving unwarrantable credence to the unintelligible, whilst, if we opt for the latter source, then the whole religious realm plummets into a chasm of unreason which is closed to further research (for how could we continue to investigate something whose central reference was to that which, according to those rational categories upon which such research depends, must be deemed impossible?).

It was stressed that what we are considering here is logical as opposed to psychological possibility. That is, although the notion of an experience of "totality" may be intelligible, it may not be humanly possible to achieve. Before our abstract location of the source of radical unlikeness can be granted more than theoretical credence, therefore, further work is needed which will offer an analysis of particular claims of ineffability, in order to discover if they can fit into such a model without undue strain. At first sight there seems to be no reason to suppose that such a model could not "hold" successfully. If, however, it does not, then supposing we still wish to accept as intelligible any claim of ineffable experience, we are faced with having to provide an alternative
justification of its possibility as an experience, and it is difficult to see where such a justification could come from.

If we accept the importance of the ineffable/mysterious element in religions, and if we locate its origin in an experience of perpetually generative radical unlikeness (which, being constituted by some sort of holistic experience, fuses together all the polarities whose multiple twinned tendrils snake their way through the very fabric of existence, simultaneously structuring our cognitive system and creating - in their unfused state - a sense of world uncertainty\(^{(12)}\)), then a situation of religious diversity is to be expected. Religious experience in this view is "wholly other". It is fundamentally dissimilar to non-religious experience because of its orientation towards (or direct contact with) the world taken as a totality and the radical unlikeness thus encountered. Such an orientation results in the use of "qualifiers"\(^{(13)}\) liberally scattered throughout the religious vocabulary. The presence of such qualifiers - words such as immortal, omniscient, omnipresent, ineffable - indicates the impossibility of reaching any single concrete description which "nets" religious experience in a wholly satisfactory way and so necessitates continual attempts at more adequate re-description. The proliferation of these attempts can, it was argued, account for religious diversity on
all the fronts on which it occurs. Qualifiers allow for - indeed encourage - repeated interpretations, whilst at the same time forbidding that any are taken as final. They serve to "multiply models without end"(14).

Thus we came to the second occasion on which the third of the religionist's primary questions is posed (i.e. "to what extent is religion accessible to study?"), for if we ground religious experience in radical unlikeness and locate the origin of such unlikeness in an experience of totality (which results in an unceasing round of ineffability and attempts at description), do we not thereby preclude the possibility of the religionist ever reaching any concrete conclusions about his data? Are his studies not thus sentenced to the same perpetual non-finality of interpretation as is displayed by religion itself? Does meta-religious diversity not simply mirror - albeit at a greater distance from the elusive and ineffable numinous image - the necessary non-finality found in religion (religion on this account being understood largely as the accumulated corpus of attempts to net the ineffable/mysterious in words)?

(3) To What Extent are Religions Accessible to Study?

CHAPTER SIX was concerned both to answer the religionist's third primary question and to explore the more general (but of course related) issue of the relationship which exists between religion and the study of religion. It was emphasized at the outset that this chapter was more
of a consolidation or closer examination of what we have already discovered, rather than being a new advance, for the question of the accessibility of religion to study can only be answered **conclusively** from a practical standpoint (when procedural principles have been applied), not from our current theoretical position. The next step further forwards must thus await some future work. However, we can, in the meantime, usefully address our attention to the various interrogatory threads contained in the third primary question and, by so doing, clarify the way in which an answer here may eventually be determined.

From the point of view of the religionist in the hall of mirrors, the goal of Religious Studies is **world decision** i.e. to arrive at a point from which the various world certainties suggested by the religions may be evaluated and where a judgment concerning them may be reached. It is towards this goal that interpolation aims. To seek such a goal by following such a procedure is to satisfy both the strata of concern which seem to operate in this area (thus, incidentally, suggesting a **reconvergence** between Religious Studies and theology, rather than the divorce between them which tends to follow if attention is given to one stratum only). The success of a study in aiming for the goal of world decision can best be measured by the way in which it deals with the ineffable/mysterious element which we have suggested is of such central importance to religion. But whereas the stratum of concern addressed
to the integrity of the discipline can be satisfied with an indirect or "second hand" mapping of ineffability, the stratum addressed to the integrity of *homo religiosus* would seem to require direct first hand experience of the radically unlike. Whether or not interpolation can provide this latter desideratum remains uncertain (and if it can provide it, the consequences which would follow are similarly unsure). Some objections to the idea of gauging the success of Religious Studies (and thereby the accessibility of religion to such studies) in this way - i.e. in terms of its handling of the ineffable - were considered before moving on to the second concern of the chapter(15).

The relationship between religion and Religious Studies was considered initially through an examination of what Morris Jastrow referred to as "the personal equation". In particular, attention was drawn to the dual potentiality of this important factor, stressing that it could propagate either insight or prejudice. The religionist must take care to ensure that its potential for insight is maximized and its potential for prejudice minimized (and the importance of his so doing was stressed by showing the sort of outlook which can result from an uncontrolled personal equation). It was suggested that the role of the personal equation may best be summed up (in a way that shows how it operates as regards the "hall of mirrors" situation and which avoids seeing it only as insightful or prejudicial) by means of
an analogy which pictures man's religiousness in terms of a stream running through his life. The hall of mirrors can thus be seen as a situation in which the religionist becomes aware of numerous different channels along which this stream might run. Cognate with our terms "world uncertainty", "world certainty", and "world decision", we dubbed this stream of religiousness our "world concern".

The discussion of the relationship between religion and Religious Studies was continued with a consideration of the ways in which Religious Studies might itself be viewed as a religious endeavour. Care was taken to distinguish between its being undertaken for religious ends (which is, in fact, still quite common) and its actually being a religion (which was rejected as absurd), and between saying that its practitioners are in some sense religious and that the subject as a whole may be regarded as such. Given our arguments against the bisectionist fallacy, which led us to conclude that religion and the study of religion cannot be altogether separated since they are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin (rather than two separate coins of vastly different value), I declined to offer any simple formula which neatly stated their relationship (on the grounds that such a formula could not do justice to the complex interaction involved here, but would inevitably promote a misleadingly clear-cut "bisectionist" distinction instead). In place of any such formula, a series of remarks geared
towards providing tentative definitions of religionist and of religion were made. These suggested that, at the end of the day, the religionist was concerned with his own (and possibly with others') religious education - and that this inevitably involved focusing on some sort of world decision, whilst religion was importantly dual in terms of creating both world uncertainty and world certainty. Vital to the certainty which religions offer is, I suggested, experience of a non-polar situation, such as is affirmed by the encounter with radical unlikeness stemming from an encounter with near totality.

(ii) Conclusion

It will have become increasingly apparent in the course of reading the preceding chapters (and the summary above will have re-emphasized this) that our thinking on procedure can only go so far without a concrete testing of its findings. But whereas a PhD research programme provides sufficient time to step back from the data and to consider in a preliminary way what the study of religion involves and how it ought to be undertaken, it does not allow time for the procedural principles which may thus be arrived at to be applied in specific investigations. Many of the results of such a period of reflection are therefore bound to be imbued with a certain sense of provisionality pending their subsequent performance in future work. However, even if much of what has been said
here has, as a consequence of this limitation, been overly
general and speculative in tone (indeed even if some of it
turns out to be mistaken), I would suggest that this sort
of deliberate disengagement from actually studying some
particular aspect of religion - so that the nature of study
in this field can be considered - is a valuable exercise.
Such a disengagement fosters an element of self conscious-
ness which serves to counter the directional vagueness or
methodological confusion to which Religious Studies seems
prone. This is simply another way of saying that it
provides us with an opportunity to see clearly where we
are going, where we want to go, and how best we are to
reach our desired destination. If the religionist is to
survive in the ever swelling waters of information which
surround him he must, on occasions, come up for air. It
has been my intention in this thesis to provide a sustained
breathing space in which attention could be given to those
broader issues which only emerge clearly outwith the
preoccupation with particular descriptive inquiries.

It must be remembered that I have been working towards
a procedure for studying religion. As such, I do not claim
to have arrived at any final and perfected model which may
confidently be put into immediate use without expecting it
to need any subsequent correction. I have, rather,
sketch out some points of design for an experimental
vehicle, a prototype, not a production model, after consider-
ing the general nature of the terrain which it will be called
upon to bear us across and examining some of the more prominent problematic features which the religious topography presents for the prospective traveller, whatever his mode of transport. Whilst I have tried to anticipate some of the problems which a journey through the hall of mirrors to a point of world decision will encounter, I have been careful to stress that such problems must eventually be answered from a standpoint of encounter rather than anticipation. The next step forwards, away from mesmerization, is for the religionist to "test pilot" interpolation towards the most significant problem in this area (namely, the ineffable/mysterious element in religion) and simply see what happens.

In the end, then, there is no conclusion in the sense of having reached some definite terminal point at which a decision is reached and a problem completely solved. Given the nature of this work such a conclusion would simply be out of place. We have, after all, been principally concerned with discussing how we might go about answering a question, not with actually suggesting an answer to it - we have asked "how can the religionist discover which, if any, of the world certainties which confront him in the hall of mirrors is true?", not "which, if any, of these world certainties actually is true?". Our discussion has thus taken place more at the level of introduction or prolegomenon than of conclusion, for although our answers to the second and third primary
questions were more conclusive in terms of actually providing answers, it is still the first primary question which chiefly defines the situation of perplexity created by multi-religious informedness - and until this perplexity is resolved our inquiries cannot be said to have reached a conclusion or to be complete. So, instead of trying to bring this work to a close by formulating something which would be at odds with the whole tenor of what has gone before, it would seem more appropriate in this final section - more in keeping with the nature of our work as prototypical - to list in place of a "conclusion" some of the more striking shortcomings (or design faults) and new topics for inquiry which seem inevitably to be suggested by our analysis so far. There are, I think, three main composite points of criticism/continuation (i.e. areas where what I have said is open to criticism and/or where it suggests a continuation of research, where further work seems needed). This is not intended as a complete catalogue of the faults or further avenues of thought which might be listed after a reading of the past several hundred pages. I have been conscious of brushing against a score of topics in the course of the argument, any one of which could provide a quite legitimate subject for extensive research, thus there are numerous occasions on which I am open to the criticism of being superficial or to the praise of being stimulating (in terms of suggesting further points of investigative departure), not to mention those points at which more serious criticisms might be
voiced\(^\text{(16)}\). Rather than providing any detailed defensive
catalogue which seeks to anticipate and parry the critic's
every thrust, the three points which follow ought to be viewed more as trying to indicate (very briefly) the broad area from which the most important issues of criticism/continuation seem to stem, as seen from an immediate (and therefore not necessarily accurate) point of retrospective self criticism. More importantly, they might be seen as locating (albeit in a rough and ready manner) where a second phase of "coming up for air" might break the surface of the sea of information, into whose waters the interpolative religionist must for a time descend.

1. How can World Certainty Originate and How can the Religionist Apprehend it?

The task to which interpolative principles of procedure must be applied is that of investigating the world certainties offered by the various religions. In other words, interpolation is to be used in the exploration and elucidation of the different images found in the hall of mirrors (with a view to reaching a point of decision about them). But over and above the sheer scale and complexity of what is involved in such a task (which amounts to little less than the detailed surveying of the varieties of human religiousness and, as such, extends in difficulty and duration beyond the competence and lifespan of any individual - a point we will consider presently) there remain certain logical difficulties facing any attempt at interpolation.
Given our analysis of the importance of ineffability/mysteriousness, its origin in experience of the radically unlike, and the source of such unlikeness in some kind of totality-experience, the question automatically arises: "how can any scheme of world certainty originate from such a locus?". For although we might accept that the meaning of religious phenomena recedes to a point (or points) of ineffability, it is more difficult, when we reverse the process, to accept the idea of an advance from the ineffable to the specific without at the same time questioning the original claim of ineffability. Whereas the "retreat" of phenomena (in terms of meaning) seems to stress the "non-finality" of religious expression in a way wholly consonant with the reported nature of the holy, an "advance" from a point of radical unlikeness to anything beyond the most minimal expressive form seems to strike a progressively discordant note with the reported nature of the states or entities apparently involved. How can we reconcile the specifically prescriptive elements of world certainty (such things as, for example, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Ten Commandments or the Five Pillars of Islam) with the ineffability of experience associated with the radically unlike? How, in short, is religious experience to be seen in relation to the codified expression of belief? How can we arrive - if indeed we can - at a logically acceptable understanding of how the former lies at the root of, and somehow validates, the latter? (and does that validation cover
the whole spectrum of religious opinion with equal force, from what is expressed in, say, mystical literature, to the finest and most concretely stated points of doctrine?). If it does originate in this way, how can a developed statement of world certainty emerge from a point of ineffable radical unlikeness without, so to speak, questioning its own nature and ground of authority? How can the images in the hall of mirrors appear in detail far beyond that apparently given at the point of their own inception? The connection between the unsayable and what is in fact said remains far from clear, despite our comments about an ongoing sequence of statement, retraction and retention. Further consideration of the role of ineffability, particularly as regards its relationship with other elements in religion, remains a centrally important area for research. We have done little more here than to touch the surface of some of the more obvious issues which it raises. In short, the objection being made in identifying the first "design fault" points to an apparent tension between ineffability and expression which the factor of "non-finality" does not seem adequately to explain. For although on one level it does seem to be accepted that nothing can be said about the central core of ineffability and that, in consequence, all accounts offered of it must qualify their utterances by a caveat of non-finality, on another there do seem to be some especially authoritative statements of its nature and significance which for all practical purposes - despite any
protestations to the contrary - are taken as finally descriptive (and/or prescriptive) accounts. Indeed such accounts seem to provide much of the substance of religious traditions.

But supposing our analysis of the generative yet "destructive" role of radical unlikeness could be reconciled with even the most highly systematized and apparently permanent expressions of world certainty (which appear to draw the teeth of that destructiveness), supposing that in fact they too could be shown to contain a truly operative qualifying element of non-finality, such that their development did not appear to contradict its own genesis, then although the terrain faced by interpolation would no longer seem at odds with the origin which we posit for it, the task of crossing it, of apprehending its central features, would still remain highly problematic. For the religionist is still faced with the problems posed by the existence of a stream of interpretations, by the "multiplication of models without end" which non-finality seems to demand. Given such interpretative fecundity how is he ever to come to grips with what is being asserted by these "multiplications"? How is he to apprehend a world certainty given the unending stream of accounts in which, however authoritative particular expressions of it may be, it is still embedded? On the one hand, the very idea of a concrete statement of world certainty seems to be queried by its own point of origin, and, on the other, even
supposing that such statements could be seen as being in some way "really" non-final, so being reconciled with a genesis in radical unlikeness, their placing in a surrounding stream of non-final accounts would still query their ability to inform conclusively, thus rendering endlessly problematic the religionist's task of discovering the nature of what it is they are trying to talk about. More work is needed in plotting out the relationship between ineffability and continuing interpretation of it, especially in terms of establishing what is required here for understanding. It almost seems as if the religionist must guard against being "taken in" by any single interpretation, yet at the same time make sure that his inquiry is grounded on a close acquaintance with the individual elements of the interpretative stream. An observation of Toynbee's is relevant here, serving as it does to connect the process of interpretation (or "mistranslation") with the idea of a multiplication of models without end and to locate understanding in some kind of "seeing through" all the interpretations:

what is permanent and universal has always and everywhere to be translated into terms of something temporary and local in order to make it accessible to particular human beings here and now. But we ought never to allow ourselves to forget that every translation of this kind is bound to be a mistranslation to some extent, and that it is therefore also bound to be contingent and provisional. The penalty for neglecting the perpetually urgent task of discarding
the current mistranslation is to allow
the light radiated by the essence of
religion to be shut from human souls
by an opaque film of accretions. (18)

Conversely, the penalty for neglecting the series of
"mistranslations" is to mistakenly locate (or not to
locate at all) the "essence" which has generated them.

Which mistranslation is the best? Can the religion¬
ist use the same criterion of "providing access to
ineffability", which we have suggested that he employs to
measure the success of his studies, in order to make a
choice of what to consult from amongst the multiplicity
of models in order to understand what they are attempting
to portray? (But if he uses this same criterion,
care will be needed to avoid being led straight back to
the paralysing conclusion - which is apparently at odds with
the basic fact of the existence of an extensive corpus of
religious literature - that only "ineffability" can give
any impression of what is involved in ineffable experience.)

Ought he, perhaps, to adopt an historical principle of
selection instead, by which he accepts whatever mistrans¬
lation is current and ignores as irrelevant, as superseded,
those in the past? (But how could he reconcile such a
procedure with the return to historical beginnings demanded
by interpolation?). Or ought he simply to consult every
model as relevant if he wishes to understand what is being
portrayed? (though if he adopts this strategy it is
difficult to see how he could avoid the accusation of
ignoring what, to the "believers" at any rate, are
presumably improvements in, or corrections to, the way in which the object of their belief is conceived of). All these points require further thought.

Thus the first "design fault" which suggests a return to the drawing board lies not so much in the process of interpolation itself as in our mapping of the terrain which it must cross. It asks, in effect, how large parts of that terrain could have come into being given our analysis of its underlying nature (thus serving to query the accuracy of that analysis in the first place), and, even supposing its development could occur in some way quite compatible with its suggested genetic sub-structure, how the religionist could ever hope to cross it. For on such a reading the object of his concern seems to be cast almost in the role of ever elusive butterfly, with the religionist himself as the perpetually pursuing entomologist, who, however energetically he might wield his net, always remains at least one step behind⁹⁰.

2. Interpolation, Faith and Reason

It is something of a truism to note that "attitudes of belief or unbelief are never reached by processes of reasoning alone"⁹¹. As Woods has put it, "a correctly reasoned god is not the object of religious devotion"⁹². The second design fault which suggests a reappraisal of our work, voices the objection that in suggesting the religionist should seek his goal of world certainty via
interpolation, we have, quite simply, ignored this fundamental fact about belief. It suggests that we have altogether misread the situation and are recommending a mode of transport wholly inappropriate to the terrain we wish to cross and the destination we desire to reach. In advocating interpolation as a means of arriving at world decision, we are guilty of the same sort of massive misconception of what is involved as we would be if we suggested flying in a submarine or sailing round the world in a tank.

