

INTERESTED COMPANIONSHIP

A review article

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John R. HINNELLS (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London — New York: Routledge, 2005. xii, 556 p. Hardcover ISBN 0-415-333105, 114.95 US\$; Paperback ISBN 0-415-33311-3, US\$ 34.95.

Robert A. SEGAL (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Malden, MA — Oxford — Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. xx, 472 p. Hardcover ISBN 0-631-23216-8, US\$ 125.95.

On first sight, these two volumes published within a few months by two leading Anglo-American publishing houses seem to duplicate each other rather patently. Both promise to introduce their reader to a subject supposed to be difficult enough that it requires a companion. Remarkably enough, they agree on how to label the field (“study of religion,” that is, neither “science of religion” nor “study of religions” nor “religious studies”).¹ Both books are collective works, with chapters authored by well-established scholars, who joined the invitation of a single responsible editor.² Both follow a somewhat similar plan when they divide their subject into two major sections, one being concerned with “approaches” (even “key approaches” in Hinnells’ volume), the other with “topics” or

¹ But see below, n. 6.

² According to the dedication, the original editor of the Blackwell project was John Clayton (1943–2003), former chair of the Department of Religion at Boston University. Segal does not specify the state of the project at the time he took over the editorship. Some deficiencies noted below may relate to the sad contingencies under which the project had to be finalized.

“key issues.”³ The decision to group together approaches *and* topics resp. issues in a single volume may reflect a new tendency in the field,⁴ since earlier textbooks focused either on method and theory⁵ or critical terms. It is unclear to me whether the new tendency is driven by epistemological, curricular, political, economic or still other reasons.

For the sake of convenience, I shall abbreviate the Routledge volume *R*, and Blackwell’s *B*. According to the dust jackets, *R* is “a major resource for everyone taking courses in religious studies.” It promises to be “an excellent guide to the problems and questions found in exams and on courses,” a “valuable resource for courses at all levels,” while *B* “will be the definitive reference work for students and scholars alike.” One senses that *R* has the promising student in mind (who may be interested and even brilliant but can only afford a paperback edition), while *B* (which does not or not yet have a paperback edition) targets the teaching scholar with the aim of providing well-informed state-of-the-art knowledge and syntheses. While Segal has authored two major pieces (on “Theories of Religion” and “Myth and Ritual”) in Hinnells’ book, there is no contribution the other way round. Despite such minor asymmetries,

³ Hinnells considered the inclusion of a third section on critical terms, but ultimately refrained and points readers to Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998.

⁴ Compare Willi Braun, Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *Guide to the Study of Religion*, New York: Cassell 2000, which is divided into three main parts entitled “description,” “explanation” and “location” (but avoids “method” as a classifier); and Johann Figl (ed.), *Handbuch Religionswissenschaft. Religionen und ihre zentralen Themen*, Innsbruck: Tyrolia and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003, which is divided into three sections providing an overview about the discipline, a presentation of various religious traditions, and selected topics which are discussed in a cross-cultural perspective.

⁵ Frank Whaling (ed.), *Theory and Method in Religious Studies. Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Berlin — New York: Mouton de Gruyter 1995; Peter Connolly (ed.), *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London — New York: Continuum 1999.

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the two volumes obviously play the same game. The question is whether they agree on the rules, and to what extent it matters whether you follow *R* rather than *B* or *vice versa*. Before comparing the two and eventually making a choice, I shall look at each one individually: how does the companion introduce himself, and how does he plan the tour? What are the approaches he considers, and which topics or issues does he identify as important enough to be discussed? One may also ask to what extent the individual contributions relate to each other and, hence, what overall impression a reader will get of the discipline as a whole. Finally, since textbooks such as the volumes under review are meant to be both introductory companions and permanent reference resources for academic study, one should ask what is done for easy handling by potential users. Since “definitive” sounds rather promising, we shall start with *B*.

I

B contents: List of contributors (ix–xi). — Introduction (xiii–xix). — *Part I: Approaches*. (1) Fiona Bowie, Anthropology of Religion (3–24). — (2) Paul Roscoe, The Comparative Method (25–46). — (3) Rodney Stark, Economics of Religion (47–68). — (4) Stephen Prickett, Literature and Religion (69–90). — (5) Thomas Ryba, Phenomenology of Religion (91–122). — (6) Charles Taliaferro, Philosophy of Religion (123–146). — (7) Roderick Main, Psychology of Religion (147–170). — (8) Grace Davie, Sociology of Religion (171–192). — (9) Ian Markham, Theology (193–209). — *Part II: Topics*. (10) Richard H. Roberts, Body (213–228). — (11) Douglas J. Davies, Death and Afterlife (229–238). — (12) G. Scott Davis, Ethics (239–254). — (13) Henry Munson, Fundamentalism (255–270). — (14) Jeffrey Burton Russell, Heaven and Hell (271–284). — (15) Lawrence S. Cunningham, Holy Men/Holy Women (285–294). — (16) Gustavo Benavides, Magic (295–308). — (17) Colin Campbell, Modernity and Postmodernity (309–320). — (18) Jeffrey J. Kripal, Mysticism (321–336). — (19) Robert A. Segal, Myth (337–356). — (20) Mark Juergensmeyer, Nationalism and Religion (357–368). — (21) Lorne L. Dawson, New Religious Movements (369–384). — (22) Simon Coleman, Pilgrimage (385–396). — (23) Catherine Bell, Ritual (397–412). — (24) Steve Bruce, Secularization (413–429). — Consolidated Bibliography (431–463). — Index (465–471).

