

NAMING OR DEFINING? ON THE NECESSITY OF REDUCTION IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Although debate continues over the place of reductionist and non-reductionist approaches within the academic study of religion, much of the debate falters due to a failure to appreciate the necessity of 'understanding' for the effectiveness of 'explaining' cultural phenomena. This article addresses this very problem, reassessing the role of the insider within a methodological reductionist approach within religious studies. Assessing the delimitation of critical analysis to 'knowable knowledge' construction, teasing out theoretical problems with verification, and recognising the role of data construction in first-order description prior to second-order theorisation, this article will argue that the insider's perspective is indeed an essential aspect of the critical analytical approach. Unlike phenomenological or irreductive approaches, however, the insider's perspective is limited to the stage of data construction ('understanding'). At the secondary level of theorisation, the relative relations bringing together data within an analytical study takes precedence ('explanation'). Thus, within a methodological reductionist approach (distinguished from ontological reductionism), there can be no explanation without understanding.

KEYWORDS methodological reductionism; insider/outsider; method and theory; phenomenology; philosophy; verification/falsification criteria

If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity—which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort,

be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice. (Michel Foucault *The Order of Things* 1994, xiv)

Although debate continues over the place of reductionist and non-reductionist approaches within the academic study of religion, much of the debate falters due to a failure to appreciate the necessity of 'understanding' for the effectiveness of 'explaining' cultural phenomena. Indeed, it is this very dichotomy of understanding versus explanation that undergirds the recent exchanges between Bryan Rennie and Russell McCutcheon (Rennie 2000, McCutcheon 2000a; cf. Rennie 1998, McCutcheon 1999, Tite 2000). Similarly, the recent study by Arvind Sharma on the distinctiveness of phenomenology of religion mistakenly assumes that method and object of study are synonymous entities (Sharma 2001a, 2001b), and, as Ronald Grimes has documented, reductionist tendencies have largely been avoided in ritual studies due to a desire to maintain a non-intrusive approach toward practitioners (Grimes 1995, 39, 157; cf. Bell 1997, 8–12; but see Baranowski 1998, Lawson and McCauley 1990). In what follows, I wish to explore the critical-analytical approach in religious studies, building on McCutcheon's advocacy of methodological reduction (especially McCutcheon 1997a, 1997b; cf. McCutcheon 2000b, 2001, 2003), in order to argue for the place of insider perspective within a functionalist approach to the academic study of religion. In order to explicate the functional usage of the taxonomic organisation of data, I will draw upon Bertrand Russell's distinction of naming and defining. My argument presupposes much of what I have explicated previously on methodological reductionism and relative relations (Tite 2000, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). It is my hope that by presenting the functional value of both the insider and outsider perspective, the impasse between etic and emic methodological stances can be overcome.

One of the defining distinctions of phenomenological approaches to the study of religion has been the privileged place given to insider perspectives on their own truth claims (for example, see Sharma 2001b, 275–276; also observed by Smith 2000, 36). W. Brede Kristensen summarises the centrality of methodological 'sympathy' with insider perspectives as follows: '... an appeal made to the indefinable sympathy we must have for religious data which sometimes appear so alien to me' (1960, 10). Kristensen's call for sympathy of perspective as a key theoretical stance for phenomenology of religion is linked to the necessity to transverse the 'alien' nature of the 'other'. Such a stance obviously privileges the insider stance by calling into question the epistemological competence of the outsider. Implied in such a questioning of the outsider is an implicit affirmation of the epistemological superiority, or verifiability, of the insider. Such an assumption of privilege is, as we shall see, highly problematic.

Drawing upon Kristensen's affirmation of insider privilege, Sharma argues that, 'while on the one hand the phenomenologist cannot give us an interpretation which will be identical with the believer's experience, on the other hand he [*sic*] can provide us with a fairly good approximation' (2001b, 42; see also

2001b, 277–278; cf. Kristensen 1960, 6–7, cited by Sharma). The insider perspective is given priority, not because the outsider is unable to gain access to the insiders' world, but because the insider claims can only be known as an approximation, or poor representation, of the 'true' insider's world.¹ Historians of religion—the outsiders—do have access to insider worlds or claims, according to this line of reasoning, but fail to *fully* understand the insider. Implied again is the validity of insider claims over and against outsider understandings. Two difficulties, however, arise in this claim. First, the presupposition never calls into question the veracity of insider perspectives. If the insider *agrees* with the outsider interpretation, or can see himself/herself in such interpretation, then the analysis is seen as valid. Such a presupposition is false due to the limitations of perspective, both individual perspective and social perspective. Second, this presupposition assumes that the outsider is not capable of developing a *better* understanding of the insider world/claims than the insiders. Such a premise is only sustainable when the first is assumed unassailable.

Insider truth claims are problematic for various reasons when placed on the level of critical analysis. The first major difficulty, which reductionists have continually indicated, is the assumption of a substantive view of 'religion'; that is, an essentialising of some entity as *sui generis*, standing above and beyond the limitations of historical and cultural contingences (see Arnal 2000, 27; Fitzgerald 1999; contra Sharma 2001b, 280; see also Ellwood 1999, 107–114, who recognises the *sui generis* claim in Eliade's work but goes on to defend non-historical categories as self-referential categories for analysis; cf. with the historical survey of the British and Continental branches of phenomenology in James 1995). At the heart of a religious tradition or claim (an historically, culturally contingent particularity) is some 'thing' classified as 'religion'—and it is to this 'thing' that phenomenological approaches gravitate as the focus of analytical work. C. Jouco Bleeker effectively demonstrates such a concern when he writes:

the phenomenology of religion sharpens the eye for the specific nature of religion and for its function in cultural and social life. The historian of religions naturally studies religion in its context, i.e. interwoven as it is with all kinds of non-religious facts. Thereby he is in danger of losing sight of the true nature of religion. (Bleeker 1972, 43; see also Dhavamony 1973, 10; Pettazoni 1954, 10–11)

Noteworthy is the usage of the plural and the singular in Bleeker's statement: 'religions' refers to the material and cultural dimensions of religious studies (the historian's domain of interest), whereas 'religion' names some essence that is at the heart of 'religions'. The concern emerges that 'religion' may be lost in the pursuit of studying 'religions' (a similar concern has been voiced by Wiggins 1992, although he does try to avoid privileging either insider or outsider viewpoints).²

Although there are various difficulties with positing a transhistorical essence, perhaps none is more troubling than the issue of verification. A critical-

analytical method necessitates that 'knowledge' be of such that it can be verified in some plausible way. Verification need not, however, be strictly empirical in nature, for even empirical arguments assume a direct correlation between sense-data and external objects or stimuli. Logical argumentation, however, wherein a process of falsification and verification can be established and played out, is the basis for a critical-analytical approach (this is true regardless of the argumentative school that we may follow; see Gathman and Pratt 2003 for a brief pedagogical discussion of Naïve Justificationism, Neojustificationism, [Popperian] Falsificationism [Popper 1965], Conventionalism [specifically Duhem 1954], Lakatos's modifying auxiliary hypotheses [Lakatos and Musgrave 1970], and Thomas Kuhn's sociology of science). Such an approach, we should be quick to qualify, does not address issues of absolute truth. Bertrand Russell succinctly distinguishes true-and-false from verifiable-truth in his plea for analytical logic to be the ground for philosophical work. He states:

We have been considering, in the above account, the question of *verifiability* of physics. Now verifiability is by no means the same thing as truth; it is, in fact, something far more subjective and psychological. For a proposition to be verifiable, it is not enough that it should be true, but it must also be such as we can *discover* to be true. Thus verifiability depends upon our capacity for acquiring knowledge, and not only upon the objective truth. (Russell 1914a, 116)

Truth is not, therefore, the goal of the critical-analytical method. Rather, the goal is to locate and explain verifiable truth, truth that *can* be discovered. Such a qualification of 'knowledge' as 'knowable knowledge' for critical inquiry necessitates the avoidance of metaphysical claims for some essentialised essence or universal or collective experiential *sui generis* encounter or entity. To posit an ahistorical, or transhistorical, essence is to move *de facto* outside of the realm of verifiability and thus discoverability (contra Sharma 1997, 51). This verifiability qualification does not, we must hasten to realise, negate the truthfulness of substantive claims. There may indeed be such a 'thing' as 'religion' underlying all (or most) 'religions'; there may indeed be some transhistorical and transcultural experience shared by humankind; and there may indeed be a deity named Odin who sacrificed an eye to Mimir for a drought from the Well of Wisdom and who now dwells in Asgard as the sombre All-Father.³ However, such true or false aspects of metaphysical claims fall outside of the domain of logical verification and thus cannot claim a place within a logically derived 'knowledge' (at least not if left in a non-reductionist state of analysis) (contra Merkur 1994, 1996). Reductionism, therefore, serves not to explain away 'truth', but rather to render all truth claims as verifiable, or discoverable, knowledge by means of theorisation. Metaphysical claims of essences and universal experiences remain 'non-knowledge' within critical-analytical approaches even if such claims are in fact true.

Substantive claims are also problematic due to the empirical dimension of verification of insider truth claims. The empirical validation of knowledge is necessitated by the very privilege granted insider perspectives by the non-reductionists. Sharma, in dialogue with John Hick's criteria for verification, makes just such a claim. 'The *empirical* check is provided by the believers', he claims, with 'the structures generated by the phenomenology of religion [being] open to a certain kind of *empirical verification* through the verdict of believers' (Sharma 2001b, 48; see Hick 1983, 94–106). This 'insider verdict' as a criterion for verification is tied into the mega-structures and macro-structures generated within the phenomenology of religion, and which actually go beyond the insider's self-understanding (see Sharma 2001b, 46–50).

Hick offers five criteria for the verification of such structures, which he refers to as 'eschatological verification' (1983, 100–102). Each of these five criteria need to be stated and evaluated in order to fully appreciate the incompatibility of Hick's eschatological verification method and logical verification of the critical-analytical approach.

The first criterion is:

the verification of a factual assertion is not the same as a logical demonstration of it. The central core of the idea of verification is the removal of ground for rational doubt. That a proposition, p , is verified means that something happens that makes it clear that p is true. A question is settled, so that there is no longer room for rational doubt concerning it. (Hick 1983, 100)

This first criterion is fallacious due to two factors. First, it assumes that verification necessitates *absolute* resolution of doubt, without recognising that there can be degrees of certainty (see, in contrast to Hick, Russell 1914c, 45–46; 1948, 353–436). In effect, there can indeed be (contra Hick) rational doubt simultaneous with verification. (Russell aptly refers to this as 'probability-logic' [Russell 1948, 355].) Second, Hick dismisses logical inquiry as essential for analytical verifiability. If logical demonstration plays no role as a criterion for verification of an asserted fact, then under what basis can truth claims be determined as asserted facts? What, indeed, is the basis for verification and in what method, to even follow Hick's reasoning, can 'rational doubt' be removed without logical demonstration? The only way in which rational doubt can be removed without logical demonstration, as far as I can see, is to assume an axiomatic presupposition of some metaphysical reality that stands in sympathy with the insider perspective. Such an approach to verification, if this is what Hick's criterion in fact leads us to, is not really verification in any sense of the word, but rather is a re-statement or reporting of insider truth claims (and this reporting as a type of advocacy of those truth claims as *a priori* verified as true).

Hick's second criterion is: 'Sometimes it is necessary to put oneself in a certain position or in some particular operation as a prerequisite of verification. For example, one can only verify "There is a table in the next room" by going

into the next room ...' (1983, 100). This second criterion also fails due to two methodological factors. First, it assumes that direct access to phenomena is both necessary and an assurance of verification. An assurance of verification is dubious at best, given, as we shall see, the discontinuity between sense-data and those external objects that are the source of such sensations. Direct access, furthermore, assumes that data cannot be gathered by means of inference. Inference, however, can offer valid access to external objects (cf. Russell 1914c, 53; my own view of inference is somewhat different than Russell, but I believe we stand together when it comes to accepting indirect, logical access to external data). For example, I may 'know' (have a sense-perception) of the existence of a table in the next room due to a shadow cast onto the wall in the room I currently occupy; or, I may assume the existence of the table due to previous experience, testimony, a photograph, or videotape. The very presence of the table could plausibly be, although not beyond a *rational* doubt, assumed due to the fact that I was in the next room but not any longer (this raises the philosophical question whether we can logically 'know' that something continues to exist even if we are no longer looking at it). A second problem with this criterion is that Hick assumes that the object of knowledge must be an objective 'thing' (a material entity open to empirical experience). Logical 'things', however, as well as psychological (subjective) 'things', are also objects of knowledge; and they are not material entities open to empirical verification. Such non-material objects can only be engaged, or known, by logical analysis, and thus we return to the fallacy of Hick's first criterion.

Hick's third criterion states: 'Therefore, although "verifiable" normally means "publicly verifiable" (i.e., capable in principle of being verified by anyone), it does not follow that a given verifiable proposition has in fact been or will in fact ever be verified by everyone' (1983, 100). Although in principle Hick is correct that a logically worked out approach resulting in verifiability (or, I would add, falsification of a proposition) should be open to duplication by others, his criterion is unacceptable. He confuses duplication of method with universal acceptance of the findings of an attempt at verification. Perhaps there are instances when a finding is so irrefutable that only a fool would disagree with the veracity of the conclusion/explanation, but I suspect that such instances are somewhat rare. Rather than universal arrival at a given solution, more common are degrees of certainty or plausibility. The more solid the method utilised, the higher the degree of plausibility and thus the more potentially persuasive the solution. Still, disagreement does not negate the veracity of a solution/explanation. Indeed, given the diverse theoretical paradigms within which scholars function (I am reminded of the seminal work of Thomas Kuhn at this point; see Kuhn 1970, especially 77–91), some may never come to 'see the light of day' as viewed from practitioners of another theoretical paradigm (thus, perhaps plausibility in verification and falsification is in part dependent upon the theoretical premises adopted).

Hick's fourth criterion is very dubious. He claims, 'It is possible for a proposition to be in principle verifiable but not in principle falsifiable' (1983, 100). He goes on to give the example of the presence of a triple seven in π , concluding, 'it will always be true that a triple seven may occur at a point not yet reached in anyone's calculations. Accordingly, the proposition may be verified if true but can never be falsified if it is false' (Hick 1983, 100). The problem with Hick's criterion is not that there are things that can be verified but not falsified, at least in an absolute sense (i.e. in the sense of whether we are dealing with true-and-false goals of verification), but in the assumption that verification processes lack falsification. For the establishment of any 'knowable knowledge', it is necessary for the possibility of falsification. If any such claim stands outside the domain of either verifiability or falsifiability, then such a claim stands outside of the realm of 'knowable knowledge'. Furthermore, falsification is a vital component of the critical-analytical approach; that is, not all analyses lead to verification, they can also lead to falsification—and indeed falsification is an essential component in the critical-analytical approach for establishing an analytical balance. Without such a theoretical balance, the veracity of any verification is dubious at best.