Given the nature of the phenomena with which the religionist has to deal in the hall of mirrors (in particular their scale of reference), it would not be particularly surprising if his confidence in reason became qualified by a recognition of its limitations (we might, in fact, expect this to happen). Thus he might well conclude, as Eliade has apparently done, that as regards the sacred we simply cannot use rational argument to the same extent as we usually do. When it comes to religion, such a mode of cognition does not seem to work in the cut and dried conclusive way which we are accustomed to expect from it. We cannot rely on such a process to lead us to complete understanding in this field (though obviously to reject it altogether would simply be ridiculous), instead

we must content ourselves with personal certitudes, with wagers based on dreams, with divinations, ecstasies, aesthetic emotions. That is also a mode of knowing, but without arguments (of whatever nature: logical, cosmological, ontological, etc.). (22)
Before accepting any sort of procedure for studying religion, it would seem prudent to give close attention to a discussion of the relationship between modes of cognition which operate "normally" and those which operate in the religious realm (if indeed there is any such distinction). Is there some sort of clear qualitative difference between how we know religiously and how we know non-religiously (the kind of thing traditionally identified by contrasting "faith" and "reason")? And, if so, why, precisely, does this sort of disparity occur and how will it affect our study? (might it mean, for example, that the study of religion could only go so far as asserting its own limitations, rather than taking the student to a more concrete understanding of its subject matter?).

But apart from simply noting this design fault and advocating for its "cure" a clear and detailed mapping of the range of our cognitive repertoires in both religious and secular realms (supposing two such separate spheres of knowing actually do exist), we might also remind ourselves that interpolation ought not to be seen simply as "reason" (nor religion simply as "faith"). We must be wary of adopting such forms of simplistic bisectionist outlook just because our work involves entry into both sides of a traditional linguistic divide. Such divisive categories can only be accepted after the most careful consideration. More particularly, we might bear
in mind that interpolation could, with some justification, lay claim to being an endeavour which is attentive to the needs of the whole man, rather than just to one or other of his single elements, i.e. it addresses neither his desire for "reason" nor for "faith" alone, but tries to ensure that both these aspects of his character are equally served (and it does this by respecting both his need to believe and his desire not to let his beliefs stand between him and the truth, by discouraging perpetually impartial descriptive studies and unexamined "closed" commitments, encouraging instead "open" commitments backed by extensive and intensive beginnings orientated inquiry). Interpolation is, in a sense, an attempt to take us to the apparent border of the rational, from where we may be taken beyond. For it is designed to bear us towards those points of contact with radical unlikeness, with totality-experience, where, as Kazantzakis graphically puts it, we find God (but the same goes for Brahman, or Nirvana, Allah or Emptiness) "dancing spaciously beyond the boundaries of a logic which cannot contain the antinomies" (23). As such, it is perhaps more accurately pictured as straddling any divide there may be between religious and non-religious cognition, rather than coming down clearly on either side of it.

The mesmerized religionist must recognize the limitations of reason and logic and those of faith and belief. He is a whole man, not an abstraction, with
feelings, ideas, thoughts, experiences, with innumerable diverse strengths and weaknesses. He is not some disembodied intellect or spirit. This multi-faceted humanness is taken into account in the notion of empathy (indeed it is used to effect it), it is to such a complete - rather than abstract - notion of the individual that the notion of a beginnings orientated approach is addressed, and for whom the concept of a personal equation (and the need to control it) has relevance. Finally, we might note a far simpler retort to the objection that interpolation is somehow out of gear with the nature of its subject matter: at least it offers a way forwards in the hall of mirrors. It may not lead us out, but it seems infinitely preferable to simply staying where we are. It may not be the perfect mode of locomotion, but, until we find something better, it does seem to take us at least some of the way in which we want to go.

3. The Hall of Mirrors and the Burden of Goodness

It is, perhaps, this third design fault which the prospective user of interpolation would eye with the most serious misgivings and which would prompt him most forcefully to return again to his drawing board. His uneasiness over this point in the design might best be seen if we view the mesmerized religionist as a man wishing to traverse a great distance in a very short time and interpolation as being a vehicle which offers only snail's pace progress.
In short, the problem here is that given the briefness of a human life and the extent and complexity of the religious realm, an interpolative effort simply seems incapable of taking us to the goal of world decision in time. It thus seems not to take real note of the nature and importance of the situation to which it is addressed, for the hall of mirrors constitutes no mere abstract problem but poses a seriously destabilizing threat to any equilibrium which a human life might boast. Unless we can come to some firm conclusion as regards our meaning and purpose, it is difficult to see how our lives are to escape from an overpowering sense of sheer dumbfoundedness, if not absurdity, with all the cynicism and despair which such a sense would seem inevitably to bring in its wake.

Further work thus seems called for in terms of sketching out the possibility of some sort of "provisional ethic"(24) to accompany interpolation, an ethic which might serve to guide us until it does "cover the distance", i.e. which could provide some sort of interim meaning and morality in the absence of any world decision having yet been reached. Although such an ethic would probably have to invest the interpolative effort with sufficient importance to give it some sort of "stop-gap meaning", which would serve to cover the otherwise yawning space between the application and desired outcome of its procedure, it would not seek to put interpolation in the place of a world certainty. Rather, it would be more concerned with establishing a scale of investigative priorities (the first
one of which would be to find something to replace its own provisionality), i.e. it would attempt to list the issues which are most vital to us and which the hall of mirrors puts most seriously in question. Then our interpolative inquiries could proceed in some sort of sequence of relative urgency, rather than tackling things of varying importance in no particular order. One important point, which this kind of ethic would seem quite likely to stress, would be that even though (as seems probable) no world decision may be reached via interpolation in any individual’s lifetime, it would still seem preferable for the religionist to continue with interpolation in a state of searching uncertainty, than for him to resort again to the abstract formulistic certainties offered by purely descriptive knowledge in which questions of truth and value are simply not considered. That, after all, was the source of his dilemma (and indeed seems responsible, at least in part, for what some see as the spiritual malaise of our time).

As Laurens Van der Post puts it:

The knowledge which is peddled in so ready a market today, seeing that it is bartered without human commitment, historical evaluation or moral obligation, is no longer a vehicle of legitimate exchange because it only communicates the facts and statistics of itself and nothing of the person who passes it on, nor anything of the one who receives it, let alone trails along with it a curl of the cloud of the aboriginal meaning which somewhere below the horizon of our time once inspired it and which alone can feed the great hunger we feel. (25)
Until we take up the burden of goodness there is always the danger of simply drifting off weightlessly into this sort of spiritual vacuum, for whilst goodness may be a heavy load, it acts more to anchor than to weigh down or oppress. In the meantime, until we can establish what it consists of, until we can decide which load in the hall of mirrors is the right one to uplift, some sort of temporary moorings seem to be called for - otherwise interpolation may appear simply as an academic joy-ride amongst purely theoretical ideas, whose every aspect of potential application we have carefully neutered by an a priori decision not to become involved.

It is, perhaps, as well for us to remember that, at the end of the day, the choice represented by making a world decision is the most fundamentally political one an individual can take. Without it the authority of whatever form of government is adopted is likely to be without real foundation (whether this be self government or national government, mores of behaviour at an individual or racial level). Unsupported by a world decision such government will, almost inevitably, be geared simply to promoting material comfort (probably assuming, somewhat rashly, that this may be equated quite straightforwardly with wellbeing). Without coming to some conclusion concerning who we are and what we are here for, or at least investing our attempts to find this out with a provisional ethic which guarantees interim intelligibility, it is difficult to see what
sense our actions can have beyond the most preliminary and restricted (not to say claustrophobic and oppressive) level. Without world certainty, or the drive towards establishing world certainty, we seem likely to fall prey to what is simply feasible (as opposed to what is desirable or advisable). But if we do not reach a decision, if we simply continue to search, can we impose some form of acceptable provisional government, some scheme of temporary meaning, upon the otherwise darkly menacing fabric of existence? Can we tame its threatening senselessness without actually arriving at any standpoint of certainty regarding it? It is such questions as these which the identification of the third "design fault" suggests that attention be given to.

If, as Smith suggests, it is the burden of goodness to espouse what is true, then surely it is the burden of seriousness and responsibility—perhaps even of sanity—to make diligent inquiry towards discovering what form that truth does in fact take. Since he is brought into contact with so many versions of what could be true, the religionist seems thus to be placed in an especially potent position as regards the ability to be irresponsible or responsible (for, in a sense, all the race "takes refuge in his breast"). Situated at an uneasy fulcrum between uncertainty and certainty, between danger and security, a brief reminder of his potential, if not quite for good or evil then at least as an influence for integrity or fragmentation, may not be amiss:
Every life is a profession of faith, and exercises an inevitable and silent propaganda. As far as it lies in its power, it tends to transform the universe and humanity into its own image. Thus we all have a cure of souls. Every man is a centre of perpetual radiation like a luminous body; he is, as it were, a beacon which entices a ship upon the rocks if it does not guide it into port. Every man is a priest, even involuntarily; his conduct is an unspoken sermon, which is forever preaching to others; - but there are priests of Baal, of Moloch, and of all the false gods. Such is the high importance of example. Thence comes the terrible responsibility which weighs upon us all. An evil example is a spiritual poison; it is the proclamation of a sacriligious faith, of an impure god. (26)

Given the importance of making the right choice the religionist may, perhaps, be forgiven if he does not reach a quick decision (27). But, at the same time, if he delays too long, or if he fails to invest his endeavours with some kind of "provisional ethic", then we might suspect that he has not properly appreciated the seriousness of the situation and has simply lapsed back into perpetual impartiality (if not indifference), or that he has had a failure of nerve and returned to some scheme of "closed" commitment, guided mostly by force of habit and following some accustomed, but unconsidered, line of least resistance. Regardless of what path he takes, the diverse images offered by the world's religions still surround him, encircling his life and work with a myriad of possibilities and innumerable nuances of significance
and insufficiency. If the "glance of his spirit" could span them all and somehow emerge with a single coherent view, then he would be immeasurably enriched. It seems just as likely, however, that he will feel forced to look away, dazzled and confused by what he sees, turning instead to the comfort of more familiar pictures. Faced with such a disparity of outcomes we ought surely to consider in more detail what degree of sanction can be invested simply in a decision to keep looking.

All along we have emphasized the need to return to beginnings, so it is perhaps fitting (if not entirely welcome) that, in the end, the thesis comes full circle and leaves us, the religionists, back in the hall of mirrors from which we set out. Given this central analogical picture to which repeated reference has been made throughout, there is an extraordinary aptness in I.A. Richard's comment that in studying the beliefs of others we may find ourselves "trying to be on both sides of the mirror at once"(28). Indeed his remark seems to sum up the whole ethos of Religious Studies as I have presented it here, for it suggests an attempt to see an image from the inside with such a degree of intimacy and involvement as to be able to view our own lives through it (i.e. seeing from the "other side" of a world certainty outwards again), and it also has connotations of trying to do the impossible, an uncomfortable sense of which continually
dogs the religionist's progress and finds explicit voice in the third of his primary questions.

Understanding religions, to the extent required to make a world decision, is inextricably tied up with being religious, a phenomenon which cannot be understood in intellectual terms alone. It is, rather, a concern of the whole person (as befits something which is so intimately connected with totality). Although we can suggest procedural guidelines by which the religionist may reach a point of re-experiencing the numen, the radically unlike, the holy, that point from which alone understanding and belief both seem finally to stem, thereafter he is on his own and if indeed he can go forward he travels into an area of absolutes which defy a priori schemes of systematization. The lines between religion and the study of religion, between Religious Studies and theology, between investigating religious phenomena and responding to the stimulus of the sacred, are not as clear cut as may once have been supposed. They are, nevertheless, still there, and, if the religionist wishes to understand his subject matter (and/or if he wishes his belief to be a cogent one) then it seems clear that he must be prepared to cut across traditional boundaries instead of trying to view the whole area of concern from a single standpoint. At the same time, though, he must take care not to confuse methodology with meaning or information with insight (and vice versa): a state of balance between often seemingly irreconcilable impulses seems to constitute an important
characteristic of his work.

That studying religion (especially in an interpolative mode) will in some way affect our religious outlook, seems a reasonable enough contention. But whether it can take us to a point of world decision, whether the interpolative exploration of different worlds of meaning can eventually lead the religionist to take up residence in one of them, remains uncertain. Our answer here would seem to depend largely on whether interpolation can lead to experience of radical unlikeness and precisely what effect such experience might turn out to have. But here we move into an area of imponderables where further theoretical reflection would be of little help.

So, as the curtain falls, we leave the religionist where we found him, still standing in the hall of mirrors confronted by a myriad of suggested world certainties, among which there may or may not be a face which accurately reflects his own and offers a true likeness - in ultimate terms - of the human situation. But although uncertain whether such a sense-giving image can be found here, at least we leave him clearer about what he is looking for, how he ought to go about his search, and what some of the possible consequences of discovery (or a continued failure to discover anything) might be.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX ONE
- Notational and Linguistic Conventions -

1. Throughout, I have used the word "religionist" simply to denote the student of religion. Although this sense has become more or less current in the field, it is important to remember that it does not coincide with the definition given in the Oxford English Dictionary (i.e. "One addicted or attached to religion; one imbued with or zealous for religion. Sometimes in a bad sense, a religious zealot or pretender").

2. "Interpolation" is likewise used in a specialist sense which does not coincide with its normally accepted meaning. The sense which I attach to it will be explained in the course of the text. At the outset, though, it is important to emphasize that as I use it "interpolation" has nothing to do with literary falsification.

3. Religious Studies and its Cognates (Comparative Religion, Science of Religion and History of Religions) have been capitalized throughout, except where quoting from, or referring to, other writers who do not observe this convention.

4. Where one or other is not grammatically demanded, I use "religion" and "religions" interchangeably. No implications of similarity or difference are intended by my choice of singular or plural. The thesis could equally well have been entitled "Towards a Procedure for Studying Religions".

5. Accenting has been kept to an absolute minimum, usually being excluded altogether. Thus, for example, words transliterated from the Sanskrit appear without diacritical marks. This policy has simply to do with typewriter capability and the unsightliness of handwritten corrections. I trust that where necessary the reader will be able to mentally insert accents for himself without undue effort.
6. Abbreviations have been dispensed with except for such general terms as translator (tr.), editor (ed.) and so on. The one exception here is the International Association for the History of Religions, which has been abbreviated to I.A.H.R.

7. In the notes, references to - and direct quotations from - other writers are indicated either by means of the author's last name, publication date of the edition consulted, and relevant page number(s) (in which case full details of the work concerned appear in the bibliography), or by listing the work in full straight away.

8. In the bibliography, the date of publication given is that of the edition consulted. Where this differs from the original edition I have, where possible, given the date of first publication in brackets. This convention has also been followed in the notes if a work is only listed there.
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- Sources of Epigraphs -

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## APPENDIX THREE: NOTES

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CHAPTER ONE

1. The earliest hominids (of which family the species Homo sapiens is a branch) may have appeared some 600,000 years ago (though we must remember that this is a comparatively recent emergence given that the earth is thought to be at least 4,500 million years old and that the first life appeared in pre-cambrian times, i.e. over 600 million years ago). Though it has been suggested that some sort of religious sense can be dated as early as Sinanthropus pekinensis (Peking Man), whose remains have been found at Choukoutien and are thought to be three or four hundred thousand years old, such a supposition, whilst not conclusively denied by existing evidence, does not seem definitely warranted by it either. The first clear indication of some sort of religious sense occurs with the deliberate mode of burial first found in Neanderthal Man who lived between 100,000 and 150,000 years ago. The species Homo sapiens includes Neanderthals, Cro-Magnons and all modern human groups, for each of which types we have increasingly clear evidence of some kind of religious concern. It is, of course, quite possible that further discoveries will reveal that such a concern had its genesis among some form of hominid pre-dating the Neanderthals. In this case the end of the first sentence may simply be altered to read: ... "in the life of the genus Homo." A good discussion of the religion of early man (and some of the problems involved in "reconstructing" it) can be found in the first two chapters of Eliade: 1979.


4. Eliade: 1979: xiii (The quotation is from the English translation, published three years after the book's first appearance.)
5. According to Winston L. King, religion may be taken as a unifying phenomenon in another sense as well: "Religion may be considered to be the most ambitious of all human attempts to unify the diversity of experience. It seeks to achieve a sense of some one central and pervasive quality or character in the total cosmic process, towards which man can orient his own personal totality of thought, feeling, and action in a coherent and unified manner." See Introduction to Religion, A Phenomenological Approach, New York, 1968, p.19. We will see later (Chapter Five) how important the notion of totality is for an understanding of religion.


7. A further refinement of this view (i.e. that we cannot see what is really there unless we go directly to the material) suggests that we can never get to the material unless we are, so to speak, already there, that religion can only be properly understood from within, by the believer, that it is somehow inaccessible to all but the most superficial observation from outside. This view will be discussed in Chapter Six.

The presence of such methodological confusion within Religious Studies has been widely noted. Widgery (1923: 13) suggests that orderly advance in the subject cannot be expected until its aims, scope and method have been at least provisionally settled; White (1967: 161 n.1) holds that methodology is "the single most important problem" in historical studies of religion; echoing Wiebe, Davis (1974/5: 205) points out that studies of religion whether scientifically or theologically orientated are, "methodologically, in a state of confusion"; and McDermott (1968: 33), condemning "the cycle of second rate study of religion", argues that until a legitimate methodology is established no improvement can be hoped for. Reinhard Pummer notes that although in the past work on method in studying religions was scarce, the situation is now changing,


10. Ibid. This passage might perhaps read more smoothly to English ears if "huntsman" was replaced by "hunter". I thus make this change in my discussion of it.

11. Quoted without source in Arthur Koestler's *The Sleepwalkers* (Pelican edition, 1968 p.358). I am not suggesting that all new discoveries proceed in an orderly progression as the building blocks of a smoothly linear history which the "giants" of each age erect, this would be to reject Koestler's well argued case for the part of "sleepwalking" in the discovery of new ideas. What I am suggesting is that the platform on which such sleepwalking takes place would be removed if we ignored the proper place of method.


15. Ibid.


17. Ibid.

18. These progenitors were suggested by Burnouf (1888: 259), Brandon (1973: 92), Muller, Bridges and Gilmore (1909: 191) respectively. Sources not specified here (i.e. those given by Muller and Bridges) are quoted by Jordan, 1905: 119f.

20. Ibid.


22. Ibid.

James' comments here on the suitability of the Graeco-Roman world and the Western world from the nineteenth century onwards as settings for the development of an interest in the study of religion are supported by J. Estlin Carpenter: "Twice in the history of the world has it been possible to survey a wide panorama of religions, and twice has the interest of travellers, men of science, and students of philosophy, been attracted by the immense variety of worships and beliefs. In the second century of our era the Roman Empire embraced an extraordinary range of nationalities within its sway. In the twentieth the whole history of the human race has been thrown open to the explorer, and an overwhelming mass of materials from every land confronts him." See his Comparative Religion, London 1913, p. 37.