Segal introduces the volume by asking “What Makes Religious Studies a Discipline?” (xiii).⁶ He discusses various answers and asserts that it is neither a distinctive method (such as phenomenology) nor a “religionist” claim to purportedly non-reductionist explanations of its subject (that is, religious explanations of religion as opposed to anthropological, sociological, psychological or economic ones), but merely “a subject matter, open to as many approaches as are prepared to study it” (xvii). As far as such a stance eliminates “religionist” reservations against studying religion with a limited set of methods from a particular disciplinary vantage point, this reviewer would certainly agree (after all, “religious” or “religionist” approaches to religion are just as reductionist as others, although they generally claim otherwise).⁷ “What counts is that the subject matter —

⁶ The terms “study of religion” and “religious studies” are here used as synonyms, whereas in *R* “religious studies” is examined (by D. Wiebe, see below) as one particular way of practising the study of religion. The following may be a somewhat naïve question, but I wonder why Segal and others should maintain the term “religious studies” for their own practice as “scholars of religion.” Is it not precisely the adjective’s ambiguity which exposes the academic study of religions both to “religionist” claims or misunderstandings and to the skepticism of neighbouring disciplines as to its epistemological status? In any case, one cannot use the term “religious studies” as an overall designation for the field (as Segal does in *B*) and at the same time distinguish it from social-scientific approaches to religion (as he does in *R*, p. 51). Alternatively, if you suspect “religious studies” to be generally “religionist,” this seems to disqualify the term as an overall designation for the field unless you consider yourself a “religionist.” Could it be, then, that terms are used loosely on purpose by some who do not want to give in and leave part of the territory to the “other side”? A curious side-effect of this situation can be observed in continental Europe, where even in non-English speaking countries scholars are increasingly pushed to label their discipline, departments, faculties, etc. in English terms. Most esteemed colleagues have thus become practitioners of a “science of religion” although their training and perspective is much closer to the humanities than to the social sciences (note that according to the European continental tradition, history does not rank among the social sciences but is part of the humanities).

⁷ *Pace* Segal, who considers phenomenology of religion and theology “by

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religion — be connected to the rest of human life — to culture, society, the mind, economy — rather than separated from it by the siege-like defensiveness of religionists.” (xvii) One senses that Segal writes in two directions, one confronting his so-called “religionists” (he mentions Eliade who still seems to have followers in the academy), the other inviting as many disciplines as wish to join the enterprise. This certainly sounds attractive but also raises two questions: First, should we call the “study of religion” a discipline at all, when it is actually an “area study” (Segal, xvii)? Second, what does it mean to be “a scholar of religion” as distinguished, e.g., from a historian, a psychologist or a sociologist studying religion? My own, preliminary and pragmatic answer would be that on the one hand, the openness of the “study of religion(s)” to many approaches — some of which may well be mutually exclusive — is defensible as an academic discipline only when one admits that students of religion cannot practically cope with all of them with the same rigour. On the other hand, “scholars of religion,” in addition to performing according to the professional standards of any particular discipline they draw upon, should have a distinct interest in connectivity and transdisciplinarity across the area as a whole, which is quite a demanding condition.

B Part I includes nine approaches, eight of which are called “disciplines” by Segal (this is debatable in the case of “phenomenology of religion,” while comparativism provides the exception). All but two entries were written by professionals in the disciplines concerned, the exceptions being Rodney Stark, who writes on economics but is by profession a sociologist, and Roderick Main, who authors the chapter on psychology of religion and is said by Segal to be not a professional psychologist, but “a scholar of religion” (xviii). The nine approaches are organized alphabetically, as are the fifteen topics that make up Part II. The advantage of such a principle is that one cannot quibble over an agenda that might be

nature nonreductionistic” (xviii), whereas I can only observe that these approaches more often than others express a *claim* for non-reductionism.

hidden somewhere behind the table of contents (although this may in itself imply an agenda of another kind). The obvious disadvantage for what is meant to be a companion is that it excludes any meaningful parcours through the area and certainly makes it more difficult for the average reader to find his or her way along the conceptual landscape of the “study of religion.” The editor certainly did not want to lay out a path leading *from* anthropology *to* theology, but this is the inevitable arrangement which results from his application of the alphabetic principle.⁸ At times this can give readers a headache, particularly when chapters following each other have no concern for connectivity. Consider the switch from the “comparative method” to “economics of religion”: what might have considerable potential for meaningful discussion is here left totally unexplored. Stark even boasts that “although I have not read any of the other chapters included in this book, I am certain that this chapter is very different from the rest” (65) and goes so far as to imply that his contribution is more scientific and less exposed to animosity toward religion than others, a curious statement which might discourage customers of a rather expensive book. In other instances, readers could be tempted to make connections, such as from phenomenology to philosophy, and overlook that they are not meant to do so. Generally speaking, the individual chapters do not even follow a common structure. Although the arguments deployed in many contributions would lend themselves to cross-referencing and mutual stimulation, that is, the kind of connectivity which can make the study of religion an intellectually thrilling enterprise, there is virtually no dialogue between the chapters of this book. Orientation therefore becomes a major difficulty for the average reader. Unfortunately, *B* has no subject index but a “consolidated bibliography,” which duplicates the bibliographies printed at the end of each chapter. Instead of this useless luxury of 33 pages, I would have loved to see a concluding chapter by Segal reflecting over the unity of the whole enterprise called “the study of religion.” To sum

⁸ This was already the case in Connolly’s collection cited above, n. 5.

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up, *B* is as much a companion as the Bible may be called a book: in reality, readers find themselves in the hands of a syndicate of guides, while the area they are invited to explore looks considerably fragmented. The final product can hardly be considered “the definitive reference work” it claims to be, especially since some of the more recently debated issues are absent from the discussion (e.g., gender, cognition, or media, to mention some more obvious topics), screened off as it were for reasons unknown at least to the average reader.