Hick's fifth and final criterion falls directly into the metaphysical realm, leaving the realm of methodological reduction entirely. He claims that 'The hypothesis of continued conscious existence after bodily death provides another instance of a proposition that is verifiable if true but falsifiable if false. This hypothesis entails a prediction that one will, after the date of one's bodily death, have conscious experiences including the experience of remembering that death. This is a prediction that will be verified in one's own experience if it is true but that cannot be falsified if it is false' (Hick 1983, 100–101). This criterion is simply an extension of his fourth criterion, but thrown into a metaphysical realm. His claim completely rests upon the insider's *personal* experience as the sole basis for verification. The problem with this criterion is obvious. The verification is not a type of verification that can be 'knowable', but rather is a metaphysical verification that lies beyond 'knowable knowledge'. The actual truthfulness of such insider experiences is not in doubt (indeed, such truthfulness is not even being considered in the critical-analytical approach). Rather, we are forced to return to Russell's comment on logical truth as *discoverable* truth (1914a, 116); and based on the necessity for the discoverable nature of truth for critical-analytical approaches, metaphysical experiences are not in the realm of verification or falsification (cf. McCutcheon 1997b). What Hick's fifth criterion aptly illustrates is the excessive value placed on the insider perspective; indeed, he illustrates privilege status of the insider gone amok.

The role of empiricism as a component of the validation within the insider's perspective is a faulty line of argumentation. An exclusive usage of empirical data to affirm the knowledge of external objects rests upon a false correlation of sense-data, sensations, and objective (material or external) reality. Objective, or material and external, reality consist of those 'realities' or 'things'

that exist outside of the subject. They are the things we 'bump into' that we encounter and belong to the objective realm of our world (cf. McCutcheon 1999, 92). Such realities, when reduced to the status of data, can be termed objective facts. Few people would deny the existence of the chair that they are sitting on, or the highway they travel along each morning; unless, of course, we move into the metaphysical camp of the ancient Platonists and merely see such objective facts as simply poor reflections of some unmovable ideal forms. Although our common sense may not deny the existence of an objective reality, the verifiability of such a reality as objective facts is not as simple to establish (at least not beyond simple assertion). Our external reality is accessible only through the process of perception; that is, by means of the acceptance or interpretation of sensations. (I am largely drawing upon Russell 1914a at this point, cf. Russell 1912; see also Peacocke 1983, 1991, 1992.) This form of perceptive access to external reality constitutes sense-data. Consequently, my 'knowledge' of the external realm is only second-hand; that is, a collation of various sense-data derived from my sensations. As Russell puts the matter: 'This is what we really know by experience, when we have freed our minds from the assumption of permanent "things" with changing appearances. What is really known is a correlation of muscular and other bodily sensations with changes in visual sensations' (1914a, 85) and, thus, 'verification consists always in the occurrence of an expected sense-datum' (Russell 1914a, 85; also 91). Reality, therefore, is not a simple one-to-one relation of subject-to-object; nor are sensations simply a peculiar filter for gaining access to the 'reality beyond' a subject.

Take a tea cup as an example of the non-verifiability of the strictly empirical method. If I place a tea cup on the table in front of me and look directly at it, the visual reception of a 'tea cup' indicates that the tea cup actually does exist. Such a conclusion can be further tested by reaching out and actually touching the tea cup, thereby adding the touch sensation to the visual sensation to validate my sense-datum (cf. Russell 1914b, 119). If, however, I look away from the tea cup, then the question arises: 'does the tea cup still exist?' Common sense would seem to indicate that it does indeed continue to exist, but the verifiability question 'how do I know that it exists?' remains. Testimony of others may also be drawn upon; that is, the person with me sees and touches the tea cup while I look away. Logically, however, this testimonial approach also fails me for two reasons. First, as Russell aptly notes, 'it must be conceded to begin with that the argument in favour of the existence of other people's minds cannot be conclusive' (1914a, 101). Second, there is a lack of continuity between the points of perception of one person and that of another (Russell 1914a, 96–97).

The first problem of the existence of other minds falls onto the whole issue of verifying a logical construction as the real (in an objective sense). Being 'real' in a logical sense (i.e. in the sense of a sense-datum) is not dependent upon being 'real' in an objective sense. (Here, logical 'reality' and the 'reality' of the empirical method differ sharply.) Dreams, to again draw upon one of Russell's insightful illustrations, are indeed 'objects of sense' even though clearly 'illusions

of sense' when directly related to the external world (see Russell 1914a, 92–93, 101–103). The *sense*-dependent nature of dreams (i.e. being products of sensations and thus sense-data) are real objects *to the senses* as are external objects. My dreams, therefore, are just as *real for my own private reality* even if they do not correspondent to the reality of my external, objective reality. Again, I must emphasise the distinction here between 'true-and-false' and 'verifiably-true' propositions. Dreams are not necessarily 'true' in some absolute way, but they are verifiably true within my own cognitive processes of world construction.⁴ Indeed, the very 'minds' I may engage to verify the existence of the tea cup may in fact be nothing more than a phantom of my own dream world; and such phantom-figures do indeed *seem* to have autonomous attributes that *seem* to indicate the existence of an independent conscience.

The second problem of the differing perspectives is closely related to what I have just indicated regarding the sense-data realities of individuals. Even if we assume the existence of other people as non-phantoms, the problem of diverse perspectives arises. My perception of the tea cup is not *identical* with the perception of the person beside me. Not only is there a *spatial* discontinuity, but there is also a *temporal* discontinuity even if only by a fraction of second. Beyond even the banal side of spatial and temporal discontinuity, there is the further, and perhaps more substantial, problematic of *experiential* frameworks for interpretation. My position to the tea cup will be slightly different than that of my friend: I stand an inch shorter, over to the left, and a metre farther back from the tea cup; the time it takes for the visual image to reach my eyes may be a fraction of a second to several hours to several days different from when my friend 'sees' the tea cup; and my cultural and personal experience may deem the object a 'tea cup' while my friend's deems it simply 'an ugly piece of clay'. Thus, all perceptive 'realities' (or 'private worlds') are dependent upon the individual's own ontological or experiential state.⁵ The same dynamic is true of not only material objects that are perceived, but also of conceptual or logical realities (i.e. non-material 'things' such as ideas, cultural or political structures, etc.) that are also perceived.

The points of perspective, as perceived perspective, constitute what Russell calls 'private worlds' (1914a, 95).⁶ Private worlds are those perceptual domains within which a constellation of 'points of view' coalesce. Individual 'points of view' relate to visible reception of particular aspects of what is seen. They are determined, or ordered, by the relational connections between those sensations that are received and interpreted. Similarities that are present in these sensations are the basis for such relations. In a sense, my 'private world' is a series of ordered relations between various sense-data that are brought into a constellation I call 'point of view' (on this overall matter, see Russell 1914a, 95–105). Each of us—that is, those of us we assume to exist independently of ourselves—has a distinct 'private world' as each of us has a different 'point of view' or constellation of relations. Due to this diversity of worlds, using the perspective of another to validate the existence of the unseen tea cup is fallacious.