Although I am presenting it as important, both Sharpe and Jastrow mention this sense of Religious Studies in a somewhat offhand and dismissive way. Jastrow (1901: 1) going on to note that though possible to see studying religion as belonging to an ancient stratum of thought "in another and more pertinent
sense, it is the youngest of the sciences", and Sharpe, in the sentence following on from the passage quoted in the text, says, "Regrettably we cannot study this entirely hypothetical pioneer."

27. By "religious man" or "homo religiosus" I wish only to indicate a basic and common religiousness in mankind as a whole, not to establish some sort of spiritual élite. Perhaps prayer might serve as a criterion here - religious man is the man who prays - providing we use some such wide ranging definition of prayer as Wittgenstein's "To pray is to think about the meaning of life." (See Notebooks 1914-1916, entry for 11.6.16).


29. In talking of ... "possible areas of study in this field" ... we ought, perhaps, to bear in mind Cantwell Smith's remark: "In this case the analogy of a field can be misleading. No matter how extensive, how difficult to encompass, a field yet lies at our feet, to be surveyed and in the end dominated. The subject matter of our study, on the other hand, is not so abject or supine, not to be so paced upon by a would-be surveyor. It has been said that one must tread softly here, for one is treading on men's dreams. Furthermore, what we view in contemplating man's religion lies not only below us, stretching on and on without bounds, but around us and within us and above us. And not only does it lie passively; here is something active, momentous, with its own initiative." (The Meaning and End of Religion, London 1978, p.5).

Although I occasionally use "field" to denote the area of interest with which we are concerned, I do so simply for convenience and without any underlying motives of domination or enclosure. Smith perhaps sees more hidden
cargo in the word than is usually intended, nonetheless it is as well to be on the alert for unwanted connotations creeping unnoticed into our discourse.

30. Of course to some extent the attempt to justify a subject of academic research in this way is quite uncalled for. I undertake it here more as a device to further clarify the area of interest than as a serious attempt to absolve myself from the accusation of wasting time in an area of practical or intellectual irrelevance. As Stuart Hampshire says:

One cannot hope, and must not try, to direct research in the humanities principally by rational calculation of directly useful and socially relevant results...... Imaginative energy has largely incalculable sources and serves largely unconscious needs. The only safe criterion is the degree of intellectual excitement that a work or a problem ... provokes, and the degree of exactness and care which men are ready to bring to its exploration.

And I hope the present work will satisfy this accurate (and exacting) criterion of worth. See Hampshire's essay "Commitment and Imagination" in the collection edited by Max Black, The Morality of Scholarship, New York 1967 (the quotation above is from p.55).


32. Ibid.

33. That Neanderthal Man buried his dead with flowers has been shown by Solecki: 1971.


It is, I suppose, the conceit of every age to think that its experience is unique. Whilst to some extent we may be justified in feeling that until some thirty years ago the knowledge of "other" religions was largely restricted to a background sense of the mysterious East or of darkest Africa, which did little to disturb our sense of equanimity, it would be a mistake to imagine that ours is the first century to have come into vivid contact with a situation where religious plurality presents a series of world views whose outlook on the human situation is not unanimous, thus confronting us with the need to evaluate, judge and decide between conflicting viewpoints. (Though arguably ours is the most accurately informed and the most self conscious of such ages). Thus, for example, Paul Hazard records how as early as 1680 the European mind had to withstand the presentation of "alternatives" to its indigenous cultural setting when, largely as a result of increased travel, such figures as the good savage, the wise Egyptian, the Mohammedan and the Chinese sage impinged upon its consciousness and challenged those assumptions made by the religious tradition (i.e. Christianity) in which it had been fostered. See Paul Hazard, *The European Mind* (1680-1715), London 1953, especially Part One, "Changing Psychologies".


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. As William Barrett has remarked (1977: 6): "Specialization is the price we pay for knowledge. A price, because the path of specialization leads away from the ordinary and concrete acts of understanding in terms of which man actually lives his day-to-day life." Eliade (1954: 19) draws our attention to the way in which specialization tends to obscure the sense of vocation which draws many to the study of religions: "The present situation amounts to this: there has been a great advance in our knowledge of the material, which has been won at the cost of excessive specialization to the point of partly sacrificing our vocation."


49. Ibid.


51. Ibid.

52. Listed according to their number of adherents the main new religious groups in Britain, according to Hick, are the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus. These proportions are reflected in microcosm in Birmingham, of whose approximately one million citizens there are some 30,000 Muslims, 15,000 Sikhs and 10,000 Hindus (as well as some 6,000 Jews and "a smaller number of Buddhists"). See Hick: 1980: 29, 38.

53. Of course the religionist may begin his studies with very little taken for granted and with the whole question of the meaning of life largely unrecognized. In such cases an acquaintance with a situation of religious diversity might be said to increase his awareness of the fundamentality
of those issues which give rise to the sense of "world certainty" and "world uncertainty". (These two terms are explained in the text some few pages further on.)


55. Ibid. 39.

56. Ibid.
Strauss's comments are not, of course, made with a specifically religious situation in mind.

57. According to Winthrop's (1976: 106) criteria, which suggest that commitment "has to be a moral posture and an open and public choice among conflicting values", the notion of commitment made from a standpoint of mono-religiousness is highly questionable. (My underlining).


60. John Bowker has drawn attention in a particularly clear way to this feature of religion as providing a scheme of sense which can include death, suffering etc. within its ambit. Thus (1973: 64-65) he attempts a definition of "religious" which sees it as "the consequences of the ways in which men have scanned the limitations (all the limitations) which surround them. But whereas men have scanned some limitations with relatively direct success, and have moved from the wheel to the moon, other limitations seem, and perhaps are, impenetrable; and it is this which may have lead to the increasing division between 'science' and 'religion'. Religions continue to wrestle with limitations which science has abandoned or left, for the moment, on one side: and if science did attempt to penetrate the limitation of, for example, death, it would not be in an existing religious way." Thus,
for example, we find (1978: 15) that "religions exemplify ... in prolific variety, the means through which people can be healed in relation to the irreversibility of time, through procedures of penitence, confession, expiation, forgiveness, absolution."


62. I do not wish to suggest that any individual could exist wholly outwith any scheme of meaning. This would seem somewhat like suggesting that fish could exist quite happily out of water. I am simply trying to make a distinction between one who is consciously committed to a particular religious outlook and one who is not, rather than attempting to present the uncommitted as a wholly unanchored individual cut free from all his socio-cultural moorings (moorings which include such basic things as language).

63. This is not simply a haphazard autobiographical intruson. In recording my own position as regards religion I am deliberately complying with Saliba's 1976: 2 suggestion that "rather than feign complete detachment and impartiality ... it is wise to recognize and state one's own religious assumptions". The idea of some sort of "register of interests" for religionists seems a good one. I hope my statement will be more enlightening than Saliba's own which simply records the fact that he is a "religious believer", a vague enough appellation at the best of times and in the context of a confession of assumptions almost useless. Only marginally more light is shed on the situation when we are told that the data "are not viewed from one particular religious tradition" but "are nevertheless seen through the eyes of a person who takes religion seriously (ibid.). This criticism made, Saliba's suggestion of a declaration of (possibly vested) religious interests still seems a sound one to make in an area such as this where reason is frequently hindered by emotion.
64. According to Smart (1973c: 15f) religion displays six "dimensions". I would suggest that the idea of world certainty might be seen as the generative source because of which such other aspects arise and to which they are directed.

65. None of the three primary questions arise immediately in the sense of being the first issues likely to emerge from a study of religions. I have already suggested that the hall of mirrors situation is one which is created by study in the first place. The study that went to make it up proceeded without an awareness of (or at least without taking seriously) these issues. However, once we become aware of a situation of religious diversity the first two questions arise more immediately from such a realization than the third.

66. The reader may find it helpful to bear in mind that the first primary question is considered in Chapters two - four, the second in chapter five and the third in Chapter six.

67. This is not to suggest that our factual catalogue of knowledge about religion is complete and that no further descriptive studies are required. Far from it, much work remains to be done on this front. I am simply advocating a temporary suspension from such accumulative work whilst we consider more precisely how we can deal with the information which it provides us with.
CHAPTER TWO

1. The world uncertain man is not pre-philosophical or pre-theological in the sense of being philosophically or theologically naive, but rather in the sense of having travelled a sufficient distance along such roads already so as to want to return to the beginning and start again. Although under such circumstances it might seem more appropriate to call him post-philosophical and post-theological, I have avoided this since it risks giving the impression that such disciplines are no longer of any use to him. Rather than being in any sense finished with or irrelevant, they are simply being held in deliberate temporary suspension whilst he initiates the investigation of his intellectual and spiritual malaise with a fundamental return to beginnings addressed to a point predating any particular disciplinary stream.


12. Ibid.


16. The historical details in my brief sketch of phenomenology are taken chiefly from Spiegelberg: 1960 and Schmitt: 1967, to which the reader is referred for further details.


The quotation is taken from the English translation, Manual of the Science of Religion, made by Beatrice S. Colyer-Fergusson (one of Max Müller's daughters) and published four years after the original.

Van der Leeuw bases his assertion on the nature of a work by de Brosses published in 1760 rather than on any deliberate mention by the latter of something called "phenomenology of religion". It is interesting to compare this sort of criterion for establishing what is phenomenology with Winston L. King's confession that: "My own phenomenological awakening was ex post facto with respect to my practice of the art ... when someone casually termed the first version of my Introduction to Religion to be phenomenological in nature I then looked at myself with a new and somewhat embarrassed self consciousness, mentally remarking to myself, 'so! I am a phenomenologist of religion'."† King's Introduction to Religion, first published in 1954, was thus subsequently revised and re-appeared as Introduction to Religion, a Phenomenological Approach in 1968. († 1972: 27)


23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.


We might also note that Sharma: 1975: 82n4 voices agreement from a standpoint outside of the Dutch school, suggesting that phenomenology of religion "differs totally" from Husserlian Philosophy.

28. For reference we might note that the Oxford English Dictionary (1961 edition) defines phenomenology as:
"1. (a) The science of phenomena as distinct from that of being (ontology). (b) That division of any science which describes and classifies its phenomena. 2. In philosophical use: that of which the senses of the mind directly take note, an immediate object of perception (as distinguished from substance, or a thing in itself). Opposite to noumen."


31. Thus Husserl has described himself as a "beginner" (1967: 28) and philosophy as "essentially a science of true beginnings or origins" (Husserl: 1965: 146). It is interesting to note that reduction, the basic methodological device for all phenomenological research, is derived from the latin re-ducere, "to lead back to origins".

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.: 4.

35. It may seem strange to talk of an individual making an effort to formulate a worldview of his own, for surely this is something which is there already or which comes naturally. I am not suggesting that the individual does not know what he thinks about the world and must stop to construct a point of view each time he is asked, but rather that (supposing him to be reflective and religiously informed) he cannot easily assume the conclusiveness of any such opinions as he has.

36. I borrow the man brought into the world "on a sudden" (with all his sensory faculties fully developed but with no previous experience) from Hume, who introduces him into the debate concerning the idea of necessary connection to show how it is only from experience, or from "custom" as Hume calls it, that we gain our knowledge of causal relationships. See An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section 4 part 1 (Selby-Bigge edition, Oxford 1898 (1748) p.28).

37. Personal communication: Richard A. Bartlett (Senior Museum Assistant, Indian Section, Victoria and Albert Museum London) describing one of the museum's Natarajas.


39. The difficulties of reporting what would be found at level one being seem likely to be similar to those encountered in the search for a process of description which would perfectly mirror the phenomenological residuum (i.e. the pure phenomena as they appear to the observer after the application of reduction). This is, perhaps, one of the most problematic areas in phenomenology. Husserl was well aware of the difficulties involved. As he complains in the
Logical Investigations, "Completely self evident truths of essences established by the most exact analysis must be expounded by way of expressions whose rich variety does not compensate for the fact that they only fit familiar natural objects" (Husserl: 1970: 255). Description, like the slogan "to the things themselves", may sound misleadingly simple. In the phenomenological context, however, it soon begins to look as formidably difficult a task as was Shylock's of cutting exactly a pound of flesh, no more and no less, for in any description of absolute data the words must also fit exactly, or we forfeit the nature of the discovery we claim to have made by the attempt to report it. Heidegger puts the problem of description well when he says, "Whenever a phenomenological concept is drawn from primordial sources, there is a possibility that it may degenerate if communicated in the form of an assertion" (Being and Time, London 1962 (1927) pp. 60-61). Husserl offers little specific guidance on the question of how we should go about formulating a phenomenological description without letting it degenerate in this way, though at one point in The Idea of Phenomenology he suggests that "we shall hark back to the speech of the mystics when they describe the intellectual seeing which is supposed not to be a discursive knowledge" (Husserl: 1973: 50).


41. Possibly the best (and certainly the most up to date) survey of the literature of phenomenology of religion occurs in Ursula King's contribution to the forthcoming Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion edited by Frank Whaling (in the "Religion and Reason" series published by Mouton). I am indebted to Dr. Whaling for making various parts of this volume available to me prior to its publication.

42. Van der Leeuw: 1964: 671.

43. Ibid.: 688.
44. "Stage" is used here simply for convenience in identifying the different parts of Van der Leeuw's thought. We must not forget that despite his serial presentation he is adamant that the various aspects of phenomenology "arise never successively but always simultaneously" (Van der Leeuw: 1964: 674).

45. Ibid.: 687.

46. Ibid.: 667.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.: 671.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.: 688.

51. Ibid.: 683.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.: 565.

54. Ibid.: 646.

55. Ibid.: 645.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.: 646, my underlining.

59. Thus in Meaning and Method (p.187) Nygren suggests that the confusion between presupposition and prejudice "is perpetually occurring, and in recent times has reached
such proportions that it must really be regarded as a cultural menace. When the presuppositions on which all thought and cultural life rest (for example, to use the instances which Nygren himself suggests on p.351, acknowledging a distinction between true and false and between good and evil), come increasingly to be described as 'prejudices' which we could well do without, this is no longer merely a harmless linguistic confusion but something with far reaching consequences in every direction." As Nygren goes on to say (p.188) "prejudice" means "just what it literally says; it means that an opinion has been formed and a judgment passed before (praes) the case has been brought to trial (judicium). A judgment thus reached in advance, before the evidence is examined, is a "prejudice". To suggest that an inquiry should be 'presuppositionless' does not, however, mean what it literally says, but rather that the investigation involved "is to be free from 'preconceived opinions' or 'prejudices'."

In a work such as this, which purports to be a phenomenological analysis of the holy in art, we might expect to find a wholly value free vocabulary. Thus we are surprised to find at one point the Shiva Nataraja described as "the noblest incarnation" of the dance (ibid.: 26, my underlining).

61. The quotation is taken from Sharpe's: 1975: 231 translation.


64. Spiegelberg: 1960: 11.
Spiegelberg also suggests here that for Van der Leeuw it was Heidegger rather than Husserl who was the main representative of phenomenology.

Interestingly, Jacques Waardenburg notes that the Epilogomena "were first intended to be printed as a prolegomenon
at the beginning of the book" (Waardenburg: 1978: 223). It would be fascinating to know the reasons behind this (I think appropriate) change of mind.


66. Ibid.: v.

67. I am using Introduction to Religion as an abbreviation for Introduction to Religion, a Phenomenological Approach, rather than referring to King's book of this former title (published in 1954) which was a precursor of the latter work.


70. Ibid.: 27.

71. Ibid.: 28.

72. King: 1968: 1-6 lists these five types of study of religion as:-
   - the study of religion from within
   - the study of religion from the semi-within
   - the study of religion from the semi-without
   - the study of religion from without
   - the study of religion from the detached within

He suggests (p.4) that "Western philosophy is seldom more than semi-inside religion; and more usually it is either semi-outside or, as in the case of sceptical philosophies, totally outside". As a "balance" to this kind of outlook, in which philosophy can all too easily be cast in the role of villain as regards religion, we would do well to remember Thomas McPherson's suggestion that positivistic philosophy (often thought of as the blackest and most religiously destructive of all philosophical villains) "can
be interpreted as an attack on those who in the name of religion are perverting religion. ... By showing, in their own way, the absurdity of what theologians try to utter, positivists have helped to suggest that religion belongs to the sphere of the unutterable. And this may be true. And it is what Otto too, in his way, wanted to point out. Positivists may be the enemies of theology, but the friends of religion". (See "Religion as the Inexpressible" in New Essays in Philosophical Theology ed. Flew & McIntyre, especially pp. 139, 140 and 141).

73. King: 1972: 33, my underlining in the latter instance.

74. Ibid.


77. Ibid.


79. Ibid.

80. King: 1972: 34.

81. Ibid.: 30.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.


91. Ibid.: 1.

92. Ibid.: vii.

93. Ibid.: 1-2.

94. Ibid.: 2.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.: vii.

97. Farley suggests that theology "successfully metamorphosizes itself into the history or psychology or phenomenology of religion" only if it "accedes to the total translation of its subject matter" into "empirically describable content". In other words, a "reality loss" fatal to theology occurs when faith is described without remainder in terms of cultic behaviour, language game or historical essence. (See Farley: 1975: 14-15.)

The kind of integral theological use of (rather than metamorphosis into) phenomenology which Farley practices is also found in George Rupp's Christologies and Cultures (1974) of which its author says (p.2) "this study may be viewed not only as phenomenology but also as theology. Indeed it aspires to be both at the same time in its attempt to integrate descriptive and constructive approaches to interpreting religious life and thought."


100. Ibid.: 376.


102. See Duméry: 1975 where in the preface we read, "My aim in this book is to trace in broad outline the phenomenology of the Christian experience, or rather, of the Christian institution."


104. Ibid.

105. Ibid. (second footnote)

106. Ibid.: 51.


108. Ibid. On such retention/revision see also Chapter 5n.29.


110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.: 8-9.

112. Ibid.: xii.

113. Ibid.: xiv.

In calling the community of faith "ecclesia", Farley at one point (p.xiv) seems to say that such a name is not merely a synonym for "church", whereas at another (p.107) he admits that its use is simply a "verbal trick" to avoid using the word "church" which carries with it "so much dogmatic and confessional baggage as well as
unfortunate connotations associated with the present state of the church".

114. Ibid.: 19.

115. Ibid.: 74.


118. Ibid.: xvi.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.: 74, my underlining.
Farley is not unaware of the apparent paradox in employing phenomenology (in which reality is meant to be bracketed out) to discover "the specific realities of a determinate faith". This is dealt with on pp. 29-35.

121. Farley comments (p. 32), "Theology like philosophy seems to have lost its subject matter in the sense of 'realities themselves'. The symptoms of this loss ... appear (as) the writing of books about books in theology, the displacement of theological inquiry by theological journalism and by 'phenomenal' descriptions of the religion, doctrines or language of the Christian faith".