Despite these reservations, there is much food for thought to be found in individual chapters. Prickett’s contribution on “Literature and Religion” is a *tour de force*, guiding as he does through the history of mainly German, French and English thinking about the ability of literary aesthetics and poetic art to reflect metaphysical realities and what was often considered the ultimate object of religion (God, the holy, etc.). Demonstrating the powerful impact of romanticism in this regard, Prickett surveys illustrious authors from Friedrich Schleiermacher to George Steiner and Hans Urs von Balthasar (whose name is consistently misspelled “Balthazar” and who was not a German [85], but a Swiss theologian). Prickett does *not* discuss the more general question to what extent literature may be studied in a religio-historical perspective as a peculiar mode of expression and experience of religious belief or attitude within a given cultural context. Impressively learned as the essay may be, I am not sure whether this is what the average reader would expect to find in a companion guide of the genre reviewed here, especially in the light of Prickett’s overtly theological conclusion that “it is one thing to believe that religious experience is in the twenty-first century inescapably literary and aesthetic or, conversely, that great literature presents ‘transcendent’ experience. It is quite another to insist on equivalence,” a question which according to him requires returning to the Kierkegaardian paradox of incommensurables and “may well turn out to be the major calling for twenty-first-century theology” (88). Be this as it may, it is not this sort of questions that most “scholars of religion” or *Religionswissenschaft* are generally

concerned with. It is first and foremost literature as an important subset of culture and its relation to another subset called religion that should appear within their focus. Contemporary literary criticism (or comparative literature, for that matter) has much to say about this relationship, but unfortunately that is not on Prickett's agenda.⁹

Lack of space does not allow to summarize each contribution individually. Even the non-specialist will recognize that some chapters stand out because of their didactic quality (e.g., Ryba's presentation of phenomenology, which clearly distinguishes etymology from actual procedures and philosophical from religious phenomenology; or Benavides' discussion of magic which is both historically and anthropologically informed; or Segal's own contribution on myth), while others impress by their concision and sharp focus (e.g., Juergensmeyer on nationalism and religion). A number of contributions have been written by authors whose scholarship has long taken the path towards canonization (Bell on ritual or Bruce on secularization are representatives of that category). As a consequence, many of these chapters make very profitable reading, even more so when put alongside more systematic and more didactic treatments such as may be found in *R* or earlier textbooks (see above, notes 5 and 6).

Personally, I have found the essay on the comparative method particularly rewarding, maybe because Roscoe writes from a social-scientific perspective with which I am less familiar.¹⁰ He starts by asserting that "comparison is an inescapable and unobjectionable aspect of reasoning" (26), and rightly stresses that "most presentations of the scientific method bear scant resemblance to what scientists do in practice" (27). He lays out the "essential elements of the comparative method," the theoretical presumption on which it

⁹ For complementary reading, see below, n. 24.

¹⁰ Note that this is not an introductory essay as one might expect to find in a companion volume. When looking for a textbook treatment discussing general characteristics of a comparative approach, the history of its implementation in the

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is grounded, including the claim for an explanatory potential (as opposed to purely descriptive taxonomy), and major objections against it, particularly “disputes about the validity of the comparatist assumption that the surface manifestations to be explained are all expressions of the same underlying, obscure or obscured explanatory entity or process,” referring himself to such classics as Franz Boas, or Ruth Benedict for whom “the significance of a cultural trait depends on the way in which that trait has merged with other traits from different fields of experience” (29). Distinguishing between “humanistic social scientists” on the one hand, whose interest is in thick description, representation of cultures “in their own terms” and cultural difference, and “‘scientific’ social scientists” on the other hand, who conceptualize humans as sharing capacities that transcend cultural differences, Roscoe notes that the scientists’ problems with comparison seem to be methodological and technical rather than theoretical, whereas the humanists’ difficulties are theoretical rather than methodological. Roscoe discusses “Galton’s problem” as a prominent example of seemingly technical nature which however ends up in the question how to define a cultural entity and its boundaries or what makes up a sample unit as distinct from another — quite a theoretical issue as it were. At the end, he notes, “the fieriest disputes about the comparative method are anything but debates about methodology. (. . .) Generally, these discussions have gone nowhere because in actuality they are covert exercises in asserting and defending *a priori* assumptions about the nature of humanity and of cultural processes.” (43) Humanistic interpretivists offer no better alternative as long as they follow only informal and unspecified sampling procedures. “To choose cases simply because they happen to corroborate a pet hypothesis is indefensible no matter what one’s epistemology. Any comparison needs to justify

study of religion, and a discussion of major issues, critiques and contemporary responses, one should better turn to R and W.E. Paden’s treatment of “Comparative religion.” In contrast to Roscoe’s, however, this is firmly grounded in the humanities tradition.

the sample it draws and to make some attempt to evaluate the possible effects on the sample of shared histories or cultural contacts” (44) — a statement, it may be noted, which puts at particular ease historians interested in culture contact. Having clearly outlined the aporetic fallacies of scientific or humanistic dogmatism, Roscoe concludes that “rather than endlessly discussing the comparative method, we should get on and do it, and see what results seem to work in getting us along, in helping us understand the social worlds around us,” drawing on the parallel of physical sciences which “advance in the virtual absence of debate and disagreement about method” (44). There are of course undeniable differences in studying cultural rather than physical worlds, but science is meant to generate knowledge, an aim that can only be achieved by testing whether something actually works, which, according to Roscoe, is not (or not always) what debates on method and epistemology do. “Useful theories are unlikely to result from insisting, covertly or overtly, on the superiority of one set of *a priori* assumptions about humans over another, or from epistemological debates over what ‘method’ apply to their study. These debates will continue to be vacuous and unproductive. Results will come rather from getting on and studying humans and their cultures, including their religions, with whatever resources at hand. Comparison — whatever it is and however it actually works — is one such resource, and there are few better ones.” (45)