Although each of us has a different 'private world', and thus the testimony of others is not a rational basis for actually 'knowing' truth verifiably, Russell is correct in noting that there are points of similarity between these 'private worlds' (1914a, 95–96). Two existing individuals can perceive a 'red' tea cup. This shared perception is dependent upon a similarity of recognising relational aspects or attributes of the tea cup. 'Shared' perception, however, does not posit 'identical' perception. The differences between the individuals, as indicated earlier, still remain, but are now brought into a point of connection due to the dynamic of similarity of recognition. Where perceptual appearances are similar is where recognition of similar relations is present. As Russell puts the matter: 'Two men are sometimes found to perceive very similar perspectives, so similar that they can use the same words to describe them' (1914a, 95). Or, as Michel Foucault insightfully observes, 'between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and its modes of being' (1994, xxi). Shared perceptions fall in this socially contingent locus between order and ordering codes. In effect, an overlap of two individual 'private worlds' occurs. Such an overlap allows the existence of both communication and community formation; communication in that they have a shared point of reference, and community formation in that their shared point of reference enables them to enter into and develop more complex social entities. When shared relations between individuals is heightened to the point of macro-level shared presuppositions (or, to draw on Kuhn again, shared epistemological paradigms), the emergence of distinct cultural entities is possible. Overlapping 'private worlds', however, can also exist on the micro-level or individual level. For example, take the temporal discontinuity already noted. When there is a greater temporal gap between one perceptual appearance and that of another, the less of a stable overlap is possible. The likelihood of the tea cup's existence is increased, although never assured, when the temporal gap is, for example, a mere few seconds in contrast to several days or years. The spatial distinctions mentioned earlier also come into play: the less discontinuity of my spatial relation to the object from my friend's, the greater overlap will exist between my 'private world' and that of my friend. (If, for example, I stand on the roof and look through a peep hole at the tea cup, I will have a very different view than what my friend will have when standing two feet away on a horizontally parallel line of sight. Imagine, furthermore, if one of us were a mile away looking through a window at the tea cup!) Experiential continuities, along with discontinuities, also fit into this dynamic of perceptual overlap: when I perceive the tea cup from a similar set of cultural or personal presuppositions, then I will probably 'perceive' the 'tea cup' in a similar fashion as my friend (e.g. in its function as a tea cup). I would call such an overlap of 'private worlds', a distinction not found in Russell, 'public worlds'. Furthermore, I would see such 'public worlds' as the basis for constructing cultures, subcultures, and more generally domains of discourse. (On differing domains of discourse, see McCutcheon 1997b, 1998; Arnal 1998; cf. MacKendrick 1999.)

The public and private worlds discussed so far contrast sharply with the epistemological presuppositions of empirical verification. There is, in effect, no 'real' world in an objective sense that can be verified *directly by the senses*. Instead, the discontinuity of *objects* (external realities) and *senses* (internal realities) render our knowledge of the external world simply an approximation of the objective reality, a reality accepted *by assumption* as standing in some degree of continuity with the private and public worlds of perception. Empirical verification, therefore, cannot generate 'knowable knowledge' in any absolute sense. The privileging of the insider's perspective is further complicated by the existence of 'private' and 'public' worlds. Although Wilfred Cantwell Smith may comfortably declare that 'I would proffer this as my second proposition: that no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers' (1959, 42), such a proposition neglects to consider the contestation and limitations of perceptive worlds. Not only do insiders lack direct access to external reality (material or otherwise), no two insiders, and especially no two groups of insiders, have exactly the same perceptual worlds. 'Insider perspective', therefore, should be reconceived as 'insider perspectives'. An individual's 'private world' will not encompass the entire realm of analysis, nor will such sense-data sets that are in the boundaries of a given 'private world' be *exact* and *verifiable* explications of the realm of analysis (contra Sharma 2001b, 261). To ask one Muslim to explain the gender relations and politics of the *Qur'an* is to simply ask for one, perhaps idiosyncratic, perception or experience of the text. The same is true of the shared 'public worlds' of a given community or cultural body. As similarities are derived from shared acceptance of relations between objects, those shared perceptions are dependent upon an epistemological framework that serves as the basis for social cohesion; thus, the public world of a social entity can be seen as the historical or cultural particularity within which the individuals are situated. Such epistemological relativity, therefore, negates an empirical form of validation of a truth claim by insider perspective. Verifiable truth, at the level of explanation, cannot be established solely on the basis of insider privilege.⁷

Given that the non-reductionist privileging of the insider perspective is theoretically fallacious within a critical-analytical approach, the question now needs to be raised as to whether or not the insider perspective can play any useful function in analytical work. I believe that when the insider perspective is moved out of its privileged status and, instead, placed within the framework of methodological reduction, it can indeed carry functional utility. In order to facilitate such a theoretical shift, it will be helpful to first distinguish the function of taxonomic designations; that is, the difference between what Russell calls *naming* and *defining* (Russell 1919, 174).

Russell, in his discussion on the definition of definitions, directly addresses the issue of classification symbols. He neatly lays out a two-fold typology of labels, referring to one as *naming* and the other as *description* (or defining). Each typology differently addresses the relational connection between an object and

its properties. Naming, he contends, 'is a simple symbol, directly designating an individual which is its meaning, and having this meaning in its own right, independently of the meanings of all other words' (Russell 1919, 174). An example would be 'Scott', a designation that literally stands in place of the object called Scott. Being a 'simple symbol', names are self-contained designations, consisting of no parts, beyond the letters in the term, which are analysable (see Russell 1919, 173). Names in effect simply 'stand in for' the object being designated and, thus, can be seen on a one-to-one correlation with that object. Thus, there is, theoretically, no distinction between the designation ('Scott') and the person for whom the designation stands in.

Descriptions, however, are defined by Russell as consisting 'of several words, whose meanings are already fixed, and from which results whatever is to be taken as the "meaning" of the description' (1919, 174). To again refer to his illustration, a description would run 'the author of *Waverley*' (Russell 1919, 173). This description, unlike the name 'Scott', does not simply stand in place of the object (the person designated), but instead tells us something about that object; it assigns, or defines, properties of the object. Each of the parts of the description have a particular, albeit semantically limited, meaning that is brought into a constellation of meanings to determine, define, the 'meaning' of the description. With descriptive designations, there is no collapsing of identity between the designation and the object being designated; the two are kept separate, with the designation telling us something about that object, and this without being an absolute constellation of meanings about that object. Indeed it would be impossible for a designation to explicate for us *everything* about the designated, or the designation would simply become the very object being designated. Such a shift would render the descriptive designation simply a name in function, as it would then 'stand in for' the totality of the object. Such a collapsing, however, of descriptive designations with the object is logically not possible, given the role of descriptions to merely function as indicators of particular relations. Names are not concerned with the relations of properties, as they simply 'stand in for' and thereby serve no definitional function; they are merely labels that stand as determinate elements of language.