122. Ibid.: 22.

123. Ibid.: 23.

124. Ibid.: 15.


126. Ibid.: 5.

128. Ibid.: 3.

129. Ibid.

130. Ibid.: 82.

131. Ibid.: 133.

132. Ibid.: 141.

133. Ibid.: 159.


136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.: 37. See also Chapter 4n.92.

140. Ibid.


142. Ibid.

143. Smart: 1973b: 3.

144. Ibid.

146. Ibid.: 109.
147. Ibid.: 108.
149. Ibid.: 110.
150. Ibid.: 111.
151. Ibid.
152. Ibid.
153. Ibid.: 112.
155. Ibid.
156. Ibid.: 115.
157. Ibid.: 118.
158. Ibid.: 107.
161. Ibid.
162. Ibid.
163. Ibid.
164. Ibid.
165. Ibid.
166. Ibid.

167. Ibid.: 106.


169. Ibid.

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.: 4.


175. Ibid.: 43.

Smart seems to take the view that as far as the student of religions is concerned "it should be part of the phenomenological method to rid oneself so far as possible of philosophical baggage" (1973b: 68).

1. By "transcendent" I simply mean those aspects of a phenomenon which are not directly given in any (single) perception of it. For example, the fact of its continued existence beyond that perception, or—supposing we are seeing something in a purely visual sense—that it has the tangible qualities commonly associated with such visual elements.

2. By "immanent" I simply mean those aspects of a phenomenon which are directly accessible to our perception of it.

3. In order to achieve the confidence and authority necessary to see accurately for himself what can be said about some religious phenomenon, the religionist must become thoroughly acquainted with all the linguistic manifestations of that phenomenon, with all that has been said about it. In order to appreciate its meaning he must immerse himself in its language and literature, rather than attempting to somehow side-step or get "beneath" all its expressive forms via some sort of radical reduction.

4. The distinction between presupposition and prejudice is well made by Anders Nygren in the passage from *Meaning and Method* already quoted in Note 59 of Chapter Two. Kim: 1972: 165 endorses Nygren's view of the extent and seriousness of the search for a presuppositionless starting point. He suggests that this "inhuman obsession" or "Cartesian aberration" has "infected Western thought for centuries". The first step in overcoming it is, he says, "the recognition of the priority of symbols".

The use of "epoche" to describe the process by which a methodological orientation towards level two seeing is effected may seem somewhat out of keeping with my conclusions regarding phenomenological terminology made in the preceding
chapter. I use it here only in the limited sense clearly defined by Van der Leeuw (to which we have already drawn attention in Chapter Two), i.e. simply as convenient shorthand to denote an emphasis on "neutral" description.


8. An exposition of the "Five Fires" doctrine, in which it is explained how at the fifth oblation water comes to have a human voice, may be found in the Chandogya Upanishad 5.3-10. Zaehner's translation (in Hindu Scriptures) is recommended, though Müller's rendering of the first oblation (in The Sacred Books of the East) makes the essentially logical progression of events clearer.

The power of knowledge implicit in the Five-Fires doctrine stems from the notion that naming a thing, or recognizing its true identity, gives one power over it. Thus most of this passage is concerned with making esoteric bonds of likeness between things in order to establish their real nature. (A good account of how prevalent this notion of power through knowledge was in early Indian thought occurs in Franklin Edgerton's The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy, London 1965, pp 22-23). This sort of knowledge was originally secret (indeed the word "Upanishad" may be translated as "secret communication") because, as a Tamil verse puts it, if everyone went to "heaven" then "the back of the sky would be dislocated". A balance must be preserved. The verse is quoted by W.D. O'Flaherty in The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology, California 1976, p.248.

10. A simple illustration of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle can be seen if we attempt to determine the velocity of a particle by shining a ray of light unto it and measuring the changing angle of reflection against a time scale. The reading given is always that of the velocity of a particle with a ray of light directed on it, which is not the same as the velocity of an unmeasured particle. Our activity of measuring automatically affects our result. Does a similarly unavoidable methodological factor confront the religionist, and if so is it serious? Needham (1972: 18) has suggested that the attempt to translate the religious beliefs of one people into the language of another "must interpose a refractory screen between the foreign investigator and the interior states ... of those who employ this language to express the subtle singularities of their own moods". And Van Baaren (1973: 46-7) has explicitly remarked on the operation of some sort of Heisenbergian principle in the study of religion.


12. Ibid.

13. My use of the word "interpolation" must not be confused with its sense as a type of literary falsification effected by the covert insertion of new material into existing texts. Understood as the fundamental operative device for a level three orientation, interpolation does involve the religionist placing himself within the already existing structures of religion, or, alternatively, the placing of religious phenomena within the already existing life of the religionist, but this is done simply in order to bring religion and religionist into as creatively close contact as possible so that understanding (in the sense of "really knowing" which we explain later) may be achieved. The process is conducted openly with no intention to deceive and, supposing it is carried out properly, no element of distortion or religious "forgery" is involved.
14. Colin Turnbull offers an interesting example here when he describes his shock at finding that the "molimo" or trumpet (which is used to "waken the forest" and constitutes the focal point of the religious life of the Pygmy tribe among whom he lived) was simply (i.e. according to a Westerner's eyes) a length of metal drainpipe. See The Forest People, London 1976, pp.72-3. The interpolative religionist would be concerned not only to see the molimo both as the Pygmies saw it and as Turnbull saw it, but also to try to establish how it ought to be seen.

15. For though we might accept that given a number of different partial views of things a diversity of outlook would result (indeed we would expect this), it is difficult to see how there could be more than one outlook on the totality of things (assuming that our criteria of comprehensiveness and inclusion here were sufficiently strict). This point is discussed further in Chapter Five.


17. Although the breadth and effectiveness of the literary imagination might make us doubt that even such dark and unpleasant subjects are necessarily closed books to the processes of interpolation. (See, for example, William Golding's Darkness Visible or Colin Wilson's Ritual in the Dark). As Woods has suggested, there is "an astonishing mobility" in our mental outlook (1958: 117). The passage is quoted in full in the second epigraph of this chapter.

18. A good example of the kind of outlook which can result when the consequences of some belief are left unexplored, occurs in this fragment of theological autobiography from John Hick: "I believed that God has made himself known to mankind with unique fullness and saving power in Christ, and has ordained that all men must come to him through Christ. And although it follows from this that those who do not
become Christ's disciples have missed the way to salvation yet I did not explicitly apply this conclusion to the hundreds of millions of inhabitants of the globe. I believed by implication that the majority of human beings were eternally lost; but I did not believe this explicitly and wholeheartedly, so as to have come to terms with its consequences for my other beliefs. This was of course a thoroughly illogical state of mind to be in". (Hick: 1977: 122).

19. Quoted in Chaudhuri: 1974: 345. In fact Müller's comment was not directed at Newbolt but was made to him - by Müller - about another guest with whose opinions on teleology Müller did not agree.

20. Trigg: 1973: 161, 166. At the same time as insisting upon a non-relativistic view of religions we ought also to beware of that process of simplistic reification (what Hick, 1975: 141, calls "the turning of good adjectives into bad substantives") which renders Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, etc. into clear-cut blocks of doctrine whose apparently irreconcilable separateness is simply a result of an unsympathetic and over-literal reading of what individual Hindus, Christians and Moslems say about their beliefs. One of the key tasks of Religious Studies is surely to establish what in fact the various religions actually are (prior to some sort of evaluation regarding the world certainties they offer) whilst avoiding the risk of presenting them as logical fictions. Cantwell Smith has argued for a purely adjectival use of Hindu, Christian, Moslem etc. (see his 1967: 107). Whilst of course there are similarities between the various ways of being religious which a nounal use of their traditional manifestations does not adequately display, such a viewpoint seems not to take seriously enough the fact that in a final assessment we cannot apply qualitatively
opposite adjectives to the same thing unless it follows a particularly zig-zag course (such that if the "thing" in question was a human life we would be forced to conclude that it was in some sense incoherent) any more than we could apply opposite nouns. Similarly, to describe someone as both Hindu and Christian, Buddhist and Jew, Moslem and Jain, would seem to ignore the fact that even though we may render nouns into adjectives we must still take note of the differences to which their original use draws attention.

Zaehner, 1980: 71, has rather tartly pointed out the absurd consequences which can follow from a failure to be clear about the inter-religious use of identical terms: 

"(a) The Qur'an is the word of God (b) Jesus Christ is the word of God. If both these statements are true, then we seem to be landed with the conclusion that the Qur'an is Jesus Christ. This may seem strange since there seems to be no obvious relationship between the two". Perhaps, other than actually arriving at a world decision, the religionist's most difficult task is to decide what the key elements of each world certainty are. Often a purely "orthodox" approach which equates world certainty with what is regarded as canonical in any particular tradition can in fact result in a misleading picture. As Brandon, 1962: 307, has pointed out (with specific reference to eschatological beliefs), "It might be as well to reflect on how far we should agree that the funerary rites of the Roman Catholic Manual or the burial service of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer might be considered accurate expressions of what members of these communions have felt personally about their own destiny and that of those whom they mourned".

21. I mention this rather obscure example to draw the reader's attention to a recent case of imaginative re-experiencing of a distant and alien religious thought-world. Thus in some of the poems of Seamus Heaney ("The Tollund Man", "Punishment", "Bog Queen", "The Grauballe Man" etc.) we find an interesting re-working of some of the
ancient pagan symbols and ideas associated with this Iron Age cult. Heaney derives most of his background information here from P.V. Glob's The Bog People (translated by Rupert Bruce-Mitford) London 1971.


23. Perhaps behavioural similarity stemming from apparently different doctrinal mores might form a possible criterion for establishing the degree of "real" difference between the various religious outlooks. However, I raise this suggestion here only as a speculative (but interesting) idea rather than as a definite recommendation.


27. I take the passage from Goethe from Wach: 1970: 134. The Whitman quotation is from "Song of Myself".

28. Whitman: "Song of Myself" (lines 832-834 and 1096-1108).


30. Ibid.


32. Ibid.


35. Ibid.


38. Nielsen: 1975: 102 writes, "In wrestling with religious questions, an individual cannot escape the gnawing question: 'what sort of person should I try to become?'".

39. These questions are originally generated by the indigenous sense of "world uncertainty" experienced by religious Everyman, whether or not he is au fait with the varieties of religious outlook, (i.e. there would be no need for any system of world certainty if we did not "naturally" experience world uncertainty to begin with).

40. Christian: 1972: 2 reminds us that "two doctrines are opposed if they cannot be accepted jointly without absurdity" and that "to accept a doctrine which recommends a course of action is to undertake to do what is recommended". It is, I think, useful to keep such clear cut points in mind in a field where it is all too easy to let abstraction and vagueness creep in. The task of mapping out inter-faith relationships is an important one, for which Christian's book provides a sound starting point. It is, however, an area of the religionist's work which has scarcely yet advanced beyond the embryonic stage. One possible thematic isobar which we might wish to examine here (and one which is much in keeping with our notion of religions as offering systems of world certainty) is the idea that religions are concerned with a few basic common problems and that, as such, they may be legitimately compared in terms of the answers they give to such problems. Thus in a relatively early work which examines some of the issues of inter-religious comparison we read, "The history of religions shows unmistakably that there are some common, fundamental,
insistent needs which man has had as a religious individual. The chief among them has been the need for moral regeneration and spiritual atonement. The experience of St. Paul is expressed by him in the words: 'For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do ...
O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (Romans: 7: 19, 24). This is a universal experience. It has been echoed by religious men all through the ages, by men belonging to every religion ... All religions have wrestled with this problem and have some answer to give to it. It is contained in their doctrine of salvation. And if a religion or a religious truth is to be tested, one test will naturally be the degree of success with which it is able to solve this most intimate problem". (Moses: 1950: 91-2). A good starting point for a study of inter-faith relationships is to be found in Relations among Religions Today, A Handbook of policies and principles, edited by Moses Jung, Swami Nikhilananda and Herbert W. Schneider, Leiden 1963.

41. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 1944-45 pp.185-206. The parable of the garden is, in a sense, simply another re-statement of the central situation with which we are concerned: namely the hall of mirrors dilemma or the notion of existing in the same house but being in different worlds. In referring to Wisdom's analogy, however, I am not simply repeating what has already been said. On the contrary, his concise and accurate re-setting brings certain issues to mind that have not hitherto been noticed.

Flew's re-telling of the parable of the gardener (in New Essays in Philosophical Theology) has gained almost as much renown as the original version. As Flew has pointed out, the man who claims that a gardener has been at work is faced with the highly problematic question of what state of affairs would be necessary to convince him that no such person did in fact exist. However, it is not on this issue
of the logically required criteria for the abandonment of any belief that I wish to focus attention here, but rather on the situation where a profound difference of belief occurs between two individuals who, on a purely factual basis, "see" the same thing. An interesting rejoinder to Flew's argument is given by Edward F. Mooney in his "Assertion and Commitment in Religious Belief", Sophia Vol. 10 (1971) pp. 7-13.

42. I use the word here in the widest possible sense.


44. I adapt this from Whitman's "I am the man...I suffered ...I was there" ("Song of Myself" line 832).

45. This is a natural progression from the notion of "doublethink" developed by George Orwell in Nineteen Eighty Four.

46. For a summary of these two contrasting viewpoints see Eliade: 1979: 13-15.


48. These misconceptions are both recorded by Mitter: 1977: 36.

49. For a full account of James' theory of personality types, the circumstances in which they occur and change, their distinguishing characteristics and differing religious needs, the reader is referred to The Varieties of Religious Experience, lectures 4-8.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.: 161-162.


54. Bambrough (1969: 65) has said of Wisdom's essay, "I believe that it comes nearer than any account offered before or since to giving an accurate characterization of the nature of disputes about the existence of God".

55. Ibid.: 59.

56. Ibid.: 61.

57. Ibid.: 60.

58. Ibid.: 125.

59. Ibid.: 150.

60. Ibid.: 150-151.

For some interesting comments on the possible role of anamnesis in the study of religion see, Jay J. Kim's "Belief or Anamnesis: Is a Rapprochement between History of Religions and Theology Possible", *The Journal of Religion, Vol. 52 (1972)* pp.150-169.


62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.


CHAPTER FOUR

1. This is not to say that third level seeing can dispense with perception or description, or that these two activities contain no imaginative elements. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that all three modes aim towards understanding but each seek to achieve it in somewhat different ways. I stress again that the three modes of sight are interrelated and that we are concerned with which one the religionist ought to emphasize, rather than with which he ought to select in some sort of exclusive fashion which would deny all application of the other two.

2. Recent works (in English) currently available on the history and development of the study of religion include Eric Sharpe's Comparative Religion, a History (London 1975), and Jan de Vries' The Study of Religion, a Historical Approach (New York 1967, translated by Kees W. Bolle). Although somewhat dated, Louis Henry Jordan's Comparative Religion, its Genesis and Growth (Edinburgh 1905), and Morris Jastrow's The Study of Religion (London 1901) still provide some interesting material.

Despite Sharpe's claim (made at the I.A.H.R.'s Turku conference in 1973, and reported in Honko: 1979: 204) that he was "engaged in an attempt to write a book on the history of methodological thought as it effects the 'discipline' of Comparative Religion", I do not think that any published work as yet adequately deals with the development of methodology within this field of studies. However, this is very much an area of present concern and doubtless such a work will soon be forthcoming. Perhaps it will take the form of Ake Hultkrantz's promised "handbook on the methodology of comparative religious research" (Hultkrantz: 1970: 84n. 59), which has yet to make an appearance and which we hope will contain a substantial historical section rather than simply repeating ground already covered in the collection of essays in the forthcoming Contemporary
Approaches to The Study of Religion edited by Frank Whaling.

3. Pummer: 1975: 161. Likewise Penner: 1976: 16 suggests that Religious Studies is building up what Evans-Pritchard called "theoretical capital", and that this may be seen both in "continued conferences on methodology" and in the focus of new journals such as, for example, Religion and The Japanese Journal of Religious Studies.


5. Quoted in Wach: 1967: 161 n.1. Both White and Brelich address their comments to the history of religions, but what they say can be applied equally well to the study of religions in general.


7. Thus the informative potential of such investigations as Jurji's Phenomenology of Religion or King's Introduction to Religion (both discussed in Chapter Two), which are imbued with a certain degree of methodological self-consciousness, is greater than that of, say, Moffat's A Comparative History of Religions, which proceeds in a more methodologically unselfconscious way.

8. A good example of such "out of sequence" thinking occurs in some remarks by Bishop Beveridge (1638-1707):

   The general inclinations which are naturally implanted in my soul to some religion, it is impossible for me to shift off: but there being such a multiplicity of religions in the world, I desire now seriously to consider with myself which of them all to restrain these my general inclinations to. And the reason of this my enquiry is not, that I am in the least dissatisfied with that
religion I have already embraced; but because 'tis natural for all men to have an overbearing opinion and esteem for that particular religion they are born and bred-up in. That, therefore, I may not seem biased by the prejudice of education, I am resolved to prove and examine them all; that I may see and hold fast to that which is best ...

Indeed there was never any religion so barbarous and diabolical, but that it was preferred before all other religions whatsoever, by them that did profess it; otherwise they would not have professed it ...

And why, say they, may not you be mistaken as well as we? Especially when there is, at least, six to one against your Christian religion; all of which think they serve God aright; and expect happiness thereby as well as you ... And hence it is that in my looking out for the truest religion, being conscious to myself how great an ascendant Christianity holds over me beyond the rest, as being that religion whereinto I was born and baptized... I am resolved to be more jealous and suspicious of this religion, than of the rest, and be sure not to entertain it any longer without being convinced by solid and substantial arguments, of the truth and certainty of it. That, therefore, I may make diligent and impartial enquiry into all religions and so be sure to find out the best, I shall for a time, look upon myself as one not at all interested in any particular religion whatsoever, much less in the Christian religion ...

A measure of the degree to which such Cartesian religious sentiments belong more "properly" to a future age can be seen in the fact that this passage was chosen by Müller to
preface the first volume of the *Sacred Books of the East* (a series of translations whose importance would be difficult to over-estimate. Radhakrishnan (1958: 13), for example, identifies their publication as one of two factors, the other being the growth of anthropology, which were largely responsible for the growth of "the science of comparative religion"). The passage is from Beveridge's *Private Thoughts Upon Religion* (pp. 20-22 in the 1813 Berwick edition; the volume first appeared -posthumously - in 1709). Of course Beveridge's "impartial" inquiry would not be accepted as such in Religious Studies today. For at the outset he adopts two *a priori* evaluative assumptions (that the best religion is that in which (i) "God is worshipped and served most like himself" and where (ii) we are given "the best and most comfortable assurances of being happy with God, to all eternity" (p.22)). Moreover, an impartiality in which Indians are held to "worship the devil" (p.21) is one surely flawed by its descriptive terms. However, the ideal of establishing true belief after a full and fair examination of all the possibilities still comes across clearly - even though the milieu from which it came prevented its being realized beyond the most germinal level.