I do not consider this a “disappointingly aimless program of action” (44) but find Roscoe’s pragmatism rather refreshing. Still, I would raise three *caveats* not by way of criticism but as matters of genuine concern. First, I suspect that we should better consider comparativism as a meta-approach rather than an approach or a method; it relates to an intellectual attitude that may well be a characteristic requirement for the academic study of religion but does not, however, define an exclusive or specific set of rules and procedures. In contrast to what both *B*, *R* and many others tend to make us believe, comparison does not represent one approach

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alongside eight or more others, but an option within each of them (an option that you may or may not take in a particular instance but which you should not exclude *a priori* when studying religion, or literature, or law, or anthropology, etc.).¹¹ Second, once you consider your field as an area rather than a discipline there can be no such thing as *the* or *a* comparative method. Whenever you do take the option of comparativism (which, I repeat, is not what you always need to do), your research will have to follow slightly different rules of procedure (or method) according to the peculiar discipline involved — though, admittedly, no comparativist should dispense himself or herself from the challenges of Galton's problem.¹² Third, I doubt that we can do away with our theoretical problems by simply ignoring them (which is not what Roscoe does, but his readers may be tempted to do so), and I doubt even more that we may solve them by cutting through the Gordian knot — it will immediately reassemble somewhat differently.¹³ This is probably part of the game's particular appeal, not just idle spilling of ink and time, and may well be one of the reasons why people choose to study — and others, after all, to teach — religion rather than physics, or, for that matter, statistics.

¹¹ Note that comparativism does not figure in any of the three introductory reference works cited above (n. 5), but in the guide published by Braun and McCutcheon (above, n. 4). However differently *B* and *R* may treat the subject, the mere fact that both include a separate chapter on comparativism instead of, e.g., including comparativism within phenomenology, signals a renewal of scholarly interest (see also the following note).

¹² Note, however, that Roscoe does not state whether his discussion pertains as much to so-called qualitative empirical studies as it does to quantitative studies whose significance depends on their adherence to the rules of statistics.

¹³ For one reason or another (perhaps because it is a debate among "scholars of religion," not social scientists?), Roscoe does not refer to three recent discussions on comparativism that are important reading for anyone involved in the

II

R contents: Notes on contributors (ix–xii). — Introduction (1–3). — (1) John R. Hinnells, Why study religions? (5–20). — (2) Eric J. Sharpe, The study of religion in historical perspective (21–45). — *Part I: Key approaches to the study of religions.* (3) Robert A. Segal, Theories of religion (49–60). — (4) David F. Ford, Theology (61–79). — (5) Peter Vardy, Philosophy of religion (80–97). — (6) Donald Wiebe, Religious studies (98–124). — (7) Martin Riesebrodt/Mary E. Konieczny, Sociology of religion (125–143). — (8) Rosalind I.J. Hackett, Anthropology of religion (144–163). — (9) Dan Merkur, Psychology of religion (164–181). — (10) Douglas Allen, Phenomenology of religion (182–207). — (11) William E. Paden, Comparative religion (208–225). — *Part II: Key issues in the study of religions.* (12) Darlene M. Juschka, Gender (229–242). — (13) Kim Knott, Insider/outsider perspectives (243–258). — (14) Paul Heelas, Post-modernism (259–274). — (15) Richard King, Orientalism and the study of religions (275–290). — (16) Judith Fox, Secularization (291–305). — (17) Richard King, Mysticism and spirituality (306–322). — (18) Judith Fox, New religious movements (323–336). — (19) Henry Munson, Fundamentalism (337–354). — (20) Robert A. Segal, Myth and ritual (355–378). — (21) Paul Gifford, Religious authority: scripture, tradition, charisma (379–391). — (22) Garrett Green, Hermeneutics (392–406). — (23) Michael Barnes, Religious pluralism (407–422). — (24) George Moyser, Religion and politics (423–438). — (25) Chris Park, Religion and geography (439–455). — (26) Thomas Dixon, Religion and science (456–472). — (27) Luther H. Martin, Religion and cognition (473–488). — (28) Mark Hulsther, Religion and culture (489–508). — (29) John R. Hinnells, Religion and the arts (509–525). — (30) Seán McLoughlin, Migration, diaspora and transnationalism: transformations of religion and culture in a globalising age (526–549). — Index (550–556).

“Why study religions?” is precisely the question Hinnells asks by way of an introduction to the *R* volume. That nothing is taken for granted could be said to be one characteristic of this collection, which has been designed for students from undergraduates to post-graduates. *R* has an obviously didactic structure which, we are told

historical and systematical study of religion: Luther H. Martin et al., *MTSR* 8 (1, 1996) 1–49; J.S. Jensen et al., *Numen* 48 (3, 2001) 237–373; and W. Braun et al., *MTSR* 16 (1, 2004) 1–101. See now also Maya Burger, Claude Calame (ed.), *Comparer les comparatismes. Perspectives sur l’histoire et les sciences des religions*, Paris and Milan: Edidit Arche, 2006.

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in the introduction (3), follows broadly a course Hinnells taught for years at SOAS. But when a subject “is one as full of sensitivities, presuppositions and prejudices as the study of religion is, then it is essential that, from the outset, the student is alerted to debates and doubts, and that key issues, motives, aims and beliefs are foregrounded” (2). Hinnells starts with the most basic questions regarding a field or discipline: why it may be interesting to study religions (here in the plural, since “the word ‘religion’ is useful, but should be used with caution” [2]), or else — since most potential readers will have made their choice anyway — in which context (globalization, migration, religiously motivated tensions etc.) and to what purpose (as a key to understanding cultures) one might most profitably do it. The introductory section also asks where the academic study of religion comes from and how it has got where it is now (a fine piece by the late Eric Sharpe). Considering myself a historian more than anything else “of religion(s),” I am convinced that postmodern students even more than their predecessors need some basic orientation marks regarding the history of their field, including contextual information about the “classics,” and this is what this book provides in reasonable quantities, sustained attention to contemporary debates notwithstanding.