Relations of properties will, of course, vary under diverse indeterminate contexts, including the context of analytical inquiry. An example of this indeterminate nature can be gleaned from the proposition 'Scott is the author of *Waverley*'. Although 'Scott' is a simple symbol, the affixed claim that he 'is the author of *Waverley*' indicates a relationship of properties about Scott: the claim is that he *is* the *author* of this *particular work*. Such a claim is a statement of relation between aspects of this person: his function as an author, and the particularity of the production of a particular work. Thus the proposition makes a claim on a set of characteristics that tell us something about Scott, and does not simply point to Scott as itself. What is useful in Russell's typology of designations is that they point out that descriptions, indeed language, are intimately linked to epistemological connotations (thus, their symbolic function);

they evoke or invoke such connotations within the indeterminate usage of language.

A problem, however, with Russell's typology is that the type he calls *names* can only exist in theory but never in practice. That is, there are no designations that are not, even if only implicitly, descriptive. For example, if I address my dean as 'Barry' I invoke a particular set of connotations: the designation indicates a personal, familiar relationship between the two of us. If, however, I address him as 'Dean Levy' or as 'Dr Levy', I invoke a very different set of connotations; that is, a set of formal relations, couched in his professional and perhaps distinctively hierarchal relation to myself. Yet, if I address him as 'Rabbi Levy' I invoke another set of characteristics or properties about this person; that is, his Jewish background, his position within a particular religious community, and a certain level or type of educational training. Except for the third designation, a clear point of relation between this person and myself is implied; indeed, the very relationship determines much of what set of connotations emerge in the descriptive designation. (I am not self-identified as Jewish, and he is not my rabbi, and thus a different set of connotations will emerge for me than for another person who may refer to him as 'Rabbi Levy'.)

Some designations indicate either *purely descriptive* or *evaluative* connotations, and the distinction again is dependent upon an indeterminate context within which properties are classed. I have tried to emphasise for my students that the designation 'heresy' or 'heretic' is not a purely descriptive term, but rather an evaluative classification sometimes misused in historiography as a descriptive term. There were no such groups as 'heretics'—the term does not point to any historically existent social entity, but rather assigns a pejorative valuation by one side of a social conflict onto the other side. (As a rhetorical device 'heresy', within the Judaeo-Christian context, is not merely used by the so-called 'orthodox' parties; even in the Nag Hammadi codices the so-called 'heretics' use the label 'heretic' to marginalise as 'other' competing groups, including those we now would see as 'orthodox'; thus, orthodoxy and heresy are simply rhetorical devices used within historically contingent instances of social contestation.) To state a proposition in the subject-predicate form, therefore, with such evaluative or descriptive terms will evoke particular evaluative connotations; for example, 'Rennie is a good scholar' and 'McCutcheon is a horrible teacher' indicates a particular value judgment about Rennie as a scholar (I do appreciate Bryan's work, even when I disagree with his non-reductionist approach) and McCutcheon's ability as a teacher (I have no idea what Russ is like as a teacher, but I have only heard good things and can only guess based on my hearing his 'inspirational' public addresses that he is an excellent teacher, contrary to my proposition). However, to descriptively designate either Rennie or McCutcheon would be to tell something about the properties of each, yet without an evaluative claim; for example, 'Rennie is the author of *Reconstructing Eliade*' and 'McCutcheon contributed an essay on marginality to the journal *ARC*'. Neither statement makes a value judgment, but both do indicate something

about (i.e. characteristics about) each. Such connotations are implicit in naming as well. If instead of 'Professor McCutcheon' I say 'daddy' (he is not my father, by the way!) I evoke a differing set of relations. If I say 'asshole' instead of 'Scott' I make a clear evaluative evocation, highlighting a negative set of relations I may have with this Scott figure; or using 'buddy' instead of 'Rennie' I make a different, more positive and friendly, evocation of properties.

Still, despite this shortcoming of Russell's typology of *naming* and *describing*, his distinction is helpful for our assessment of the role of the insider within the critical-analytical approach.⁸ The process of *naming* is fallacious due to its substantive correlation of category with object. Like the *sui generis* presupposition in phenomenology of religion approaches, names collapse first-order description with second-order theorisation, thereby removing the very tension, the very 'gap' that is necessary for theorisation (contra Ellwood 1999, 109–110; on the fallacy of collapsing a class with members of a class, see Wittgenstein's comment in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ¶ 3.332 [1922, 56–57]; also see the witty and popular essay by Russell 1975). In collapsing description with theorisation, in effect our analytical 'maps' *de facto* become our 'territories' even when still called 'maps' (see Korzybski 1958, Smith 1978, 1996, Tite 2001). (Indeed, the fallacy of Russell's *naming* type actually substantiates his call for the critical-analytical approach!) Descriptions, on the other hand, assist the critical-analytical approach by presupposing this analytical gap between data and theory. They place the emphasis not upon the object or objects, nor do such designations 'stand for' some such entity in an ontological sense, but rather focus upon the sets of properties and the relational configuration of those properties within historical, cultural and political particularities. By placing the analytical focus upon the indeterminate particularity of specific and shifting relations, descriptions (within a defining function of analysis) take first-order data collections and direct our attention to possible explanations of that data. This distinction between *naming* and *defining* is not all that dissimilar from what Robert Baird labelled 'the essential-intuitional method' and the 'functional-definitional method' (Baird 1991, 1–16). For Baird, the former method rests upon a search for *sui generis* essences, while the latter method uses categories for a stated heuristic purpose. Functional-definitional methods are only valid within the context of an analysis of some matter, rather than 'pointing to' or 'standing in for' some metaphysical reality. Thus, in the construction of 'knowable knowledge' categories serve a utilitarian function in theorisation (cf. Lawson and McCauley 1990, 27).

Such explanatory utility, it should be noted, is only possible within an analysis of relations. Such a focus on relations, rather than objects within the relations, further moves us away from the pitfalls of ontological reductionism. Ontological reduction, as I have indicated elsewhere (Tite 2000, cf. McCutcheon 1997a, Plummer 1975, Wiebe 1994), runs the danger of explaining away the data; the data (truth claims) are explained away by means of an absolute reduction to some other domain of conception (be it economic, cultural, political or psycho-

logical; and these domains, it could be argued, are still in need of theorisation). In my earlier study on reduction (Tite 2000, 66) I contended that two taxonomic pitfalls must be avoided: (1) the danger of absolute reduction, and (2) misrepresenting the data. The first is the fallacy of ontological reduction as well as the 'metaphysical reductionism' proffered by the *sui generis* advocates (Tite 2001). The second taxonomic pitfall, however, should now be clarified further. The misrepresentation of the data is perhaps not the taxonomic danger of reduction, but rather misrepresentation of the sets of properties between the data under analysis. By focusing on the relative relations of our sets of properties, rather than the data itself, theorisation results in explanatory products that are only relevant for the sake of the analysis under consideration.⁹ When we look to other sets of properties, or other epistemological connotations, we will move toward generating newer and different explanatory products. In this creation of knowledge, we are not attempting to *name* the ontological or metaphysical nature of some object or objects. Rather, the sets of relations are relative to the analysis within which we are engaged. Such a process of addressing sets of properties reductively is, therefore, a process referred to as methodological reduction (see McCutcheon 1997a, 1999, 2000b, Tite 2001; cf. Braun 2001 who refers to anthropocentrism as the analytical focus of religious studies). As for the second taxonomic pitfall (Tite 2000, 66), one significant verification tool is that of the insider's perspective. However, in order for the insider's perspective to be functional for 'knowable knowledge' construction, it must be moved from the domain of *sui generis*, essentialist-intuitional *naming*, and instead be placed within the *descriptive*, functional-definitional domain of methodological reduction.