10. Ibid.

11. For a full statement of this five-fold methodology, see Moffat: 1875 (Vol. 1): v-vi. Briefly it consists of:-

i. A presentation of the common elements in man's religions

ii. An examination of the most ancient scriptures

iii. An extensive comparative survey

iv. An extensive classification

v. An identification of essence and absolute

Moffat was not confident enough to think that he could undertake such an ambitious programme unaided. He provides (on page v) a list of those authors to whom he is especially indebted.
Despite the veiled apologetic tone, Moffat's questions mirror many of those which, I would suggest, also face the non-partisan religionist.

13. Ibid.: vi (my underlining).

14. Ibid.

15. See Moffat 1875 (Vol. 2): 297-299 for a passionately written comparison of Christianity and Buddhism which concludes: "They are direct antagonists. No religion is at the same time so flatly opposed to Christianity, and so worthy to be compared with it as that of the Buddha. Both teach a pure morality with tenderness and love. Both promise salvation to suffering man; and in that sense are gospels to their respective believers; but one is a gospel of life; the other virtually of death; one promises salvation from an indefinite succession of degrading births, by putting an end to the susceptibilities of life; the other from the pangs of eternal death, by spiritual birth into larger capacities. To save from evil, the one takes away sensation; the other confers blessedness. One claims to be the highest effort of human thought; the other a message from God."

16. This is not to say that Moffat's analysis of the contrasting nature of Christianity and Buddhism is intrinsically untrustworthy. We are, rather, suggesting that the method used to reach it is questionable since it does not do justice to the complexity of the subject matter involved.


Although Donald Wiebe has suggested that "the phrase 'science of religion' ... is, usually, quite clearly
distinguished from the phrases 'the sciences of religion' and 'the scientific study of religion'" (Wiebe: 1978: 7), the latter phrases referring to the application of particular scientific methods to religious phenomena, the former indicating a discipline which is methodologically distinct from any particular science, the propriety of our contrasting Burnouf's comments on the science of religion and Burhoe's on the scientific study of religion is unimpaired since I am using both phrases here in the wider sense of denoting method (in the most general sense) in the study of religion. Burhoe's opinion echoes that of Edwin Starbuck, voiced some seventy five years earlier in his Psychology of Religion (London 1899), who contrasts the study of religion with the history of science and concludes that "the study of religion is today where astronomy and chemistry were four centuries ago" (p.3). Alister Hardy would, apparently, disagree with this assessment of the situation, suggesting (1975: 20) that in William James and in Starbuck himself we already have parallels in what he calls "the biology of God" to Darwin and Wallace in (non-theistic) biology.


The reader's attention might also be drawn to John Gill's "Can Religion be Studied Scientifically?" Religious Humanism Vol. 3 (1969) pp.8-12. Gill argues that religion cannot be adequately approached by purely empirical means and that therefore if science is equated with empiricism we cannot hope to understand religion through a scientific approach. He suggests, however, that such an equation is mistaken.

Some interesting comments, from a quite different perspective, on the history and future possibilities of a science of religion occur in Long: 1978: 400-414, where
the author attempts to show "By means of a critical analysis of problems of method in the history of religions" how "our rational western intellectual tradition, rooted in a citied-tradition has blinded us to an adequate appreciation of the variety of the human" (p.400). The debate concerning possibility here is best viewed against the backdrop of such work as Yinger's *The Scientific Study of Religion*, which claims that although objective, scientific study cannot be taken as the only fruitful attitude to adopt towards religion, nonetheless it is true to say that "in our time the scientific study of religion prospers" (p.vii).

20. Penner and Yonan make a useful distinction between reduction "employed as a negative metaphor" to mean the unwarranted translation of one thing into terms generally associated with another (i.e. reductionism, explaining in the sense of "explaining away"), and reduction seen simply as the attempt "to offer adequate theoretical explanations and to provide for the continual progress of scientific knowledge". See Penner and Yonan: 1972: passim, but especially p. 131.


22. Ibid.: 107.

23. Ibid.

Like Burhoe, Penner and Yonan point to the possibility of cross fertilization from work done in the social and natural sciences, such work being used to break "the deadlock that exists in the methodological reflections on the science of religion" (p.108).

24. Ibid.: 114.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.: 133.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.: 5.
34. Ibid.: 6.

Thus in The Idea of the Holy Otto invites the reader "to
direct his mind to a moment of deeply felt religious
experience" and suggests that one without the resource
of a recollectable religious experience should simply
"read no further". (See Rudolph Otto The Idea of the Holy
translated by John W. Harvey, London 1928, fifth edition,
revised with additions, page 8).

It is interesting to compare Otto's somewhat
dismissive attitude here with that of Frits Staal, one
of the most forceful present day exponents of what
might be called a "directly participatory" methodology
(i.e. where the religionist consults his own experience
as primary source material). Whereas Otto seems to
suggest that one either has or has not this option open
(though his tone is admittedly rhetorical, he appears to
think it unlikely that a human life could be wholly devoid
of recollectable religious experience) Staal advocates a
course of deliberate mystical training for the aspiring
student of mysticism. (See Frits Staal: Exploring Mysticism,
Harmondsworth 1975 especially pp.125-147).


From Clyde A. Holbrook's *Religion, a Humanistic Field* (New Jersey 1963) p. 38. We ought, perhaps, to remember Cantwell Smith's objection to such a sobriquet. See Chapter One note 29.


41. Ibid.: 14.

42. At the same time we might note that, in contrast to the general ethos of Religious Studies in this century, Long: 1967: 19 (in what appears to be a resurgence of optimistic confidence) writes: "I should like again, a century later, to re-iterate this prophecy, for I think we are much nearer Burnouf's goal".

43. By "imitative if not committed empathy" I simply mean sympathetic imaginative re-experiencing of actual belief to as close a degree of overlap as is possible without this being rendered indistinguishable from belief, thus some sort
of (temporary) "commitment" might result. A comment of Van Baaren's is relevant here: "It is possible for reasons of method to accept for a time a belief system of a religion as worthy of belief. This kind of religious action I call symbolic religious action". (Van Baaren: 1973: 39).

44. Thus Honko (1979: xxiii) writes: "I referred to methodological imperialism. Father Wilhelm Schmidt, Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade no longer rule (if they ever did). There is no theory or method in existence which can predominate over the others, within comparative religion at any rate". In like vein we find Sharpe (1971: 12) asserting that "The study of religion must remain the meeting-ground of complementary (not competing) methods - historical, sociological, phenomenological, psychological, etc. Great harm has been done to the study in the past by those who have insisted that their approach excludes every conceivable alternative. Let us hope that such dogmatism is a thing of the past."


47. Ibid.

48. Haydon 1926a: 32 (my underlining)
In the passage quoted, "religionists" could be substituted for "historians" without distortion, and it is as it can be understood as applying in this wider sense - i.e. to the study of religion as a whole rather than to the history of religions in particular - that I quote Haydon's remark here.
Apart from being polymethodic, the other two fundamental characteristics of the science of religion which Smart lists are that it is aspectual and without clear boundaries. His remarks were first made in the Virginia and Richard Stewart memorial lectures given at Princeton in 1971 and later appeared in print in *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*.

Again, whilst Kitagawa addresses his comments specifically to the history of religions, I present them here as valid remarks about the study of religion in general.
asking ourselves rock-bottom questions about 'how to live' - about what finally and ultimately is worth seeking."

Novak's thought on Religious Studies has been subjected to severe criticism by Crouter (1972: 55-64). To some extent his style of writing is almost guaranteed to raise the intellectual hackles of academics who rely to a lesser extent on the use of hyperbolic imagery and colourful, if sometimes obscure, apothegmatic pronouncements (not to mention a certain almost journalistic tendency in his use of slang expressions, a tendency which, although giving the book a lively currency, will almost certainly render it prematurely out of date: few things age faster than "street-talk"). But Crouter's main objection, that, as a self confessed invitation to Religious Studies (for thus is Novak's book sub-titled), Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove fails, cannot be dismissed simply as an irritation over style (though one suspects that this is the motive force underlying the somewhat acid tone of many of his criticisms). Crouter questions whether "initial clarity" (p. 57) is brought to this field of study by introducing at the outset such questions as "who am I?" and suggesting that they are of central concern to the study of religions. In terms of our own presentation of the steps which the religionist follows, Novak does, perhaps, seek to introduce too soon those "eventual" questions whose urgency only becomes properly realised after pursuing for a time the impersonal descriptive approach which ignores them. But that such questions are (eventually) central is, I think, incontrovertible. Novak provides a characteristically spirited reply to Crouter's comments (1972: 65-78) which shed further light on how he views the study of religion. If, sometime, in the future, Ascent appears in a new edition, the inclusion of these two articles as an appendix would make a stimulating supplement to the course of the discussion.


64. It ought perhaps to be stressed again that in the technical sense in which I am using it here, "interpolation" must be understood as being shorn of all those connotations of deliberate literary falsification which generally accompany its everyday usage.


66. i.e. *The King Must Die* (London 1958) and *The Bull From the Sea* (London 1962). Avrom Fleishman, who considers Mary Renault to be "one of the finest of current historical novelists" (1971: xii), suggests that her work enables us "to find our way into the cultural climate of the past" (ibid.: 257), and that in the case of *The King Must Die*, for example, we are enabled "to recognise the ritual drama of the Cretan bull dance in the way we recognize our own myths and communal passions" (ibid.).


68. Ibid.: 25.

69. Ibid.: 7.

70. Ibid.: 26.

It goes without saying that in neither case is the comment to be understood literally.

71. Ibid.: 7.

Steiner draws attention to the difficulties faced by the aspiring complete reader of Shakespeare (in particular as regards his understanding of a passage from *Cymbeline*): "The main task for the 'complete reader' is to establish ...
the full intentional quality of Posthumus' monologue, first within the play, secondly in what is known of Shakespearean and Elizabethan dramatic conventions, and, most difficult of all, within the large context of early seventeenth century speech habits ... And where are the confines of relevance? No text earlier than or contemporaneous with Shakespeare can, a priori, be ruled out as having no conceivable bearing. No aspect of Elizabethan and European culture is formally irrelevant to the complete context of a Shakespearean passage. Explorations of semantic structure very soon raise the problem of infinite series ... An exercise in total reading is ... potentially unending." (pp. 5, 7, 8).

The interpolative religionist may also find a similar difficulty in knowing where to draw the boundaries for his investigations.

72. Ibid.: 25.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.: 26.

75. I take these titles from Miles: 1975: 80, "Bildungsromane and the Pedagogy of Comparative Religion", who suggests that they be used as treatments of Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism respectively (as opposed to the straightforward descriptive/factual approaches which I go on to list in the text). The choice of Bildungsromane is quite wide, and selection of examples varies considerably from person to person. Miles' brief but useful "Bibliography of Bildungsromane and Autobiography for use in the Comparative Study of Religion", with which he concludes his article, (pp. 84-86) is self confessedly arbitrary. Such arbitrariness/individual variation is further illustrated by the wide variety of selections made in this field by the contributory authors to Cole (ed.): 1977: 42-56.
Autobiography and (non-fictional) biography might also be included in the field of reading which is analogous to interpolation.


79. Morton Smith (1968: 15-16) also makes use of Coleridge's famous dictum about poetic faith in order to elucidate the nature of Religious Studies. The study of religion is, he says, like the study of poetry in as much as "one must come to the material with what Coleridge called 'that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith', or one will never feel the moving power which the material has, and one will never, therefore, be able to understand what the believers are talking about." According to John Beer (Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence, London 1977 p.88 n.36), Coleridge's comment occurs in his Biographia Literaria (II.6).

80. Of course seeing what is there and making decisions about it tend to pull in opposite directions. Seeing something as complex as religion requires much preparatory work and it is altogether understandable why decisions are sometimes postponed. The religionist might perhaps bear Amiel's comment in mind: "The man who insists upon seeing with perfect clearness before he decides, never decides. Accept life and you must accept regret" (entry in Amiel's Journal Intime, December 17th 1856).

Although it would be nice to wait until we understood completely before committing ourselves to anything, maintaining such reasonable neutrality indefinitely fails to take the simple twinned facts of finitude and need into account. This tension between the need to investigate and the need to decide will be mentioned again in Chapter 7, when we consider the hall of mirrors in relation to "the burden of goodness".
Kellenberger's (1979: 312-313) discussion of the difference between "knowing that a proposition is true" and "understanding the full significance of what is known" is relevant to our distinction between knowing and really knowing. Of particular interest is the example he gives from Tolstoy: "Let us recall ... Ivan Ilych and his realization that, truly, he would die. What he realized was not the truth of the proposition 'I shall die'. He had known all along that that proposition was true. Moreover, when we try to specify Ivan's cognitive change, we find no new truth that he has realized. He has deduced no new proposition. Nor has he empirically discovered a new truth, not even 'I shall soon die', for this too he had already come to know. Rather he has more deeply realized the import of an old truth, something he cannot satisfactorily articulate as the old truth or as any new truth."

82. The simplistic pictures which an over-literal interpretation of such key formulae suggests, obscure the important nuances of shade and colour in the originals with the broad strokes and primary colours of generalizing abstraction. Taken as central affirmations in Vedantic Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity respectively, such statements, if accepted at linguistic face value, may not only result in logically inadequate and factually misleading notions of such traditions in an intra-religious sense, but may also lead to misconceptions of the relationship between religions. Thus if we adopt a simplistic understanding of the contrasting claims that "there is no God but God" and "God is three in one", we might think that Islam and Christianity were irrevocably at odds over the numerical symbolism of God, whereas John Bowker (1973: 92) has suggested that "inter-religious dialogue, by testing the relation between intention and use, might be able to establish that the intention of the Christian utterance in referring to God as 'three in one' actually conforms to the
Muslim intention of referring to God as 'there is no God but God.' We must beware of being led to unwarranted conclusions by an uncritical literalness in our approach.

83. Obviously, though, we require a certain number of pieces before either the need to structure, or the possibility of structuring, them into some sort of picture arises. As I have said already, the problems facing the mesmerized religionist in the hall of mirrors are eventual rather than initial ones. The descriptive process is not rejected, rather it is accepted as the first stage in the religionist's inquiries.

84. We might, perhaps, be tempted to ask here: is the process of abstration necessary in the first place? Our answer is that it is. We cannot start with things in their totality, but nor should we rest content to end with their fragmentary appearance. A process of abstraction and re-implication in completeness, of dissection and re-construction, seems required for proper understanding.


88. The notion of enlarging the individual's awareness in some way is, of course, central to any learning process. We might, however, draw particular attention here to two statements which define history and art in terms of this sense of expansion, in a way which casts light on a similarly important aspect of Religious Studies (what I have referred to, using Huston Smith's phrase, as "enlarging the glance of the spirit"). Thus Toynbee (1956: 2) writes: "The historian's profession, whatever he makes of it, is an attempt to correct a self centredness ... by consciously
and deliberately trying to shift his angle of vision away from the initial self-centred standpoint that is natural to him as a living creature." Likewise Joseph Conrad (1921: 16) has remarked that "the demand of the individual to the artist is, in effect, the cry, 'take me out of myself'." These two parallel themes fuse in a doubly enlarging way in a work of historical fiction like Golding's The Inheritors (discussed in a later section of this chapter). Like the historian or the artist, a primary aim of the religionist must surely be to correct (or at least to put its correctness to the test) that innate self centredness which blinkers the individual by allowing only one - often "hereditary" and unexamined - schema of religious meaning to dictate how he sees and values the world and himself, and bars him from what Bowker (1978: ix) has referred to as the possibility of living "in a deliberately multiple resourcefulness which does not betray the conditions of continuity and appropriateness in the systems in question, and which does not lapse into casual syncretism."

This principle of expansion has more than a purely academic aspect and is perhaps, at the end of the day, only finally satisfied within a religious setting. Peter Koestenbaum, for example, notes that "Life is the perennial quest for self transcendence (and) the terminal point of such expansion is unity with the totality of being" (Koestenbaum: 1967: 199). Such unity is, of course, widely characteristic of mystical experience.

89. Smart: 1973a: 72.
On a simple scale of difficulty or mental strenuousness, it is, for example, by no means clear whether reading Joyce or doing phenomenology would come out higher. An interesting rejoinder to this notion of Smart's (but one which perhaps comes dangerously close to using difficulty, or, less charitably, linguistic obscurity, as a criterion for
identifying phenomenology) is that which suggests that in fact such works as Ulysses or Finnegans Wake are really phenomenological exercises. See J.D.G. Garcia, "E. Husserl & J. Joyce, or Theory and Practice of the Phenomenological Attitude", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research Vol. 9 (1948-49) pp. 588-594.

90. Interpolation is not, of course, confined to the medium of written texts. This is simply the way in which its operation and results are most conveniently presented for the purpose of discussion.

91. Apart from the drawbacks to the analogy with reading stated in the text, we might also mention the point that in literature we are somewhat guarded from the "urgency" of the religious aspect of things simply by a fictional setting. The question of the salvific potentiality of the world certainties with which the religionist is confronted is not one which may be easily banished from his mind simply by closing a book.

Of course in terms of the purpose for which he introduces it (i.e. as an elucidatory analogy for phenomenology) acting is a more successful model than reading. The actor, as Smart remarks, "succeeds in a quite practical manner in bracketing the emotions, dispositions etc. which he presents on the stage. There can thus be no a priori reason why the phenomenologist should not imaginatively rehearse the feelings and beliefs of those he aims evocatively to describe."