Part I on approaches heads off with a chapter on “Theories of religion” by Robert A. Segal, which is somewhat ironic since Segal’s own collection does not include a chapter on theory as one particular way of approaching religion in its own right. Segal takes up much of his argument with “religionist” approaches that he already deployed in the introduction to *B*, and elsewhere, but the *R* version is much more syllogistic and introduces a number of logical and terminological distinctions which are as basic as they are useful (origin vs. function, historical origin vs. recurrent beginning, “how” vs. “why” explanations, variants within the “religionist” argument and between classical or contemporary social scientific theories, etc.). His final section goes beyond “religionism” and charges heavy criticism against the opposite side, i.e., postmodern critics who according to Segal not only refuse to see the real virtues of

consistent theory but “arise in conspicuous ignorance of contemporary philosophy of social science and the sociology of natural science” (59). Segal expresses passing criticism against Mark Taylor’s *Critical Terms* (1998, see above, n. 3) but singles out¹⁴ Tomoko Masuzawa’s *In Search of Dreamtime* (1993) and Russell McCutcheon’s *Manufacturing Religion* (1996) as objects of particularly strong refutation.¹⁵ Students of religion will not only learn about Segal’s disdain for postmodernist thinking (which he considers to be non-theory), they will also notice that the study of religion is no pastime for weaklings but sometimes a rather physical enterprise. *C’est de bonne guerre*, as the French would say. The more interesting point is that Segal’s frontal attack against postmodernism will hopefully lead readers to chap. 14 of the same book, where Paul Heelas, who thinks that the study of religion really has an urgent need for vitalization, exposes postmodernism in a more neutral mode as an “assault on the Enlightenment project” (this section will help students to identify Segal as a major contemporary representative of just that project) but also as the “radicalization of difference” (which will help them to understand the anger that the reader perceives in Segal’s charges). Heelas goes so far as to anticipate a third way in between the two so different sorts of criticism, but he wisely adds that “the emergent middle way is perhaps best kept in dynamic and creative tension when the poles — High Enlightenment and Wild Postmodernity — are forcefully argued” (272).

R Part I continues with a series of contributions that may well be read in line and form the kind of *parcours* which I missed in the *B* volume, leading from theology and philosophy of religion through “religious studies” to social-scientific approaches. Comparative

¹⁴ Curiously enough, Segal’s “religionists” remain anonymous, except in discussions with long-gone giants such as M. Eliade.

¹⁵ He also calls McCutcheon’s political and materialist approach “delightfully iconoclastic” (58). Insiders will be aware that this is just another round in an ongoing exchange of arguments between Segal and McCutcheon.

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religion is discussed last as if providing some sort of common horizon to all others.¹⁶ Let me again single out one essay, “theology,” written by David F. Ford, a Cambridge-based professor of Divinity, who is also the author of a *Very Short Introduction* to the subject.¹⁷ Ford not only exposes major options regarding a distinction between theology and what he calls “religious studies,” or integration of the two, he also distinguishes five different “types” of Christian theology and identifies several variants of “theology” in non-Christian religious traditions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Theologians will be satisfied to notice that their enterprise is here described to students of religion in a straightforward but sufficiently sophisticated way, not as one of these unfortunate caricatures which “scholars of religion” sometimes like to draw before sending off their arrows of despair. Not all theology practised in academia is a type 5 undertaking (“exclusively a matter of Christian self-description,” “a grammar of faith” [70]), and students of religion should know about that. Interestingly enough, Donald Wiebe in his critical review of “Religious Studies” has another five-fold typology, which can be compared to Ford’s, although (as insiders to the debate would have expected) they do not easily fit each other.¹⁸ Having read this fine exercise in taxonomy, intelligent students will then turn to *R* chap. 13 and see what Kim Knott has to say about insider and outsider (or *emic* and *etic*) perspectives. They will first note that either scholar writes as an insider of his own preferences, and second ask themselves whether and how a binary taxonomy can fit a pentagram, or whether and how a pentagram can be translated into a continuum, which is the way how Knott herself modelizes the range of options from insider to outsider, or fully participant to exclusively observer position. As

¹⁶ But see above, n. 10.

¹⁷ David F. Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁸ Again (see above, n. 6), I cannot understand why Wiebe, after detailed

for readers of this review, they will have understood that what makes the *R* guide particularly worthwhile in my view is the fact that it does not only allow for meaningful linear reading, but also lends itself to cross-referencing and connection-building which is actually the way of reasoning the internet generation of students is used to. Readers will hardly be surprised to learn that the *R* collection comes with a subject index, that its chapters have rather more extensive bibliographies than the *B* ones, and that sometimes these even include short characterizations, which may be helpful for undergraduate students but also for others.