Methodological reductionism contends that there is at least a three-stage process within critical-analytical work.¹⁰ The first stage is that of first-order description, where insider truth claims are collected and made accessible as 'data'. Datum itself is a product of critical inquiry; critical inquiry is the selective process of extracting the 'things' to be analysed, and thus data is not to be equated with reality itself (at least not in some absolute sense of objective reality). Such reworking of the data reproduces insider truth claims, and renders them accessible to a broader analytical process. The Grimm brother's collection of European folktales and myths actually could be seen as an early, and rather crude, form of data collection. The selectivity of data collection is important to recognise; the process *does not* reproduce *objective reality in its totality*, but is selectively drawn out from the larger external world. In a classical historical-critical method, this first-order selectivity falls into the process of establishing evidence (i.e. the remnants, or parts of X, that allow the historian to gain some [indirect?] access to X) and source evaluation (i.e. to weigh the evidence, to determine its value for scholarly inquiry into an historical reconstruction of X). Such selectivity enables the unmanageable nature of X to be placed within set parameters; parameters that are necessary for establishing specific degrees of certainty for constructing 'knowable knowledge'. (This very point is highlighted

by Ashmore and Sharer [1996, 79–113] on archaeological data processing in fieldwork.) A key aspect of this first-order process of description is accuracy of reproduction—with the qualification that such reproduction, given its self-imposed analytic limitations, is a heuristic approximation of X; that is, X rendered into Data should be valid only when Data approximates X. Thus, as I have already stated, taxonomic processes, within the framework of methodological reduction, must avoid misrepresenting the data (or, more accurately, the constructed data should not be a misrepresentation of X) (Tite 2000, 66).

The second stage in methodological reduction is second-order explanation or theorisation. Explanation constitutes the process of grounding the first-order data within those domains where knowledge can be rendered 'knowable knowledge'; thus, explanation typically grounds insider truth claims in a social, political, historical or cultural context (cf. Fitzgerald 2000, 103). Theory, therefore, functions at this level as a way of ordering, explicating, and comparing the raw data of first-order processes. Such theorisation focuses less on the actual objects of data, be those artefacts physical, psychological, ideological, or ethical, and instead places the focus upon those properties of relation shared between data. Theorisation, therefore, constructs analytical foci for which the diverse data are brought into constellations of problem-solving endeavours. Theory sets up the framework for such construction of foci, and explanation is the goal of the entire problem-solving enterprise. These *modes of relation* are relative relations, as is certainly the case given their dependency upon the analytical questions raised by the researcher. Classifications, as analytical devices, are merely the products of temporary, analytical frameworks whose existence is strictly one of functional utility (Carter 1998; Baird 1968, 1991; Ashmore and Sharer 1996, 109; Smith 1998, 281–282; Tite 2001). A third stage in the critical-analytical approach is that of 'critique' (see especially Tite 2003b, McCutcheon 2001); that is, the self-reflective reassessment of our theoretical frameworks, methodological tools, and scholarly products.

What place does the insider perspective hold within a methodologically reductive approach? Or should the insider perspective simply be dismissed as a methodological hindrance to the critical-analytical method? Insider perspectives are interconnected to what is termed 'understanding' (*Verständnis*) (cf. Plummer 1975, 178–179; Sharma 2001b, 118). According to at least one non-reductionist, the end goal of the phenomenological method is understanding (Rennie 2000, 105, 110 n. 4). Such an objective, however, results in the establishment of the privileged status of the insider; a status that our preceding discussion has indicated is highly problematic for critical-analytical approaches. Yet, Rennie's overarching concern in his 2000 critique of *Manufacturing Religion* is not to preserve the privileged place of the insider, even though such a privileged place is assumed throughout his article. Rather, he raises the concern that 'understanding' will be divorced from the entire analytical process (as some 'irredeemably flawed ... "rhetoric of experience" '; Rennie 2000, 109) by the explanatory models advocated by the reductionists. The concern over 'not understanding' a believer

entails the belief that explanation without understanding 'effectively denies the right of subjects to speak out of their own subjectivities and give critics the right to impose whatever interpretation they feel appropriate on any claims that the subject makes' (Rennie 2000, 108–109). By exploring both Michael Friedman's deductive–nomological model and the Causal Statistical model of Hans Reichenbach and Wesley Salmon, Rennie contends that 'understanding thus is prior to and necessarily entailed by explanation, even in the most rigorously scientific accounts of explanation' (2000, 109). This claim is especially grounded in the Causal Statistical model, where 'how' processes and not predication of 'why' questions places understanding as the enduring product of scientific analysis. (The deductive–nomological model is seen as inadequate due to placing the analytical concentration onto the 'why' question.) Although his elevation of understanding to centre stage is dubious, Rennie's basic concern over scholars *not* understanding insiders is valid. What, therefore, is the methodological check on misrepresenting the data, or, as Rennie puts it, 'attempt[s at] an explanation of religious claims by imposing [one's own] motivations on the believer' (2000, 110)?¹¹

I fully agree with Rennie that 'understanding' is intimately tied into explanation, and that a theoretical approach is faulty if it eliminates the insider perspective. However, we part company when it comes to *where* in the explanatory process understanding belongs. Whereas he would undoubtedly place understanding, and thus insider privilege, at the apex of the analytical process (so also Wilfred Cantwell Smith), I would have to place insider perspective at the level of first-order description, and thereby separate it procedurally from second-order theorisation (similarly see Preus 1996, 211). If explanation, as a second-order stage, attempts to explicate *modes of relation* between properties, and first-order description collects, restates, and makes accessible insider truth claims (i.e. the generation of data), then understanding would strike me as rationally belonging to first-order processes. To inquire whether the data (the objects collected for analysis) adequately approximate the external reality, from which such data is derived, is a necessary stage of critical validation or assessment of our data collection. The critical focus of first-order description falls onto the *objects* being collected; whereas the critical focus of second-order explanation falls onto the *relational connections* between the collected data. In the statement 'ARB' (where A and B denote objects and R the relational connector), explanation is concerned not with the objects of analysis (A and B), but with the point of analytical relation (R). And, due to *modes of relation* emerging within the analytical questions raised (the problem-solving dimension of critical analysis), explanation is the exclusive domain of the researcher and not the researched. Thus, understanding (as insider perspective) does not have a direct bearing on second-order theorisation. However, given the first-order focus on objects (the A and B) and not the modes of relation (the R), insider perspective functions as a necessary check on the outsider's construction and evaluation of data.

This placement of insider perspective at the level of first-order description (restatement and accessibility of insider truth claims) allows the insider to play a vital role within the critical–analytical method. If researchers truly wish to know what insider truth claims are, then it makes sense to allow the insider’s to have an authoritative voice in describing those claims. Such a voice, however, does not mean that the limitation of perceptive worlds—private and public worlds—is forgotten. Insider truth claims are not exactly the external, objective world in which insiders live. Rather, such claims are ‘points of view’ of a perceived reality, both individually and shared in collective cultural bodies (i.e. religious devotees and religious communities). To have a clear restatement of ethical, metaphysical, social, and textual truth claims (i.e. of the data of ‘religion’) for the sake of theorising, a fairly clear ‘understanding’ is necessary. Without such an understanding, second-order theorisation of the data cannot proceed with any degree of certainty.