Alongside Smart's comments on acting as a possible analogy for phenomenology, and of relevance to any approach to religion which suggests investigation via a dramatic (as opposed to a comprehensively intellectual/spiritual) re-enactment of religious thoughts and feelings, we ought,
perhaps, to note Rodney Needham's point about the inaccessibility of belief to a simplistically conceived mimesis based on repetition of easily observable behaviour. Arguing that the "conventional externals of religious belief" need not "entail a real adherence to the doctrines that they are supposed to acknowledge" (Needham: 1972: 100), that no religious act shows simply by its performance what the individual involved believes, Needham denies that the Wittgensteinian recipe for explaining fear ("What is fear? What does 'being afraid' mean? If I wanted to explain it at a single showing - I should play-act fear.") Philosophical Investigations part ii section ix) could be extended to cover belief, for "one cannot possibly play-act belief: there is no facial expression either natural or (so far as I know) conventional, which can be put on for this purpose, and there is no bodily act which can be taken as a sure and distinctive sign of believing." (p. 102) This lack of a clear "physiognomy of belief" (p. 101), which I think Needham exaggerates (perhaps confusing the possibility of deception with the absence of genuinely informative expressive forms), does not affect the work of interpolation, which is concerned not to repeat discrete "external" actions, or, from an observation of them, to attempt to work back to some hidden mental state, but rather to reconstruct as completely as possible the thoughtworld of the believer in all its various dimensions so that such actions may be seen in their milieu and understood in relation to it. Given that religious phenomena are, in an important sense, "observationally elusive" (the term is taken from Ramsey: 1955: 198) this reconstruction will rely heavily on the believer's own account of his outlook, especially as this is recorded cumulatively in the written corpus of his tradition. The "play-acting" of the interpolative religionist, if it is not to appear as misguided and superficial mimicry, must be conceived of as an extensive imaginative-intellectual exercise rather than as some form of facile drama.

94. Thus when 1, 2 and 3 become 10, 20 and 30 (or 100, 200, 300), and the quantities are thus increased ten or a hundred times, the prefatory integer still retains its "oneness" "twoness" or whatever.

95. An added advantage of this analogy is that in its various associative forms - integrable (capable of being integrated); integral (entire or whole); integrity (entireness, wholeness) etc. "integer" offers a verbal fertility cognate with its analogical referent, i.e. religion. Both zero and cipher are similarly dense in accurately suggestive imagery for their analogical counterpart, i.e. man. Thus zero may be taken as "the point from which reckoning begins", and cipher, apart from its sense as nought, also suggests some sort of hidden coded message which requires some form of deciphering if we are to appreciate its full meaning.

96. The return to beginnings sought by interpolation ought not to be confused with the attempt to start de novo. It is concerned to make the religionist as receptive as possible to religious world certainty, and this it seeks to do through stressing his identity as representative of the human situation, his being homo religiosus rather than specific culturally bound individual (for as Eliade (1954: 24) has remarked, "symbols, myths and rites are always a revelation of man in his ultimate situation, not in his historical situation. What they reveal is the situation that man discovers when he takes stock of his position in the universe"). The return to beginnings does not seek to dehumanize the religionist in the manner required by advocating some sort of total neutrality.

97. An excellent discussion of some of the issues raised by the fact that the religionist seeks to deal with an area whose nature and extent might lead one to suppose that a
pre-requisite of competence was for him to be multi-lingual, is given by John Bowker in "Religious studies and the Languages of Religion" (Religious Studies Vol. 17 no. 4, December 1981). Unfortunately, as regards the writing of this thesis, Bowker's paper appeared too late in the day to be given any more attention than that of a recommendatory footnote.


99. I.A. Richards' notion of "multiple definition" is of relevance to the task of trying to establish the range of meaning of key religious terms in an attempt both to understand them further and, more particularly, to map out their degree of transferability to - and expression by - other systems of thought. See I.A. Richards Mencius on the Mind, Experiments in Multiple Definition (London 1932), especially chapter 4, "Towards a Technique for Comparative Studies".

100. To talk of "homo religiosus without a religion" may seem somewhat paradoxical if we forget the sense in which this term has been used throughout these pages. It is thus perhaps timely to remind the reader that homo religiosus is understood as man concerned with meaning, man motivated by a sense of world uncertainty in search of world certainty. As such, he may at times be outside any specific religious system without this querying his basic "religious" status.


102. We are reminded of Steiner's point about the problem of setting the bounds of relevance for an inquiry (quoted in note 71). The importance of wide spectrum informedness is perhaps especially important to the religionist given
the number of areas on which religion impinges and which, in turn, cast light on it. As Eliade (1978a:69) has remarked, the history of religions is a total discipline. It should thus be noted that when I go on to say, in the case of rebirth, that the bounds of relevance may be drawn by the Vedic texts, this is not to suggest an impermeable and information-tight barrier which delimits a small unit of intellectual territory, but rather one through which virtually the whole history of India seeps in all its various dimensions. Like Eliade, Gordon E. Pruett has drawn attention to the vast scope of Religious Studies. He suggests (1975: 2) that the ideal religionist is one "whose range of interests and attributes is potentially universal".


104. We have already had occasion to mention the distinction between what William James termed the healthy minded and sick-souled outlooks in our contrasting of passages from Max Müller and Eugene Marais (in Chapter Three). For a full account of James' theory of personality types, the reader is referred to The Varieties of Religious Experience lectures 4-8. The application of these categories to the contrasting eschatologies of the Samhitas and Upanishads is suggested by W.D. O'Flaherty in The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology (California 1976). In The Epics and Puranas O'Flaherty suggests that the despair and discontentedness of the sick souled outlook is resolved.

105. As Smart has remarked (1973b: 24-25), religion is very much an organic system in which key concepts are situated in a web of doctrines.


Keats' phrase "a vale of soul making" occurs in a letter
written to his brother and sister in April 1819, the relevant passage of which is quoted by Hick in *Evil and the God of Love*, London 1974 (1966) p.295 note 1.

108. To present "really knowing" and deciding as two separate endeavours is, of course, artificial. I present them so here simply in the interests of clear exposition. To "really know" something would be automatically to be in a position to make decisions about it, and to decide - if this is to be an informed and reliable act - must be performed from the standpoint of "really knowing".

109. Perhaps the central role of Religious Studies is to find a way in which our sense of world uncertainty may be given peace. This idea of the endpoint of our inquiry being the satisfying or extinction of those needs which brought it into being in the first place, echoes Wittgenstein: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. - The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question." (Philosophical Investigations, paragraph 133).

110. By "souvenirs" and "traveller's tales" I hope simply to suggest something of the immense and intrinsic fascination offered by the multivarious religious experience of mankind. No matter how perplexing, it ought never to be forgotten just how interesting a field of studies this is.

111. The question of the religionist's responsibility to others in communicating the conclusions he reaches is one which, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet received an adequate discussion.


113. Ibid.: 15.
114. Ibid.: 16.

115. Ibid.


118. See Otto: 1936: 63-64.


120. Ibid.: 3.

121. Ibid.: 112.

122. Ibid.: 8.

123. Ibid.: 9.

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid.: 6-7.

126. As we have seen (Chapter Two note 39), Husserl encountered an analogous problem when it came to describing the phenomenological residuum in a way which left it undistorted. Perhaps at a very early point in the history of religious consciousness there was no danger of a qualitative rift between theological word and divine object. Otto makes the intriguing suggestion that, like the description of Brahman as "ascarya" in the Kena Upanishad (4.29), which simply means "that in the presence of which we must exclaim aah!", many of the names given to deity may likewise have arisen from what he terms "original numinous
sounds". To Otto's appendix of this title (1936: 194-198) could be added the following passage from Kazantzakis' *Spiritual Exercises* (p. 101, my underlining): "We have seen the highest circle of spiralling powers. We have named this circle God. We might have given it any other name we wished: Abyss, Mystery, Absolute Darkness, Absolute Light, Matter, Spirit, Ultimate Hope, Ultimate Despair, Silence. But we have named it God because only this name, for primordial reasons, can stir our hearts profoundly. And this deeply felt emotion is indispensable if we are to touch, body with body, the dread essence beyond logic."

But despite this recent evidence of a vestigial sensitivity to direct sound-object relationships, such (refreshing) spiritual atavism is rare. We have, by and large, crossed our linguistic rubicon (which, following C.L. Barber, I locate as flowing between expressive cry and vocal symbol, the change from former to latter marking "the great leap forward of the intellect from animal to human" - *The Story of Language*, London 1972 (1964), p. 20) and must now face the problems on the other side of direct verbal equivalence.


128. See Chapter One note 1.


131. Ibid.

Anderson's point here raises the question again of whether anamnesis can be said to play any part in Religious Studies. See Chapter Three note 60.


137. Ibid.: 138.

138. I do not think (as some commentators have suggested) that there is any reason to suppose that Golding grants the Neanderthalers some form of telepathy as a device for communication among themselves.


141. Ibid.: 299-300.


151. Some measure of the stagnation (or, from another angle, stability) of Neanderthal culture may be gleaned from the fact (recorded by Solecki: 1971: 180) that in eighteen feet of deposit at Shanidar - this representing 2,000 generations or 60,000 years - there was virtually no variation in what was found.


157. See note 126 of this chapter.


159. Ibid.: 35.


161. Ibid.: 146-147.


163. Ibid.: 100.

164. The Inheritors contains a switch in zero orientated outlook about three quarters of the way through, when we see the situation through Cro-Magnon eyes. To simplify I have focused here on one of its perspectival keys only.
165. Indeed there seems to be no reason to take as an exaggeration Golding's comment, made in an interview given in 1970, that prior to writing this particular novel he had read all there was to read on Neanderthal man, and that any inaccuracies which can be spotted are likely to be the result of new evidence which was not available at the time he was writing (cited in Tiger: 1974: 72).

Inaccuracies and omissions can, of course, be spotted. Golding was, after all, not attempting to present a paleo-anthropological text or to give an interpolative account of some Neanderthal world certainty, but to write his own (very particular) brand of novel. For example, Solecki holds that homo neanderthalensis "undoubtedly used skin coverings for his body" (Solecki: 1972: 179) while in The Inheritors they go (hirsutely) naked, and it seems likely that Neanderthalers were more carnivorous than those in Golding's group. I have, admittedly, stressed those points which stand in favour of treating The Inheritors as being fundamentally well informed and informing, rather than trying to trace out any flaws in its factual background (as Rexroth: 1965: 96-98 and Fackler: 1969: 64-66 attempt to do in a rudimentary - and, I think, unconvincing - way). But even if serious flaws could be substantiated conclusively, my main point remains unaffected: namely, that, whether completely correct or not, The Inheritors demonstrates a mode of writing in which facts may be successfully reimplicated in their context, where the reader is presented not with abstracted formulae but with a total milieu.

166. Again we are reminded of Wittgenstein. Perhaps at least one role of the religionist, like the philosopher, "consists of assembling reminders" (See Philosophical Investigations paragraph 127).

167. This comment is from an interview Golding gave to Owen Webster (see "Living with Chaos" Books and Art 1958, p. 16) and is quoted by Tiger: 1974: 18.

Of course if his exploration is to be successful and he is to discover anything of note, the reader of Golding's work must remain alert throughout. It is not an easy book to read, and "unless one's visualization is constant and intense, one is apt to miss what is going on" (Medcalf: 1975: 15).


171. Frazier: 1970, 24 lists some of the more important objections to such a procedure: "The methodological approach which recommends that knowledge gained through scientific procedures requires the supplementation of 'empathetic understanding' raises unavoidable epistemological problems. Is the 'imaginative' reconstruction of the meaning of religious phenomena a 'fiction' of the mind or an accurate disclosure of historical actualities? Whose 'divinations' are we to trust? Are the intuitional disclosures made possible by 'empathetic understanding' as clarifying and revealing of religious phenomena as they are of the 'existential' situation of the person employing such a method? Clearly the imaginative empathetic entrance into the complex of a religious heritage uncovers phenomena overlooked by descriptive, empirical analysis. Does it, however, provide the key to comprehending the meaning of the phenomena brought to light? Can we be so certain, as some exponents of this method seemingly are, that it carries us to the heart of the 'creative phenomenon' that lies hidden behind the phenomena, yet appears in them all as the ground of their life and the core of their meaning?".

172. I do not claim any great originality in advocating a procedure such as that offered by interpolation. Its essential theme of a mode of penetrative inquiry which blends
empathy and objectivity has been voiced in many quarters (though I have not come across any detailed proposals as to precisely how that theme may be effected - this is something I have tried to do here). Moreover, the roots of the idea, based on the assumption that a fundamental likeness in all men provides a basis for understanding which transcends all historical-geographical-cultural boundaries, go far back into history and extend right up to the present day. Given its large historical span it would clearly be impossible to pause here to trace out the development of this current in human thinking, though to do so would make a fascinating project. At the other extreme of inclusion, to pick out a single name from among so many would simply seem to be an act of the most arbitrary favouritism. Be as this may, I would draw the reader's attention to the two works by James Haughton Woods listed in the bibliography. These might be seen as early precursors of the sort of method which I have attempted to give voice to in the notion of interpolation. Woods' thought has been undeservedly neglected in the field. Although early (1899 and 1906) his work is still valuable, and Religious Studies has not developed far enough beyond it to consign it to the category of "historical interest only".
CHAPTER FIVE

1. This Chapter incorporates various ideas first discussed in a dissertation entitled, "Feelings Without Words: The Possibility and Religious Significance of Ineffable Numinous Experience", which I submitted (in the Spring of 1978) to the Department of Philosophy at Edinburgh University in partial requirement for the degree of M.A. in Religious Studies.

2. To suggest that a thread of mystery/ineffability/silence runs unbroken throughout the whole religious realm may seem to be something of an exaggeration. After all, there are plenty of religious phenomena about which there is no difficulty in speaking. My point is that when the questioning process (which seeks the meaning of such phenomena rather than a descriptive account of their immediate appearance) is rigorously applied to any locus of religious manifestation it will eventually bring us into contact with this seam of silence. This central cord of generative mystery does not run at uniform depths. It is far below the surface in such visually and verbally "solid" phenomena as (man-made) places of worship, rituals, dogma, religious art, etc. It is more openly exposed in mystical literature. Nor should this casting of ineffability in so central a role be seen as suggesting that religion is in some way inherently negative, tending always towards denial rather than affirmation. As King: 1968: 24 points out, the situation here is somewhat paradoxical since "the negative sign in religion is indicative of the locus of the positive. And where it is most strongly negative - as with the unapproachable holiness of Yahweh or with the absolute voidness of the Buddhist Nirvana - there is precisely the centre and heart of the most ... positive reality that any religion has to offer man."
3. It would be an interesting comparative exercise to consider how the existence of other religions has been accounted for in the various particular traditions, i.e. what accounts are given within Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic etc. thought concerning the significance of there being other faiths beside their own. I will, however, restrict my attention in this chapter to outlining a tentative logic of religious diversity, as opposed to isolating or constructing a theology, or theologies, of it.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. (my underlining)


8. Ibid.


12. We have, of course, already determined one effect which this "something" has on the study of religion, i.e. it presents it with the situation of multi-dimensional diversity which we are currently investigating. When I say that one of the aims of this chapter is to determine its effect on Religious Studies, I mean how our conception of such studies might be altered from the point of view of a standpoint which identified this "something" more precisely, plotting its locus and becoming fully conscious of its nature (rather than just "blindly" confronting/studying its effects).
Perhaps I ought to stress again that in arguing for an experiential basis to religion I am not accepting (or rejecting) the accounts given of the experience(s) involved. For the moment, at any rate, the inquiry seeks to be neutral regarding the status of such entities/states as God, Brahman, Nirvana etc. which are often thought to "follow" automatically from certain types of experience. My concern is to focus on that type of experience and to see what certain ontologically non-asserting aspects of attempted accounts of it/them can tell us about its/their nature (i.e. about the truth status of the ontologies or world certainties based upon it/them). The aspects I have chosen are those of ineffability and "non-finality".

That something which might, for convenience, be called "numinous experience" does actually occur is, I think, a basic fact of human psychology (or spirituality) which, some seventy years after Otto's Das Heilige, is not open to serious dispute. What is (and seems likely to remain) disputable is the question of what significance such experience ought to be seen as having.

14. This could, perhaps, be suggested as an important factor in the demise of the so called "dead religions", with over-reliance on an experientially unrenewed tradition leading to its gradual decline.

15. I use "theophany" in a general sense here to indicate a qualitatively unspecified experience of the holy. I do not intend it to be understood only in a narrowly theistic sense.

16. These "supplementary" individual experiences are almost invariably expressed in terms of the vocabulary already established to deal with the classic original
theophanies in which the various traditions are historically rooted. Indeed they may sometimes stem directly from a study of (or deliberate spiritual exercise involving) that vocabulary - as in Merkabah mysticism, for example. Given the fact that existing accounts are generally used to provide the framework for future interpretative attempts, it is interesting to consider the possibility of an inter-religious translation of what may be a single common experience. This point (which reminds us of the idea of a return to linguistic beginnings) is raised challengingly by Smart: "If religious experience is our ground of faith, then let us not be so narrow as to consider only the experiences of our tradition ... We interpret our experience. We clothe our intuitions in the vestments of one tradition. Sometimes quite unconsciously. Who has seen the virgin in Benares? What Sicilian saint or Scotch divine has seen the celestial Buddha? ... The appeal to experience has to be viewed against the wider backcloth of the great religions." (Ninian Smart: A Dialogue of Religions, London 1960, p. 12).

17. In the search for an adequate apprehension of religious experience some key terms will, of course, be used over and over again. Such terms constitute the central symbols found in every tradition (the syllable Aum in Hinduism, the wheel of the law in Buddhism, the cross in Christianity, etc.). However, such things are so dense with imagery - none of which serves to finally define their epistemological limits - that they may themselves be seen as repetitions (rather than explanations) of the experience in question. They constitute what Rudolf Otto has called "numinous ideograms of the wholly other" (The Idea of the Holy, London 1936, p.30). Thus as Kinsley (1975: 204) found in his study of Kali, "No matter what we may say about such symbols, their meaning never seems to be exhausted by our commentary."


20. It might appear that the place of "canonical" literature in this view of things - the Vedas, the Bible, the Qur'an and other such writings - has been forgotten, for surely if such originary accounts of religious experience are not regarded as successfully definitive then nothing will be - in which case our criteria for success are simply of impossible strictness. However, such literature is as much of the nature of inexhaustible symbol (or "numinous ideogram of the wholly other") as it is of a straightforward "account". As we have already suggested, it would seem to ignore the variety of interpretations which can be put on this kind of writing, to argue that it is conclusive in the sense of satisfying all further need for discourse about the holy.


22. One might well ask which aspects of religion are not concerned with the human situation. I would endorse the negative answer implied by this rhetorical question and suggest that ultimately all religious phenomena are focused towards world certainty, although this focus (like the central ineffable thread) may run at varying depths below the surface.


24. Ibid.

26. Skanda Purana 4.2.87
To see Shiva merely in visually literal symbolic terms, i.e. as a multi-armed figure dancing within a ring of fire, is to be "taken in" by the potency of the symbolism and mythology in which accounts of this deity are embedded. I would suggest that "Shiva", and indeed "deity", are themselves cryptograms for a powerful and disturbing experience which is inherently ineffable and invisible.