The sequence of chapters in *R* Part II is less linear than in Part I. The editor has placed “Gender” on top of the agenda, which is fully understandable,¹⁹ immediately followed by “insider/outsider perspectives,” “postmodernism” and “orientalism.” Again, the interested reader may go webbing: gender issues are to some extent insider/outsider issues, while postmodernism raises the question whether gender criticism should be considered as an offshoot of the enlightenment project or practised as a variant of wild postmodernism, especially when it comes to feminist approaches (note that there is no chapter on feminism in *R*, but you may go to the index and see that it figures at several places, not only in the chapter on gender). While the first third of *R* could be termed the “of” section (theories *of* religion, philosophy *of* religion, anthropology *of* religion etc.), the last quarter is definitely an “and” section (religion *and* politics, geography, science, cognition, culture, and the arts). A chapter on religion and the arts, here written by Hinnells himself, is rare enough to be highlighted, as this remains one of the most

criticism of the many ambiguities surrounding the label “Religious Studies” in the US and Canada, concludes by the rather optimistic perspective that it “should be understood to refer to a purely scientific undertaking” (121), as if any of those who do it otherwise were prepared to accept that normative statement in the sense he would intend.

¹⁹ The ratio between male and female contributors is 20:4 in *B* and 24:5 in *R*, that is 5:1 in both.

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neglected subjects in the study of religion, past and current, in spite of all that has been said and written about iconic, pictorial, or visual turns, visual culture, media and communication or more generally about religion and the senses. I agree with Hinnells that studies on art “should be a primary focus” (509) in the study of religion, whether pursued with an aesthetic, iconological, semiotic or any other perspective, provided it does not fall into the phenomenological traps of earlier, generally text-oriented scholarship. Hinnells, who also appears to be an artist himself, stresses aspects of representation, experience and emotion in his chapter on arts. These are but a few out of many themes that one could legitimately address, and there is an obvious need not only among humanities-oriented scholars of religion, but anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists as well, to take into account visual aspects of religious culture and to study the complex ways religion(s) codify visual sensory perception, value different kinds of visual experience and draw up rules what should or should not, by whom and under what circumstances, be exposed to the individual or the public gaze.²⁰

Issues which presently appear to be marginal to the field could well develop into full-blown approaches in a near future. It is not far-fetched to anticipate that religion will soon be considered a formal subject of political science or human geography. A chapter on the transformations of religion and culture (and for that matter, the *study* of religion) in a globalizing age of migration, transnationalism, diasporas and multiple identities is aptly set at the end of Part II (insiders may know that Hinnells is also the editor of the *Handbook of Living Religions* [1984, 1998]). Everyone is aware

²⁰ I may refer to a forthcoming article, “*Visible Religion* und die Sichtbarkeit von Religion(en). Voraussetzungen, Anknüpfungsprobleme, Wiederaufnahme eines religionswissenschaftlichen Forschungsprogramms”: *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 23 (2, 2006) 165–184, where I argue that *Visible Religion* could provide an interesting, if presently underexplored interface for humanistic (art-historical, iconological, cultural, aesthetic) and social-scientific studies on religion.

that *something* (would someone please supply a plural?) called “religion” is increasingly used today as a powerful, and sometimes terrifying, marker of identity and difference among individuals, communities and public constituencies (not to speak of civilizations) in almost any country of the world and certainly in all those “western countries” where religion, in the sense it is addressed in this book, can be studied at the university. “Given the wide-ranging interest,” writes Seán McLoughlin, “of other disciplines in migration, diaspora and transnationalism, and the continuing salience of religion for these issues and related public policies, the study of ‘diaspora religion’ ought to be one area where the prospects for such engagement are good. (. . .) while religious studies may begin to relocate in terms of broader disciplinary contexts, it must also start to ‘export’ more sophisticated accounts of religion to those for whom such a task is less of a priority.” (546) Such a conclusion gives the whole *R* project a touch of open end horizon, leaving the by now graduated reader with an (unspoken) *tua res agitur*.

III

As it happens, *R* and *B* had first been attributed separately to two reviewers by the editors of this journal. It was Michael Stausberg (University of Bergen, Norway) who suggested that they should be reviewed alongside each other. Readers will by now have understood that as far as I am concerned, I found *R* more appealing, and coming closer to its self-declared purpose, than *B*. In a final section, I shall now compare the contents of both companions and ask what approach or topic/issue is lacking here and there and might be included in future editions, provided the editors also consider them appropriate. In order not to be too subjective, one could have cross-checked with the earlier textbooks mentioned above in nn. 3–5, but both Hinnells and Segal will have done that repeatedly when preparing their collections, so this comparison could only reveal a few subjects that for one reason or another they did *not*

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want to figure in their book. We might however consult a recently published two-volumes collection of *new* approaches to the study of religion (henceforth abbreviated *NA*)²¹ in order to see how the present and future of the study of religion is perceived by others working in the field.

Listing the approaches discussed in *R&B* results in the following table:²²

<i>B</i>	<i>R</i>
[cf. <i>Introduction</i> (Segal)]	Theories of religion (Segal)
Theology (Markham)	Theology (Ford)
Philosophy of Religion (Taliaferro)	Philosophy of religion (Vardy)
–	Religious studies (Wiebe)
Sociology of Religion (Davie)	Sociology of religion (Riesebrodt/Konieczny)
Anthropology of Religion (Bowie)	Anthropology of religion (Hackett)
Psychology of Religion (Main)	Psychology of religion (Merkur)
Phenomenology of Religion (Ryba)	Phenomenology of religion (Allen)
The Comparative Method (Roscoe)	Comparative religion (Paden) ²³
Economics of Religion (Stark)	–
Literature and Religion (Prickett) ²⁴	–

²¹ Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, Randi R. Warne (ed.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion. Vol. 1: Regional, Critical, and Historical Approaches* (Religion and Reason, 42); *Vol. 2: Textual, Comparative, Sociological, and Cognitive Approaches* (Religion and Reason, 43), Berlin — New York: W. de Gruyter, 2004. Approaches and topics/issues are somewhat mixed up in this collection, which is divided according to the following categories: regional, critical, historical, textual, comparative, social-scientific, and cognitive approaches. See the review by M. Stausberg in *Numen* 53 (2006) 238–246.