Perhaps we could see this relationship of understanding to explanation as a type of translation process. As religious studies scholars, we are taking the claims (‘language meaning’) of one set of subjects (the insiders) and trying to *translate* that ‘meaning’ (the raw data) for the sake of another set of subjects (the outsiders) (by means of theorisation). There are basically two general approaches to translation, each accentuating a distinct conception of translation work. One method of translation is the Formal-Equivalency (F-E) model. With the F-E model, a direct process of translation occurs with the original term being replaced with an equivalent term in the receptor language. The focus, as Eugene A. Nida explains, falls upon ‘form and content’ (1964, 159). As Nida and Taber correctly indicate, a F-E translation, due to a failed appreciation for the discontinuities of original language and receptor language (such as semantic context), ‘distorts the grammatical and stylistic patterns of the receptor language, and hence distorts the message’ (1969, 203). A second type of translation is the Dynamic-Equivalence (D-E) model. The D-E model, as Troy Martin effectively lays out for us, ‘studies the elements of the source-language to determine the meaning, shuttles over at the level of meaning to the receptor-language, and then drops the elements of the receptor-language that express that meaning’ (1993, 57; also note his excellent diagram that illustrate the flow of translation in the both D-E and F-E models). A D-E type of translation attempts a process of translation, therefore, by clearly establishing the semantic meaning of X in the original language, to raise the level of meaning up, carrying it over to the other language context, and then drop the elements of X’s meaning into the semantic context of the other language. In such a translation model, *both* sets of subjects are important; yet, they are also not conflated. There is a *functional* dimension to this analogy: when we theorise data, we are theorising for the sake of the ‘semantic’ context of the theorists (the outsider) and not for the sake of the insider. The analytical questions raised are not, therefore, meant to address, or fit into the ‘language context’ of the insiders such as might be found in a F-E model. Rather, to follow the D-E model, theorisation of data is for the sake of the scholar—the

questions are *her* questions, not the insiders; the concerns are those of the study being conducted, the problems addressed, and therefore need not be reflective of the insider's perspective.¹² Insiders of a religious tradition have their own sets of concerns and epistemological frameworks, which are not necessarily those of the scholar/outsider. Thus, it is as unnecessary for the insider to see himself/herself mirrored in the end product of the critical-analytical approach as it is for the outsider to expect to find himself/herself mirrored in the epistemological frameworks and raw data of the insiders.¹³

Within the tenacious debate raging between reductionist and non-reductionist in the academic study of religion, the role of the insider's perspective has been a central point of contention. This now classic 'etic or emic' methodological approach has failed to move beyond an impasse, and thus a fresh approach to addressing the utility of insider perspective is necessary. This essay has attempted to begin this process of 'bridging' the chasm between reductionist and non-reductionist approaches on this question. Although some non-reductionist have raised concerns over the lack of appreciation that reductionist scholars may hold for believers' self-understanding, my discussion has indicated that an insider perspective is not only valuable, but actually necessary for naturalistic explanations of religious traditions when placed within the purview of methodological reductionism. Indeed, to ignore the place of the insider's own point of view on their own truth claims runs the risk of invalidating explanatory products.

Despite the importance of insider perspective, however, there is a clear distinction between phenomenological valuation of the insider position and that of the critical-analytical approach. Whereas within phenomenology of religion the final product of analysis is determined by understanding, the critical-analytical approach necessarily places understanding into a reductionist framework in conjunction with explanation. Understanding, within the critical-analytical approach, limits understanding (i.e. insider perspective) to the stage of data collection (first-order description) where the focus is on the *objects* constituting data. Explanation, however, explores not the *objects* of analysis, but rather the *modes of relation* raised by analytical questions. Building on Russell's theories of sense-data in conjunction with his classification theories (specifically *naming* and *describing*), the veracity of insider perspective was argued to be intimately dependent upon the issue of verification: knowledge within academic discourse must be 'knowable knowledge', it must address matters that are *discoverable*.

The critical-analytical approach, consequently, falls under the domain of methodological reduction. Reduction without consideration for insider perspective would result in a form of ontological reductionism, wherein insider truth claims are treated dismissively. Such a theoretical move would render explanation nothing more than ethical pronouncements with metaphysical presuppositions. Insider perspective, therefore, does indeed play a methodologically essential function within a methodologically reductionist approach; and such an approach, in order to avoid becoming ontologically reductionist or non-verifiable, needs the insider perspective to successively establish analysable

data for theorisation. Such placement of insider perspective is neither dismissive nor derogatory. Rather, the insider perspective is absolutely necessary for the validity of the established set of described data. Without this 'understanding' phase, the next phase in analysis, that of explanation, would be methodological fallacious (i.e. it would be non-verifiable in accordance with the data). The relationship between *understanding* and *explaining*, consequently, is analogous to a D-E translation model. As scholars of religious traditions, we are attempting to 'translate' the truth claims of one set of subjects to the explanatory framework of another set of subjects. In such a translation process, if there is a lack of understanding there can be no explanation.

NOTES

1. Sharma states the matter as follows: 'Thus phenomenologists should not claim that their understanding can be substituted for the believer's self-understanding, and believers need not claim that the phenomenologist has no access to their interiority just because he or she is not one of them' (2001b, 42). Kristensen states the matter in similar terms: 'Let us be completely aware of the limited validity of historical research. This limitation is imposed by the subject itself; namely the absolute character of all faith. Every believer looks upon his own religion as a unique, autonomous and absolute reality. It is absolute value and thus incomparable ... But the historian cannot understand the absolute character of the religious data in the same way that the believer understands them' (1960, 6–7; cited in Sharma 2001b, 41–42).
2. Even the so-called 'new phenomenology' fails to avoid the problems of transhistorical essences. Although Waardenburg would have us turn our attention 'from the search for timeless essences to a search for timely meanings including those meanings which have a religious quality to the people involved' (1975, 315), his emphasis on 'intentionality' or 'expressions' (see 314) still presupposes some form of 'religious experience' that stands beyond the pale of historical particularity; that is, a *sui generis* experience even if not a *sui generis* object (= essence). Similar problems emerge with Wiggins' understanding of 'religion' as 'the issue of universality [of experiences] ... how humans relate to the universe' (1992, 109). (Also on religious experience, see the more recent essay on Ninian Smart's theoretical framework by Bryan Rennie 1999.)
3. I have purposefully chosen these three examples of metaphysical truth claims in order to illustrate three different, although not exclusive, types of non-verifiable truth claims: claims of some *sui generis* essence designated 'religion'; religious experience as some universal human trait (a type of 'human spirit' transcending culture and history); and specific mythical claims (i.e. specific theologies or cosmologies). I selected the Norse mythic characterisation of Odin (or Odhinn-Wódhan), rather than a Judaeo-Christian mythic tale, in order to offer an alternative perspective for readers in place of more faith defended

myths (such as the resurrection of Jesus), in order to more clearly evaluate those more cherished beliefs (the myths of one tradition should not predominate the myths of another simply because one is tied into the belief structure of many living scholars while the other is simply treated as a cultural 'myth' tale of some now more or less extinct tradition).