27. The notion of a low threshold of comparative tolerance owes much to the thought of I.T. Ramsey. Indeed we might well add "ineffable" to his list of "qualifiers" which serve to "multiply models without end", indicating that no theological model can be fully adequate or final. Qualifiers have a functional unity in that they point to the radical unlikeness of the objects to which they are attached and demand that any attempts to understand them be continuing rather than conclusive. See Ramsey's *Models and Mystery*, Oxford 1964, p. 60f. We might also consider that closely associated with such words, perhaps playing the role of second order qualifiers pointing to the effects of continued interpretation/description in the face of their primary siblings, are such terms as "ambivalent" and "paradoxical".

28. Of course it might well be argued that this view of religious traditions as embodying accumulated collections of strivings to adequately describe and expound the content and meaning of certain striking but problematic experiences, is mistaken. A believer might, for example, suggest that there is no need to search for some ever elusive interpretation since the answer is here, in the
Bible or the Qur'an or the Vedas (or whatever body of writings is taken as sacred). But this sort of argument, it seems to me, makes the mistake of offering someone the pieces of a vastly complex jigsaw puzzle when they have asked for a description of the completed picture (a jigsaw, moreover, which - as the most cursory glance at history reveals - can be put together in a variety of different ways giving many different and equally plausible pictures). Conversely, someone advancing a single clear cut interpretation (unless it were convincingly comprehensive in its scope) might well be thought to be offering as final no more than the fragment of the picture which is visible on a single piece of puzzle.

29. Ferré: 1973: 207 sums up neatly a common feature of the efforts of such figures as Bultmann, Whitehead, Bergson, et. al. to offer interpretations of religion, when he identifies their "insistence on retaining, so far as possible, primary religious discourse while refusing to allow it to claim literal truth."

Bambrough: 1969: 36 has noted that such a process, if pursued to extremes, can give rise to "a suspicion that the use of traditional words has been carried so far away from the original and basic use that an element of deception or at least self-deception is involved in the use of the old words for the expression of the new beliefs." Thus he suggests that to take the resurrection to mean no more than that "the gospel of Christ continues to be preached" (p. 35) is to adopt a version "which makes believers of us all, but only in the sense in which we all believe in Homer's gods" (ibid.). One of the key factors which makes progressing through the hall of mirrors so difficult a process is that the religionist must decide which sense of "the old words" really constitutes the images which confront him.
30. To suggest in one breath that world certainties display a cuckoo syndrome and in the other that they may contain a prescription for tolerance may seem flatly contradictory, a cheap deception where what is given by one hand is taken away by the other. The risk of inconsistency might, I think, be lessened (rather than doubled) by giving such tolerance the built in means to "defend itself" and ensure its own survival. This can be done by building in the rider that it extends only as far as its opposite: i.e. a tolerant position will tolerate every shade of difference except one which actively attempts to establish a single colour in which this ethic is deliberately proscribed. In assessing the place of tolerance in religion we might, perhaps, want to utilize the distinction which Gordon Allport suggests between "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" religion. Thus, "Extrinsic or immature religion tends to be identified with minimal involvement of the self, with rigidity of doctrinal beliefs, with socially conservative or constructive views and a high degree of inability to tolerate ambiguity in beliefs and practices. ... By contrast, intrinsic or mature religion is characterized by intensive involvement and self-commitment, a flexible and liberal social outlook and an ability to tolerate and effectively utilize the ambiguity present in human life." (From Theodore A. McConnell: The Shattered Self, the Psychological and Religious Search for Selfhood, Philadelphia 1971, p.24). Paul W. Pruyser likewise suggests that it might be taken as a sign of maturity "when one's belief system contains an explicit belief in tolerance ... as a positive value in its own right." (see his Between Belief and Unbelief, London 1975, p. xvii). The notion of an "open commitment" suggested in Chapter 6 will cast further light on how a world certainty may be tolerant despite its "cuckoo syndrome".


32. Ibid.: 162.
33. Ibid.
Most (perhaps all) non-religious answers stop long before that point at which no further explanation is needed. A defining characteristic of religious "answers" may be that they bring the chain of "whys" to a conclusion. Some of the complexity in attempting to find a terminus for this interrogatory process has been shown by G.E.M. Anscombe in her monograph _Intention_ (Oxford 1957). An answer which attempts to be finally explicative (i.e. beyond which there is no need to go in looking for reasons) need not itself be particularly complex. Indeed as Beer (1964: 18) has shown, not much logical credence can be given to the idea of an ultimate explanation viewed in terms of something which specifies all necessary conditions and lists all universal laws. Ward (1973: 37) is more dismissive and finds it "doubtful whether the notion of 'ultimate explanation' is intelligible".

34. The study of religion itself may well be held responsible for some of these cracks, although it is equally arguable that only through such study may clarity be ensured. The relationship between religion and Religious Studies will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

35. Window/mirror is perhaps more analogically accurate than either of the terms singly could be. For in tandem they acknowledge that religious world certainties not only provide a "window" through which the individual may see the human situation, but that they also constitute a "mirror" upon which his own life is reflected.

36. Alasdair MacIntyre offers some interesting comments on the differences between "primitive" and "scientific" man in dealing with incompatibilities: "Primitive man acknowledges the existence of the anomaly, of the exceptional, of that which constitutes a counter example
to his conceptual generalizations, only in order to outlaw that anomaly; and he thus avoids having to revise or reformulate his prevalent beliefs. The scientist, however, accepts anomalies and exceptions as a basis for either abandoning or revising the theories which he has hitherto accepted. Although, according to MacIntyre, theology was developed in the light of a prescientific outlook, there seems no reason to suppose that theistic man must continue to adopt a primitive standpoint with regard to those elements which constitute apparent incompatibilities to his beliefs. See Alasdair MacIntyre & Paul Ricoeur: The Religious Significance of Atheism, New York 1969, p.9f.

37. By "original" here I simply mean historically primary, those accounts of religious experience which have achieved the status of having founded a religious tradition.

38. Faced with a lens of meaning which has become wierdly distorting, some seem to look out on a dual world, half scientific, half mythological, where heaven and hell are somehow thought to co-exist above and below the earth alongside a knowledge of the vast outreaches of space, unmindful either of the contradictions involved in doing so, or of the strenuous efforts of theologians over the past few decades (at least within the Christian tradition) to prevent just such an intellectually schizophrenic world view. Only a persistent vagueness about the consequences of certain interpretations of religious and non-religious claims could allow this sort of absurd dualism to occur. Others, impatient with what they consider to be the incurable unreasonableness of the elements which constitute the religious frame of meaning and the consequent impossibility of ever bringing it into compatible parallax with the non-religious frame, have simply wrenched away the window/mirror of meaning from its religious moorings and rely on variously conceived secular outlooks. This sort of
approach, however, often finds its genesis in a distressingly childlike literalness when it comes to trying to understand religion. But despite the apparent shortcomings of its two alternatives, is it reasonable to remain confident that some sort of mediating middle way may be found?

Traditionally (to simplify a little in the interests of analogical clarity) theology has concerned itself with describing what lies beyond/is reflected in the window/mirror of meaning; philosophy of religion has debated what could lie/be reflected there (and has rejected as logically unsound much of what the theologians have had to say); Religious Studies, in as much as it is an old enough discipline to have acquired a traditional role, has, by and large, been occupied with describing the nature of those elements which make up the religious frame, usually offering no opinion on what does or could lie behind/be reflected in the window/mirror of meaning. This attempted "neutrality" in the face of knowledge of a range of world certainties is, I have suggested, an untenable position for man in search of meaning to hold, supposing he does so beyond an initial descriptive phase.

39. Of course the option to deem accounts of religious experience mistaken, fallacious or nonsensical is left open for anyone who cares to try to substantiate it. However, I prefer to opt for the hypothesis that such accounts are intelligible, though in what sense they are remains a matter for investigation. Intelligibility must not, however, be seen as an automatic guarantee of truth.

40. Hume: An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding Section IV Part I (Selby-Bigge edition) Oxford 1894 p. 28. Such a wholly unlike situation would also, as we have noted earlier, appear to be the destination to which level one directed sight might take us.
41. Ibid.: Section V Part I (p. 44).


43. Thus accompanying what he calls "the general hermeneutical rule that some likeness is necessary for all understanding" (1950: 529), Joachim Wach points to the fact that "we cannot understand what is wholly like ourselves" either (Wach: 1970: 134). From these two principles he concludes "that understanding can apply only to an intermediate field, lying between what is wholly similar and what is wholly dissimilar to our nature" (ibid.).

44. Something which was like everything (unlike nothing) might, perhaps, be similar to "omnium" in its elusiveness. Omnium, we are told in *The Third Policeman* (London 1967), Flann O'Brien's haunting and hilarious tale of hell, "is the essential inherent interior essence which is hidden inside the root and kernel of everything and it is always the same" (p. 67). Thus people, chimneys, the wind, books, cows, cheese, and anything else one cares to mention are all really omnium. But as policeman MacCruiskeen, an authority on such matters, replies, when asked if he has ever seen a piece of this all pervading substance or knows what colour it is, "that is the ultimate and inexorable pancake". "Pancake", in his disturbingly eccentric vocabulary, meaning insoluble problem.

45. The potential strangeness and ungraspsability of complete unlikeness may, perhaps, be inferred by building on the starting point provided by Thornton Wilder in his description of John Ashley (*The Eighth Day*, London 1967, p. 5): "He was odd through a very lack of striking characteristics. He was neither dark nor light, tall nor short, fat nor thin, bright nor dull".


49. In giving mystical/ineffable experience so key a role as this (what amounts to the central common denominator underlying all religious phenomena) I am not blinding myself to the obvious dissimilarity between the mystical and the numinous, nor to the fact that the numinous might equally well be put forward as an alternative experiential common denominator. As Ninian Smart has remarked, "the mystic goal is non-dual" whereas "dualism between God and man is of the very essence of numinous discourse" (Smart: 1958: 340-1). However, the resolution of this "spiritual conflict" (ibid.) need not greatly concern us here. Suffice it to say that it would involve a strictness of categorization not warranted by accounts of the various forms of religious experience, to try to divide "mystical" and "numinous" such that no overlap occurred, and to say that, at the end of the day, the focus of mystical and numinous experience was actually different, would be indefensible. Following Otto here we might tentatively suggest that the mystic appears to stress the "wholly other" aspect of the numen and not its quality of unapproachability, whereas in worship - a typical setting for numinous experience - stress is placed on this second quality and on the "creature consciousness" which it generates (see Otto: 1936: 25-26, 29-30). Similarly the mystic goal of union, if seen as starting from "a consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself" (ibid.: 22, my underlining), need not appear in such utter disagreement with the dualism of numinous experience. Be as this may,
in what follows I take the mystic's experience to be powerful, ineffable and numinous, and view his writings as containing the most easily grasped (and the most challenging) expression of religious experience of the radically unlike.


52. Quoted in Aldous Huxley: *The Perennial Philosophy*, London 1950, p. 32. The "scripture" to which Shankara refers in this passage is Taittirya Upanishad 2.4.


54. It is important to realize that there are different types of silence, rather than simply assuming that it is a single and undifferentiated phenomenon. In an interesting article (which, among other things, contrasts the use of silence as it occurs in the writings of Rudolf Otto and Harold Pinter), Dauenhauer (1973: 23) reminds us that silence "does not always manifest itself as 'safe' and 'benign'", but rather "appears as polyvalent with respect to its emotional impact".

To Arthur C. Danto's (1973: 54) distinction between having reached and being reduced to silence, we might, in view of our criticism of Alston, also want to add a category of never having left silence (of something never having entered our consciousness), i.e. what I refer to in the text as "natural silence".

56. Such terms (God, Shiva, Tao etc.) may, as we have already suggested, (see note 17 of this chapter) be considered as "numinous ideograms of the wholly other", rather than as ordinary descriptive terms.

57. A possible objection to the suggested proscription of all ineffable experience claiming also to be possible data of consciousness, comes in Paul Henle's ingenious essay "Mysticism and Semantics" (Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 9 (1948-49) pp. 416-422). Whilst I think Henle successfully makes the point that something may be ineffable with regard to some particular system of symbolism, this seems to depend solely on the condition that such symbolism is designed to be restrictive and that the normal operation of "like" is deliberately circumscribed. It is difficult to see the usefulness of comparing ineffability within (or rather outwith) the symbolic system Henle suggests, with its occurrence in our own conceptual scheme in which "like" has such an immense field of reference.

58. Perhaps at this point it might be helpful to suggest three possible senses of "ineffability", I base these on Kennick's (1967: 181) definition of the ineffable as: "that for the expression of which all possible words are unsuitable":

(i) Absolute Ineffability: That for the expression of which all possible words, including these words, are equally unsuitable.

This is self contradictory and unstateable, "ineffable" becomes a non-word which it is not possible to apply.

(ii) Ineffable Ineffability: That for the expression of which, apart from this negative minimal statement, all possible words are equally unsuitable.

This is not self contradictory and can be stated, but its statement tells us no more about an ineffable
experience than that it is ineffable.

The religionist cannot accept either of these interpretations of ineffability as meaningful, since to do so would be to ignore the application of likeness needed to ensure the logical possibility of being able to experience the situations to which they are appended. Both the proclamation of ineffability which risks being condemned as self contradictory, and its insured twin: "There is nothing I can say about X", and, "There is nothing I can say about X except, 'there is nothing I can say about X'", are equally prone to the argument against possibility. The latter simply evades (somewhat nit-picking) charges of self contradiction, not of experiential impossibility.

The only sense in which the religionist can accept a claim of ineffability as meaningful lies in a third possibility:

(iii) Qualified Ineffability: That for the expression of which all possible words are unsuitable, but for which we have some standard of relative accuracy by which we may establish that some words, and these among them, are more suitable than others.

Such an interpretation satisfies the requirements both of logic (with likeness being allowed a minimum operation) and of ineffability (since each operation of likeness is acknowledged to be flawed and non-final).

A state of complete radical unlikeness cannot be experienced, thus absolute and ineffable ineffability are purely theoretical conditions. However, since it is from approaching close to this locus of total dissimilarity that religious experience seems to acquire its ineffable nature, I continue to use the terms "radical unlikeness" and "ineffability" without stressing each time that in so doing I mean them in a qualified sense.
59. Or, we might say (if we accept that the "holy", given its ineffability, must stem from totality) ... "of the religions' experience of the holy" ... The somewhat elliptical comments made by Corlett and Moore in their recent (and generally somewhat vague) The Question of Religion (London 1978, pp. 63-64) are of interest here: "I notice now that the word 'holy' seems to be linked - at least in sound even if the purist tells me it isn't in root - to the word 'whole'.

'Whole' - wholesome, complete.

The truly holy man appears to be complete in the sense that he does not seem to desire and pursue the things of the world. Because he is self-sufficient and has put his faith in the deity, he is at peace ... and does not seem to be anxious and tense in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. ... If I think in terms of being made whole rather than holier, I can perhaps avoid the problems of pride."


61. Ibid.: 587.

62. Ibid.: 585.

63. Such incomplete viewpoints need not, of course, be simple. Indeed non-religious specificity is often more complex than religious totality.

64. Given the degree of variation in religious world certainties we ought, of course, to bear in mind the possibility that, far from obscuring an underlying continuity, such variations indicate the mistakenness of taking as one tradition what may in fact be several
different things. But whilst it may help our understanding of, say, the Hindu scheme of world certainty to trace out six contributory strands (as R.E. Hume does, for example, in *The World's Living Religions*, Edinburgh 1959, pp. 20-21), it would surely be indefensible to suggest that we are in fact faced here with six quite separate phenomena focused on entirely different subjects. Continuity is, as we suggested earlier, ensured by the ineffable/mysterious "constant" without the presence of which it is doubtful that we would accept something as religious in the first place. But of course in appealing to this constant we are left with the problem of why, if it is present in them all, we consider the different religions to be different. According to Hume, the continuity of Hinduism is ensured by "its theoretical belief in one immanent, all inclusive, all sanctifying World Soul, and by its practical social control through caste" (p. 21).

65. We ought, perhaps, to make clear that the interpolative return to zero is not "self destructive", i.e. it does not involve any attempt to put to one side or in any sense "bracket out" the aims of its own endeavour.

66. It is, perhaps, arguable that if the differences between the religions are simply those resulting from several incomplete views of the same thing then it is better to find some way in which to include them all in any outlook, rather than trying to select a single one as best (for in this way would we not have a better chance of coming to a more complete view of the holy and thus to what is involved in a religious view of the world?). This would, of course, still leave us with the problem of how to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable, but the focus of world decision would move from that of choosing between the various religions to "simply" choosing between a religious and a non-religious outlook.
67. If we go back to William Golding's *The Inheritors* we will find a good example of how fundamental likeness is in placing any new thing. In the following passage, Lok, the Neanderthal protagonist, is trying to comprehend the "new people" (*homo sapiens*) who have suddenly and disruptively appeared in his environment: "Lok discovered 'like'. He had used likeness all his life without being aware of it. Fungi on a tree were ears, the word was the same but acquired a distinction by circumstances that could never apply to the sensitive things on the side of his head. Now in a convulsion of the understanding Lok found himself using likeness as a tool as surely as ever he had used a stone to hack at sticks or meat. Likeness could grasp the white faced hunters with a hand, could put them into the world where they were thinkable and not a random unrelated irruption. He was picturing the hunters who went out with burnt sticks in skill and malice. 'The new people are like a famished wolf in the hollow of a tree.'" (pp. 194-195). As George Steiner has remarked (1975: 23), metaphors are "new mappings of the world, they reorganize our habitation in reality."

68. Whether or not "Comparative Religion" has any more definite meaning than "Religious Studies" or "History/Science of Religion" in indicating an independent academic discipline is difficult to say. I use the phrase here in a wholly unspecialized sense simply to mean any study of religion in which different religious traditions are compared in whole or in part.

69. "Polarity denying" is, perhaps, confusing, since obviously all the great world religions are centrally concerned with providing/giving expression to a world certainty in which both sides of existence's pervasive polarity find a place. However, in such a certainty, unlike the state of affairs found in our everyday experience,
the divisiveness of the polarities is subsumed beneath the singularity of an overall sense giving scheme. In this sense of "taming" its divisiveness, unlikeness is polarity denying.

70. In pursuing comparative religion we ought also to remember Irving's (1948-49: 547) point: "The great danger inherent in the use of the comparative method lies precisely in this dissolving tendency which, in the beginning, seeks to explain a phenomenon x by comparing it with a phenomenon y, and ends by explaining x away altogether by reducing it to y".


72. The present exposition is exempted from the non-finality which it describes by virtue of its status as theory about radical unlikeness, rather than attempted description of it.

73. Ramsey: 1964: 60.

74. Thus we can harmlessly explain the paradox which, according to Christopher Cherry (1975: 64), "surfaces alarmingly often in any exploration of religious discourse", i.e. "the paradox of the unsayable which, for all that, is said".