²² Being interested in matters of meaning, I shall follow the order of entries suggested by *R*.

²³ Paden has also authored a chapter on “Comparison in the Study of Religion,” in *NA* II 77–92.

²⁴ Cf. D. McCance, “New Approaches: Literary Theory,” in *NA* II 59–73.

As it happens, *R* is slightly less comprehensive than *B*. However, if economics of religion is such a US-centered enterprise as it appears in Stark's self-centered and outspokenly unrelated contribution to *B* (see comments above), there is no reason to regret its absence from *R*. The chapters on philosophy of religion in both collections remain likewise centered on the "western" tradition, which is regrettable. Still, they come with insightful questions more than with ready-made answers and thus make intellectually challenging reading. As for the chapters on phenomenology — the most contested among the approaches included — they both present a remarkably clear argument and provide a fine panorama of their subject. The presuppositions of philosophical and religious phenomenology are clearly exposed, and controversial issues well identified as such. Allen, the *R* contributor whom Segal would probably range among his "religionists," argues that recent contributions to the phenomenology of religion have been "more sensitive to providing a methodological framework for becoming attentive to the tremendous diversity of the religious voices of others"; that they have become "more self-critical, and more sophisticated in recognizing the complexity, ambiguity, and depth of our diverse modes of givenness"; and that they "tend to be more sensitive to the perspectival and contextual constraints of their approach and more modest in their claims. There is value in uncovering religious essences and structures, but as embodied and contextualized, not as fixed, absolute, ahistorical, eternal truths and meanings." (206) Doesn't this sound as if phenomenology had gone postmodern? The interesting thing about such claims is that in both volumes they find themselves surrounded by their critics, whom interested readers may consult in order to cross-check either argument. Readers can thus make up their mind *en connaissance de cause* and will in any case gain much serious argument to consider, which they should first understand in its real sophistication before criticizing and eventually rejecting it. At the bottom line, it still remains unclear to me how useful it is to ask for "essence" when studying religion as a "scholar of religion." If "essence" can only be defined contextually,

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what about contexts where it is not an operative category at all (such as may well be the case in the academic study of religion, at least in a rigorously scientific environment)? Why should scholars not limit themselves to practising historical or social-scientific research which is sensitive to context (both the object's and its own) and open for comparison? What specific contribution can phenomenology make to the academic study of religion, except perhaps, paradoxically, force them to be more explicit about their presuppositions in order precisely not to fall into the traps of essentialism of any kind? However modestly Allen may raise his non-reductionist claims, I find it more reasonable for scholars of religion to acknowledge that all their scientific research is by necessity reductionist in some way, but that the main criterion for the production of scientifically controlled knowledge is that it be argued on the basis of empirical, documented evidence, and that the explanations advanced may, in principle, be falsified (not a very original conclusion, I concede, but at least a practicable one).

There are common omissions of both collections which are either interesting or startling, or both. That neither of the two editors deemed feminist approaches to be worthy of a chapter in its own right (as Connolly had it in 1999) signals a shift in emphasis from engaged scholarship based on hermeneutics of suspicion and a liberationist agenda, toward a more general interest in gender issues that will probably allow male participants to play a more active part in the game. On an even more general level, both companions lack some formal introduction into linguistics, or semiotics, or communication theory with regard to religion. Since religions as much as their students communicate through language, whether on meaning or statistics, primary data or explanations, this would seem to be a useful complement for further editions.²⁵

As a historian (and writing this review for a journal committed to a discipline called "History of religions") I am most perplexed

²⁵ See J.S. Jensen, "Meaning and Religion: On Semantics in the Study of Religion," in *NA I* 219–252.

by the sheer *absence of a chapter on historical approaches* to religion. Incidentally, the term “history” does not even figure in the subject index of *R*, as if it were either self-explanatory or irrelevant (Taylor may consider history non-scientific, but his book on critical terms [above, note 3] has at least an entry on “historiography” in the index). One needs not to be nostalgic of mythic origins *in illo tempore* when regretting that history — and some theoretical reflection on what “history” means, what questions it raises, what concepts it uses and how it proceeds to produce explanations — appears to be largely off-screened from the study of religion as it is presented by *R* and *B*. This is startling for several reasons. Many an explanation the general public asks for when addressing a “scholar of religion” on a given topic or issue is historical in nature. The very notion of a religious tradition presupposes history and requires historical research. In German-speaking academia — but having read *R* and *B*, I wonder whether this is not a more general trend — I notice a regrettable tendency among students of religion to confound factual knowledge about rites and symbols (*Religionskunde*) with history of religion (*Religionsgeschichte*), and however interesting social-scientific studies on religious issues may be, they are also often distressingly naïve when it comes to matters of history, memory and tradition. I have pointed out above that the chapters on comparativism should, in my view, precede the account of the more disciplinary approaches, since all these may be practised in a comparative perspective. The same holds true for history and the historical perspective, which could unfold — on perfectly empirical grounds, since it is based on documentation — as social history, cultural history, history of mentalities, historical anthropology etc. on the condition that it is recognized as a necessary part of the academic study in religion.

When we turn to the topics or key issues addressed in *R&B*, the following table may be drawn up:²⁶

²⁶ See above, n. 22.