4. Russell clarifies this point as follows: 'But what is illusory is only the inferences to which they give rise; in themselves, they are every bit as real as the objects of waking life. And conversely, the sensible objects of waking life must not be expected to have any more intrinsic reality than those of dreams. Dreams and waking life, in our first efforts at construction, must be treated with equal respect; it is only by some reality not *merely* sensible that dreams can be condemned' (1914a, 93).
5. This dependency on the subject, rather than the object, is succinctly stated as follows: 'Thus every event that I experience will be one of the events which constitute some part of my body. The space of (say) my visual perceptions is only *correlated* with physical space, more or less approximately; from the physical point of view, whatever I see is inside my head. I do not see physical objects; I see effects which they produce in the region where my brain is' (Russell 1914b, 129).
6. Russell defines 'private worlds' as follows: 'The system consisting of all views of the universe, perceived or unperceived, I shall call the system of "perspectives"; I shall confine the expression "private worlds" to such views of the universe as are actually perceived. Thus a "private world" is a perceived "perspective" but there may be any number of unperceived perspectives' (1914a, 95).
7. Smith has qualified the proposition that 'no statement is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers'. He distinguishes 'meaning' from 'external data about religion' in the following: 'On the external data about religion, of course, an outsider can by diligent scholarship discover things that an insider does not know and may not be willing to accept. But about the meaning that the system has for those of faith, an outsider cannot in the nature of the case go beyond the believer; for their piety *is* the faith, and if they cannot recognise this portrayal, then it is not their faith that he is portraying' (Smith 1959, 42). The problem with Smith's qualification is the highly ambiguous definition of the terms 'meaning' and 'faith'—does 'meaning' imply explanatory force or simply understanding? Is the role of 'meaning', let us say as indicating the insider's self-understanding of his/her own truth claims, functional at the level of data collection (i.e. first-order description in need of theorising) or at the level of explanation (i.e. second-order theorisation)?
8. Mohanty (1989, 2–7) rejects Russell's typology not on the basis of the non-reality of true names, but on the basis that Russell's 'ascription of a property or properties to a thing is a description, and his sense allows for a description to which nothing corresponds in reality; i.e. one which is a

description of nothing (this is not the case with names, which, in order to be names, must name something)' (1989, 3). Mohanty wishes to create a space for the presence of valuation of objects when describing sets of properties, and sees Russell's purely logical approach to descriptions as a hindrance (logic, in Russell's view, is not limited to *actual* realities, but rather *possible* realities; a point Mohanty overlooks). Mohanty's rejection is, furthermore, encompassed in a desire to see the role of 'the notion of intuitive backing' (1989, 4), which necessitates a direct relation of description with existent reality and thereby privileges insider perspective. Evaluative connotations, as I have already indicated, need not be eliminated from Russell's typology; nor must such ethical properties be seen as truth claims by the analysis. Rather, ethical properties are epistemologically limited sets of properties that fit into the category of data in need of explanation. Critical-analytical approaches, therefore, do address ethical matters; but they are not normative theories, even if some practitioners of critical-analytical methods may make normative claims. The same error of seeing reductionist approaches as anti-ethical underlies the highly confessional position advocated by Alan Torrance, when he states: 'The advocacy of naturalism in the university serves ultimately to anaesthetise the academic domain against the notion of an objective sphere of value, or rights, of the categories of dignity' (2000, 22).

9. On the relative, fluid usage of categories, see also Katherine K. Young (1992, 126): 'By contrast, category formation is construction, an act of reflective imagination, and a creation for analytic purposes which is based on comparison and generalisation involving self-conscious articulation of choice ... Of course, it is category formation which in the final analysis defines the range of exempla, even though the category may be arrived at inductively'. Her comment follows a survey of the ongoing problem, and implications, of using the designation 'world religions' (as well as 'great religions', 'religions of the world', etc.). She highlights two aspects of categories that I have been arguing in favour of. First, categories are *constructed* entities, indeed *devices*, and do not exist outside the boundaries of knowledge construction. Second, categories are *relative* or *imaginative* devices, which are generated as abstractions (and I would contend they are most certainly inductively derived abstractions), and thus are dynamic analytic tools and not static labels for (imaginary or externally real) existing entities. Smith (1998, 281–282) clearly declares the fluid, analytic purpose of categories for critical scholarship: "'Religion" is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics or "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon' (cf. Braun 2000, 14–15; Segal 2000, 189–191).
10. What follows is largely based upon Tite (2001, 2003b), Arnal (2000), Mc-

Cutcheon (1997a, 2001), Smith (1978, 1996, 1998, 2000) and Wiebe (1994 1999); cf. Segal (1983, 1997).

11. One of the difficulties with the debate over 'understanding', especially phenomenological *Verständnis*, is the ambiguous meaning of the term. Rennie's usage of the term is typical, in that 'understanding' is presented in a vague sense of referring to the affirmation of the insider's viewpoint. He does, however, nuance this vague meaning when he addresses the issue of causality (the Causal Statistical model). By moving away from causal predication (the why questions), this model places the stress on the issue of 'understanding'; that is, the how questions. Both the why questions and the how questions move away from, and are not necessarily dependent upon, the insider perspective. Instead they move in the direction of actual explanation. Thus, Rennie's own understanding of 'understanding' remains a vague privileging of insider over outsider perspectives. To his credit, Sharma has attempted to clarify different meanings of the word 'understanding' (2001b, 118–119). He distinguishes 'historical' understanding from 'empirical' understanding: 'I use the expression "historical" understanding to mean the significance of a given "fact" in the study of religion in terms of the light of historical research sheds on the issue, when the fact itself may belong to the realm of myth or ritual. Similarly, I use the word "empirical" understanding to mean what any given "fact"—be it text, an artifact or an archeological remain, or mythical or ritual event, etc—means for the insider, as distinguished from the outsider' (Sharma 2001b, 118–119). He goes on to clarify the spatial and temporal distinction between *historical* (past) and *empirical* (present) understandings of religious traditions (2001b, 119). Sharma's distinctions, however, reinforce the general sense of the term 'understanding' to relate to the self-understanding, or self-reflexivity, of the insiders. Non-reductionist approaches to the term 'understanding', therefore, continue to link it to insider privilege. See also Plummer (1975, 165–168) on understanding, and, on explanation (1975, 168–180).
12. Wittgenstein's comment in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ¶ 6.1222 (1922, 162–163) asserts this very distinction between logical propositions and empirical experience for validating propositions: 'This throws light on the question why logical propositions can no more be empirically confirmed than they can be empirically refuted. Not only must a proposition of logic be incapable of being contradicted by any possible experience, but it must also be incapable of being confirmed by any such'.
13. I am assuming, of course, that the outsider is not an insider or in some way connected to the insiders' group. Such an assumption is only a heuristic presentation for the sake of simplicity. However, many of those who study particular religious traditions also are practitioners of those traditions, or have been former practitioners. As human beings, we do not exist and function only in one 'world' or community, nor are many scholars only 'accountable' to one community (this includes institutional responsibility, such as church-related universities or theologically oriented academic societies; as well as personal belief commitments to various bodies outside any secular[ised] academic

body). For many, those multiple worlds overlap or inform each other in diverse and dynamic ways. Although I would not wish to negate such a dynamic—I do feel it is important to recognise such a dynamic in order to have a clearer sense of the academic study of religion—I would have to contend that the specific ‘domains of discourse’ within which we do our work are distinctly different from each other, thus in some cases rendering the ‘insider’ an ‘outsider’ when engaged in the ‘role of’ scholar (cf. McCutcheon 1997b).

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