CHAPTER SIX

1. Mindful of our arguments in Chapter One against viewing method and material as quite separate entities, my distinction here between methodological prolegomenon (or "theoretical testing of the ground") and actual use of that theory in the applied method of a particular inquiry, ought not to be confused with the "bisectionist fallacy" point of view. As I hope this thesis has shown, religion and Religious Studies are areas which overlap and inter-penetrate, but it is still possible to lay emphasis on one or the other. My emphasis is on the latter rather than the former - which is not to say that method and material are sundered, but simply that the present inquiry is focused on one rather than the other to the extent that this is possible given their inter-relationship.

2. In his recent study of commitment and neutrality in teaching religious education at school level, Edward Hulmes points to this tension between what I have termed "natural" and "organized" interest: "This is a very sensitive area, an area in which we blunder about, crushing all too often and perhaps permanently disfiguring the deeply set spiritual needs of children and older people too. It is as if the whole field of religious education is too intimate for our arrogant professionalism" (1979: 29-30). Likewise we find Arthur Green suggesting that "departments of religious studies are the last places a truly searching student should go to learn about the religious life in any sort of personal way" (quoted in Heinz: 1975: 233); and, along similar lines, Lauree Hersch Meyer (1974: 134) notes that "in teaching religion, we often inadvertently challenge a student's identity base in the effort to encourage academic perception and clarity ... with the unhappy result that the student is so obsessed to defend his source of security in order to defend himself that he is incapable of perceiving what issues are at stake". The attempt to balance
objectivity and empathy is an attempt to heal this rift between natural and organized interest, as is Cook's plea that, since the study of religions involves "so much that is bound up with men's inmost convictions", it requires from its practitioners "a proper sense of responsibility" and an attitude which "must not be without a certain respect and reverence" (1914: 23).

It must be remembered throughout this chapter that although I contrast Religious Studies in terms of (i) its being a common concern of homo religiosus and (ii) its being an academic discipline, I am not advocating such a division of "natural" and "organized" interest. Ideally the discipline Religious Studies should serve to further the concerns of religious Everyman, and it is towards such a situation that interpolation is geared. Moreover, when I come to stress "world decision" as the goal of studying religions I am not overlooking the fact that there may be many less difficult goals en route to such an ambitious destination which it may be more useful (in practical terms) to aim for. My intention in stressing an ultimate goal is to ensure that our inquiries do not become sidetracked by mistaking interim objectives for the final desideratum.


7. This pithy, if somewhat flippant, characterization of theologian and religionist is recorded by McClelland (1974/5: 203). Similar to it (and similarly simplistic) would be the distinction which might be derived from that which Jacobsen suggests to distinguish between
parapsychologist and spiritualist, i.e. the religionist seeks knowledge and poses questions, while the theologian has faith and gives answers. (See Nils O. Jacobsen, Life Without Death?, London 1974 p.137).


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.: 216 (my underlining. I stress it is "completed by" rather than "replaced by").


16. (Cantwell) Smith: 1978: 11 (my underlining). With Smith's Christian, Muslim and Buddhist we can include any man who makes a world decision.


20. The point might be raised in objection here that a criterion of success/accessibility is not bound to be calibrated according to what we think most important in religion, but could instead be determined by "external"
factors, for example, according to how well the various methodological elements of interpolation have been met (or according to how "purely descriptive" an inquiry has been). However, such criteria will only serve to assess the extent to which we have been successful in operating a particular method, which is not necessarily the same thing as showing the extent to which that method has been successful in tackling its subject matter.

30. Ibid.: 232 (n.b. in this context "religion" means Religious Studies).
32. Ibid.
33. Thus in Mankind and Mother Earth (1976) Toynbee writes: "A human being feels as if he is the centre of the Universe because his own consciousness is, for him, the point from
which he views the cosmic spiritual and material panorama. He is also self-centred in the sense that his natural impulse is to try to make the rest of the Universe serve his own purposes. At the same time he is aware that, so far from being the Universe's true centre, he himself is ephemeral and expendable; and his conscience also tells him that, in so far as he gives way to his self-centredness, he is putting himself morally, as well as intellectually, in the wrong." (p.3).


37. It would, of course, be unreasonable (and quite contrary to what we said in Chapter Five concerning the cognitive centrality of "like") to expect the first European accounts of Indian art to have occurred in some sort of wholly new language which had no links with what was already known, i.e. for descriptions of such novel phenomena to occur in their own terms rather than according to existing conceptualizations. Obviously unless links are made between known and unknown, via the establishing of likenesses, we would be unable to understand and assimilate new information. At the same time, though, there does seem to be an important difference between using an existing conceptual system flexibly and inflexibly, between establishing likenesses and simply transferring a whole conceptual system unto an area of experience quite foreign to it.

38. Mitter: 1977: 5 (The painting is reproduced in Mitter's work, which is an extensively - and usefully - illustrated volume).

40. Ibid.

The references in Isaiah are given as:- Isaiah 40: 22, 12,15; 44: 9-20; 40: 18-20; 41: 6-7.

42. Ibid. 15.


44. Thus Cook (1914: 7) writes, "In the opinion of some, perhaps of many people, the study of religions seems to have been the cause, more than any other study, of loss of faith in Christianity on the part of well-informed individuals".


46. Cook: 1914: 26 (my underlining).

47. Ibid.


55. Though of course any method must include some means to control the personal equation. Thus Jastrow suggests that the way to keep it in check and under safe control is "by the determination of a proper method and by a close adherence to such a method" (1901: 1).


58. See Chapter One note 63.


61. Ibid.


63. Ibid.

64. Brauer in the Preface to Kitagawa (ed.): 1967.

65. The world certain individual may, of course, be one who has made a non-religious world decision, opting for atheism, communism, humanism (or whatever) rather than, say, Christianity or Islam. It is arguable that such decisions should be seen as constituting not different channellings of the stream of world concern (i.e. channels which take different courses from those of Christianity, Islam, etc.) but as courses of action which lead to the evaporation, submergence, or transmutation of the waters of our stream of world concern. If this were the case (I do not think it is, but the issue is too complex to argue here) then a non-religious personal equation might indeed
render its holder ill suited to study religion, however "open" his commitment was.

66. However, it is not uncommon to find that those who, in one breath, restrict their attention to the first stage, in the next make pronouncements which betray a clear interest in the second. Thus although Bleeker (1975: 3), in noting the existence of "three well known shades of opinion: all religions are false; all religions are true; or only one's own religion has the truth", may conclude that in order to discuss such opinions "we would transgress the borderline of our discipline and we would be in danger of getting entangled in all kinds of intricate theological problems", only a few pages later (p.7) he opines that "religion is and remains the highest good of humanity because man in his religious belief faces the ultimate Reality and Eternity".

67. The believer in this analogy may be seen at one point as one who has made a world decision in terms of committing himself/his stream of world concern to a particular directional channel, at another as a water-dweller swept along by a particular stream of world concern. The analogy thus tends towards slight ambiguity. Moreover, ineffability is better seen as something which runs the full course of the stream rather than occurring (as rocks, rapids etc.) in a single locus only. The analogy, (like all analogies) is thus not wholly satisfactory. However, despite its shortcomings it seems sufficiently enlightening to allow it to stand.

68. Harvey, in his translator's preface to Otto: 1936 (p.xix).


70. See McClelland: 1972: 231.
74. McDermott: 1968: 29 (my underlining). Rupp (1974: 256f) draws attention to the possibility of a "systematic appraisal of alternatives" within a single tradition (his identification of "the profound facts of pluralism and disagreement" within such traditions reminding us of the point made concerning intra-religious diversity in Chapter Five). The importance of such an appraisal is that it "encourages self-conscious development and even modification of one's own commitments". Moreover, it also "establishes the context for any systematic and at least potentially comprehensive evaluation of other communities."
76. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
We might also note at this point that, according to Wittgenstein, "The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of the world" (Notebooks 1914-1916 p.81e). Here a "moral quality" seems to come close to being a means of salvation.
82. Snell: 1899: 92.

83. Ibid.


85. Thus in his "Fragments of a Confession" (printed in The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, New York 1952 p.14) Radhakrishnan writes: "my one supreme interest has been to try to restore a sense of spiritual values to the millions of religiously displaced persons, who have been struggling to find precarious refuges in the emergency camps of Art and Science, of Facism and Nazism, of Humanism and Communism."

I would agree with Woods that the Science of Religion has no intention of creating a religion. What individual scientists of religion intend to emerge from their work is, however, a different matter.


90. Ibid.


105. I will confine myself to a single recommendation of a
treatment of defining religion which pays proper attention
to the difficulties involved. This is Frederick Ferré's
excellent paper, "The Definition of Religion", which appeared
(1970) pp.3-16.


107. My comment here is based directly on Bambrough's
(1969: 14) remarks on Socrates' analysis of knowledge in the
Theaetetus: "Socrates mistakenly identifies the question
'what is knowledge?' with the question 'what is the definition
of knowledge?' ... Knowing what knowledge is is a necessary
precondition of being able to say what it is, and not vice
versa".

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.


112. See Daisaku Ikeda, *The Living Buddha*, An Interpretative Biography, New York 1976 (1973) p.137. The Buddha's analysis was accompanied by advice to escape from such dissolution. Thus the saying reads in full: "Decay is inherent in all composite things. Work out your own salvation with diligence".


116. Ibid.


120. Haydon: 1926a: 40.


There is an interesting religious aberration which we might, perhaps, call the "all's well fallacy". This arises when the world certainty offered by a religion is taken as showing that in fact the mundane certainties of life lived at a commonsense level are sufficient. This fallacy totally ignores what King calls "the massive religious sense of something wrong with the world" (ibid). We ought also to distinguish between mundane pessimism and religious pessimism. As King puts it, "the former is sheer negativity and disillusionment, while the latter actually turns out to be a necessary by-product of a deeper assurance" (ibid.: 23).

Hocking's analysis (1928: 238-239) provides further support for King's conclusions: "Religion is the healing of a breach which religion itself has made ... it is religion that reveals to man the disparity between himself and his world, sets him at odds with that from which he came, brings him to that pass to which the animal cannot come - an unwillingness to take his world as he finds it."

1. I remind the reader that the meaning of *homo religiosus*, in the broad sense in which I have used it in these pages, has been derived from a comment in Wittgenstein's *Notebooks*: religious man is the man who prays, in the sense that "to pray is to think about the meaning of life". See Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, ed. G.H. Von Wright & G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford 1961 p.73.

2. This is not to suggest that our factual knowledge about religion is complete and that no further descriptive studies are required. Far from it, much remains to be done on this front. I have simply advocated a temporary suspension of such work whilst we consider more precisely what it involves.

3. In particular it considered the objection - voiced from the standpoint of the "bisectionist fallacy" - that Religious Studies and religion are such different and unequal phenomena (in terms of content, value and interest) that to consider learning anything about the latter through conducting or reflecting upon the former is a highly dubious contention.

4. This is, of course, to assume that a straightforwardly descriptive approach cannot give a complete picture of the sort which is needed in order for the religionist to begin his process of evaluation. Such an assumption was justified by appeal to such remarks as that of Bleeker's (himself a major exponent of the descriptive approach): "Our knowledge of the religions of the world yearly increases in extent and refinement (but) this does not mean that our understanding of the innermost of these religions is proceeding in the same proportion. There are still many blind spots on the map of our insight" (1963: 11).
5. This is not to say that the interpolative process involves no reduction. The three modes of sight overlap, and our selection of a single type was more a recommended emphasis than an exclusive choice.

6. Objections which ask such questions as: are religious world certainties suggesting how we should see specific cultural, temporal, or psychological worlds, or do they suggest how we should view the basic elements of the human situation, offering an outlook which will remain valid in any alignment of them? (This question is vitally important in terms of deciding what sort of attitude to adopt towards the diversity of man's beliefs, for if religions are seen as providing particular accounts of particular sets of conditions then the fact that they are different in terms of world certainty is unproblematic. If, on the other hand, they are seen as being addressed to what we might call the elemental structure of life, that is, if they seek to provide meanings for existence and directions for living which hold good under any circumstances, then the fact of religious diversity is a highly - not to say urgently - problematic matter, since it then automatically poses the question, "which view is the right one and which is the best way to live?"); Can an approach such as interpolation, which concentrates on taking us further "inside" the data, avoid not also taking us further down the road of mesmerization along which the descriptive approach has already led us?; Does the idea of interpolation fall victim to the "if I were a horse" fallacy (i.e. does it exaggerate the extent to which we can imaginatively place ourselves in other viewpoints)?

8. Most importantly we dealt with the question of how a method of approach which claims to be "non-factual" (in the sense of providing no further data) can possibly promote our understanding of religion.

9. This is to assume that, at the end of the day, there are differences between the world certainties offered by the various religions (which amounts to saying that different religions are different rather than being in some sense "all the same"). This is the situation as it appears on first entering the hall of mirrors, whether or not it will remain our conclusion after extensive interpolative investigation, remains to be seen.

10. This is not to suggest that there is only one type of religious experience. I am, however, stressing here what I take to be present in all of them (though in varying degrees), namely an element of ineffability.

11. To simply assume that they are mistaken involves the use of criteria whose own veracity it is difficult to establish. How, for example, could we verify the verification principle which the Logical Positivists employed for their elimination of religion, metaphysics, etc. from the realm of sense?

12. We suggested that the sense of world uncertainty has its origins in an awareness of the series of polarities which run through existence and seem to preclude any possibility of overall sense being made of it: love and hatred; cruelty and compassion; life and death; light and dark; hot and cold, etc. Any attempt to find some single sense seems inevitably to be contradicted by its opposite. The "different worlds" we seem to inhabit appear to be largely determined by which side of the basic hope/despair polarity we stress. Religious experience
seems somehow to transcend the polarities and to reach a level of meaning which is immune to their perpetual disharmony. The great religious systems of world certainty seem somehow able to subsume all the opposite poles beneath a unitary sense-giving outlook. Paradoxically, in reaching this level of apparent ultimate sense they lose the ability to properly express their insight.

13. The term is I.T. Ramsey's. See his Models and Mystery, Oxford 1964, p.60.

14. Ibid.

15. These objections asked if a scale of measuring the success of Religious Studies calibrated in terms of ineffability does not risk sacrificing historical accuracy and philosophical rigour to the vagueness and vagaries of a situation in which nothing can be said, and if it does not, furthermore, both make a value judgment about religion and advocate a goal where the two strata of concern in the study of religion are irrevocably sundered.

16. Initial reflection would suggest that at least some of these criticisms would be likely to focus attention on the notion of the three "modes of sight" or methodological orientations which were identified in Chapter Two, evaluated (from the point of view of the mesmerized religionist in the hall of mirrors) in Chapter Three, and one of which (level three seeing) was developed as "interpolation" in Chapter Four. I am aware that the presentation of these ways of seeing requires further development, stressing more clearly their similarities and differences and considering more carefully whether
or not they exhaust all the cognitive possibilities open to the religionist. However, such development must await some future work, here I have been concerned simply with stressing the existence of options for orientation and noting some of the more obvious pros and cons which might direct our choice. Other points which seem likely to attract the attention of the critic would be the idea of a "totality-experience" and the assumptions that Everyman may be considered to be religious in some fundamental sense (independent of the profession of any particular beliefs) and that imaginative re-enactment can be considered as a legitimate way of knowing.

17. Radical unlikeness is "destructive" in the sense of its attacking the conclusiveness or authority of any attempted descriptions of it which try to say too much.


19. The question remains: if the religionist too is fated to "multiply models without end", can he still hope to arrive at a point of understanding? (I would suggest that our answer here must be "yes" unless we wish to be left with the rather strange corollary of having to accept that the religions do not understand themselves).


22. Eliade: 1978a: 267. Eliade's comment was made with particular reference to the philosophical proofs for the existence of God.

24. Such an idea reminds us of Descartes' comments (in the Discourse on Method) concerning the need for some sort of temporary moral code to guide his conduct during the submission of all his beliefs to systematic doubt.


The wider implications of setting a bad example (or of setting no example at all) are not difficult to deduce from Amiel's statement of what happens at an individual level. In terms of indecision, of failure to make any world decision, Alan Watts (1973: 21) provides a clear, if somewhat pessimistic, statement of the "global" consequences which follow: "Modern civilization is disintegrating because it has no principle of unity, no certain or even workable knowledge of the meaning and true end of human life. ... Liberalism must face the plain fact that if we do not know what man is for, we can neither educate him nor heal his infirmities. If you do not know what an automobile is for, it is absurd to think that you can run it or repair it intelligibly".

27. Could he also be "forgiven" for deciding he can only make "limited" decisions - i.e. that whilst his evaluative competence might extend to judging between individual religious phenomena it breaks down when he comes to consider the great religious traditions as single wholes? An answer here would seem to depend largely on where such a decision would leave him as regards mesmerization, i.e. on the number and type of single phenomena he could deal with thus. This kind of limited evaluation is suggested by Hick (1981: 467): "whilst we can to some extent assess
and grade religious phenomena, we cannot realistically assess and grade the great world religions as totalities. For each of these long traditions is so eternally diverse, containing so many different kinds of both good and evil, that it is impossible for human judgment to weigh up and compare their merits as systems of salvation. It may be that one facilitates human liberation/salvation more than the others; but if this is so this is not evident to human vision. So far as we can tell, they are equally productive of that transition from self to Reality which we see in the saints of all traditions". If this kind of analysis were to be accepted, presumably the main problem might then become one of choosing between religious and non-religious outlooks. Hick's equation of all religions as being "equally productive" of a single type of transition may, of course, be disputed.

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RESEARCH TOOLS

All too often bibliographies fail to list those indexing/abstracting volumes which - although seldom quoted from or referred to directly - are nonetheless often responsible for locating many of their entries. In attempting to see the extent of existing work relevant to my thesis I relied
not only on the many references gleaned from sources consulted, but also on various solely bibliographical works. Three such publications were of particular use:

1. **Index to Religious Periodical Literature** (continued after Volume 12 as **Religion Index One**). Published by the American Theological Library Association.
2. **The Philosophers Index**, an International Index to Philosophical Periodicals. Published by the Philosophy Documentation Centre, Bowling Green University, Ohio.
3. **International Bibliography of the History of Religions**. Published by E.J. Brill of Leiden for the I.A.H.R. (Discontinued after the volume covering 1973 and replaced by **Science of Religion**, published by The Institute for the Study of Religion, Free University, Amsterdam and The Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds).

Although it appeared too late in the day to assist in the preparation of this thesis, the volume compiled by Michael J. Walsh et. al. on behalf of The Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries - **Religious Bibliographies in Serial Literature, a Guide** (London 1981) - provides a good survey of research tools available in this area.