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B

Body (Roberts)
[cf. *Introduction* (Segal)]
Modernity and Postmodernity
(Campbell)

Secularization (Bruce)
Mysticism (Kripal)
Pilgrimage (Coleman)
New Religious Movements
(Dawson)
Fundamentalism (Munson)
Myth (Segal) / Ritual (Bell)
Death and Afterlife (Davies)
Heaven and Hell (Russell)
Magic (Benavides)
Holy Men/Holy Women
(Cunningham)
[cf. *Introduction* (Segal)]
[cf. *Introduction* (Segal)]
Ethics (Davis)
Nationalism and Religion
(Juergensmeyer)
–
–
–
–
–
–

R

Gender (Juschka)
Insider/outsider perspectives (Knott)
Postmodernism (Heelas)

Orientalism and the study of religions (King)
Secularization (Fox)
Mysticism and spirituality (King)
[see below, Religion and geography (Park)]
New religious movements (Fox)

Fundamentalism (Munson)
Myth and ritual (Segal)
–
–
– [but see entry in index]
Religious authority: scripture, tradition,
charisma (Gifford)

Hermeneutics (Green)
Religious pluralism (Barnes)
– [but see entry in index]
Religion and politics (Moysen)
Religion and geography (Park)
Religion and science (Dixon)
Religion and cognition (Martin)
Religion and culture (Hulsether)²⁷
Religion and the arts (Hinnells)
Migration, diaspora and
transnationalism (McLoughlin)

²⁷ The same author has written about “New Approaches to the Study of Religion and Culture,” in *NA* I 345–381.

I have mentioned that some obvious issues such as gender, cognition or culture are not discussed in *B* and must be absent on purpose from that collection. Strikingly enough, they figure more or less prominently on the postmodern agenda. In contrast, *R* has taken such issues into account and thus reflects more faithfully the present state of academic debate. The risk of any up-to-date rather than conventional collection is that it cannot always follow the most recent swing of the pendulum. In a future edition, the chapter on orientalism in *R* may perhaps include some thoughts on so-called “inverted orientalism,”²⁸ or various forms of “occidentalism” as they are now studied in the Middle East, in South and East Asia, and in Africa. It would be easy (but unfair to both editors) to draw up an endless list of subjects that one would wish to see in this section. I shall suggest only six, namely: law (not only “religious law,” or the status of law within religion, but also the status of religion within law systems and the relationship of legislating bodies to religion); education/teaching (again, as an insider issue of transmission and an outsider issue of providing analytical instruments that may help the civil society to deal with religion);²⁹ media; emotion; sensory perception; and ecology.

I should perhaps end this lengthy review by emphasizing my own peculiar vantage point and the perspective from which I have read the two volumes under review. Having ‘stepped over’ from Biblical studies and the comparative history of ancient Near Eastern religions to *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte* and *Religionswissenschaft* relatively recently, I find myself in an area that appears to be considerably fragmented. True, many “scholars of religion” or *Religionswissenschaftler* try to integrate anthropology and cultural studies and aim at building bridges between the humanities and the social sciences. However, when looking at the

²⁸ See J. Borup, “Zen and the Art of Inverting Orientalism: Buddhism, Religious Studies and Interrelated Networks” (*NA* I 451–487).

²⁹ Although a conspicuously theory-driven journal, *MTSR* has recently addressed this issue, see D. Sarma et al., *MTSR* 17 (2005) 227–286.

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various taxonomies operating in the field, which are both history-related and interest-driven, I wonder whether there is anything like a “common ground where all scholars of religion meet,”³⁰ and whether and how people operating in different disciplines relate to each other in their scholarly discourse. (Such a question may appear slightly out-fashioned, or pre-postmodern, but consider that in continental Europe, there are not as many departments of religion where several colleagues practising clearly different disciplines work alongside each other as in the Anglo-American world; representatives of the field are often just one or two per university, if any.)³¹ I also wonder how the study of religion will cope with new developments in neighbouring fields, particularly in view of method and theory, and to what extent new approaches, subjects and insights will gradually transform the canons and standards of our field. In the end, what will make the “study of religion” a coherent field? After all, graduating students will still have the label “study of religion” or a similar one written on their diploma. They should know what it means for them and for the society to which they belong. While these may not be the main questions Segal and Hinnells had in mind when imagining their book’s

³⁰ See Russell McCutcheon, “‘The Common Ground On Which Students of Religion Meet’: Methodology and Theory Within the IAHR”: *Marburg Journal of Religion* 1 (2, 1996) 1–12.

³¹ An interesting result of this situation is the fact that companions or introductory textbooks such as the two volumes under review have long taken the genre of *Einleitung* or *Grundzüge* in German scholarship, generally written by individual authors such as Jacques Waardenburg, *Religionen und Religion. Systematische Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Sammlung Göschen 2228), Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1986; Fritz Stolz, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft* (UTB 1980), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988, ³2001; Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002. Hans Gerhard Kippenberg, Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe*, München: C.H. Beck, 2003 has two authors but is no less idiosyncratic. But see Hartmut Zinser (ed.), *Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung*, Berlin: D. Reimer, 1988, and more recently the textbook edited by Figl mentioned above, n. 4.

potential audience, the coherence of an academic field, fragile as it still may be, is certainly a legitimate matter of academic concern and the kind of concern for which one should better ask for some companionship. Companions such as the two books under review bear a particular responsibility for defining the coherence of their subject matter.

Considered from this admittedly interested perspective, *B* comes as an authoritative, solid and sophisticated if somewhat conventional account of how religion has long been and is currently taught and studied at many places in the (western) world. Unfortunately, the book has not too much of an innovative flavour. In contrast, *R* is more original and sometimes even slightly provocative. Its authors leave more room for doubts and debates and hint at alternatives or transformations that are already underway here and there. *R* also addresses more explicitly than *B* the connections between the academic study of religion, its practitioners and the concerns of their host societies. *R* may well be slightly postmodern in that respect, which is certainly not what *B* was designed for. Having consulted both companions and hopefully indicated the major strengths and weaknesses of each in this review, I shall not have to choose between the two books myself. Still, I anticipate that in my future study and teaching I shall seek the company of one more often than the other.

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