
Il n'y a pas un Solution de la Continuité: Eliade, Historiography, and Pragmatic Narratology in the Study of Religion *

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The importance of remaining critical concerning Eliade's work cannot be overstated, especially if there is to be any possibility of isolating an Eliadean contribution to an effective paradigm for the History and Philosophy of Religions. The utilization of Eliadean conceptions for the elucidation of our understanding of religious phenomena must not give way to some kind of hagiography of a "Great Man" as long as the question of establishing the *value* of his contributions demands our attention. Why should we even bother to study this man, dead since 1986, and, some would say, now *passé*? In this article I would like to make some indication of his contributions towards an effective paradigm for the study of religion and particularly for the historiography of religions.

There is a salutary contemporary emphasis on the importance of historical contextualisation. For example, to better understand my

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work, it is necessary to understand my position as a scholar of British background and education, employed at small college in the USA, teaching seven courses each year, with over 300 hours each year in the classroom and sole responsibility for approximately 150 students in these courses. Similarly, it is important to understand the historical context of Romania in the late 1930s in dealing with Eliade's relationship to the extreme right. The narration of context is part of "history," often thought of in the Anglophone West as narrative truth in opposition to narrative untruth, or fiction. Eliade, of course, referred to his field of study as the History of Religions, and he made a distinction between this, his "diurnal" or "scientific" work, and his fictional literature as his "nocturnal" or artistic work (the German *wissenschaftliche* would be less misleading than the English "scientific" here). However, he also insisted that "Il n'existe pas de véritable solution de continuité entre mes ouvrages scientifiques et mon oeuvre littéraire, entre le règle diurne de l'esprit et son règle nocturne."¹ Clearly Eliade saw no final *solution de la continuité* entre history and fiction, *istoria și povești*. This observation is not original to Eliade but the value of his work is most often in the synthesis of pre-existing thought and its application to the study of religion, and this is no exception. That there is no resolution of the continuity between historical and fictional narrative was central to the 1973 work, *Metahistory*. The author, historian Hayden White,

consider[ed] the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them.... Histories (and philosophies of history as well) combine a certain amount of "data," theoretical concepts for "explaining" these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past. (1973, ix)

White, at that time Presidential Professor of Historical Studies and a faculty member of the History of Consciousness Program at the University of California at Santa Cruz, pointed out that "Continental European thinkers—from Valéry and Heidegger to Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault—have cast serious doubts on the value of a specifically 'historical' consciousness, [and have] stressed

the fictive character of historical reconstructions and challenged history's claims to a place among the sciences" (1973, 1-2.). White himself attempted "to establish the uniquely *poetic* elements in historiography" (1973, x) and he gave specific attention to the "artistic components" of historiography (1973, xi) by means of a close and masterful inspection of the works of both historians, and philosophers of history, including Hegel, Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce. White "attempted to establish the ineluctably poetic nature of the historical work and to specify the prefigurative element in a historical account by which its theoretical concepts were tacitly sanctioned" (1973, xi). He "postulated four principal modes of historical consciousness on the basis of the prefigurative (tropological [that is, based on poetic figures of speech]) strategy which informs each of them: Metaphor, Synecdoche, Metonymy, and Irony" (1973, xi). He argued that, "in any field of study not yet reduced (or elevated) to the status of a genuine science, thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp the outline of objects inhabiting its field of perception" (1973, xi). Among other things, White concluded that the possible modes of historiography (and philosophy of history)

are in reality *formalizations* of poetic insights that analytically precede them and that sanction the particular theories used to give historical accounts the aspect of an "explanation"; ... there are no apodictically certain theoretical grounds on which one can legitimately claim an authority for any one of the modes over the others as being more "realistic" ... [and that] as a corollary of this, the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetic or moral rather than epistemological; and, finally, ... the demand for the scientization of history represents only the statement of a preference for a specific modality of historical conceptualization, the grounds of which are either moral or aesthetic, but the epistemological justification of which still remains to be established. (1973, xii)

White does not deny the "scientific" element of historiography; rather, he too seems to accept that there is no *solution de la continuité* between art and science in historiography. He complains that the supposedly scientific historicism of the nineteenth century meant that

“whole bodies of data from the past—everything contained in legend, myth, fable—were excluded as potential evidence for determining the truth about the past” (1973, 52). This is precisely the kind of historicism against which Eliade rebelled with such studies as “Folklore as a Means of Cognition.”² The idea of such “master tropes” had been used by Giambattista Vico in his *New Science* (first published in 1725), and Hegel as well as Vico characterized “poetry as a form of knowledge” (White 1973, 86, 230-32). White points out that “Vico alone in his time perceived that the historical problem was precisely that of determining the extent to which a purely ‘fabulous’ or ‘mythical’ apprehension of the world might be adequate, by any criterion of rationality, as a basis for understanding a specific kind of historical life and action” (1973, 52). Once again the continuity between polar categories is emphasized, and here, I believe that it can accurately be claimed that Eliade to some degree anticipated White’s historical theorizing by almost three decades. Eliade certainly read not only Vico³ and Hegel but also Burckhardt, Croce and many of the others cited in White’s account, and he seems to be more familiar with the problems of historicism than most contemporary historians of religions, who seem to avoid philosophy, including the philosophy of history.

This is not Eliade’s only valuable anticipation of contemporary historiography, as I hope we will see. White’s means of characterizing the basic modes of emplotment are *religious*—the Fall, redemption, transcendence and the overcoming of death (1973, 8-9)—and he sees the origin of these plots in “sublimated forms of mythic archetypes.” In other words, elements that are somehow *religious* are at the base of the emplotments that are in turn at the base of all history writing, according to White. This seems to provide more than a little support for Eliade’s contention that “to be—or, rather, to become—human is to be religious” (1969, preface). The application of such thought to the study of religion was Eliade’s original contribution, but, like many pioneers of a new methodology and mode of inquiry, his application is often tentative and implicit and must be carefully reconstructed from his written legacy.

Since Eliade’s death, the type of thought that I understand him to have applied has been more clearly elucidated by a variety of theorists,

quite independent of the History of Religions. One of the most recent representatives of such theorizing in American historiography is Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. Although no single historian can stand for the entire field, Berkhofer is one of America's leading historians of the First Nations and is a highly respected theorist of historiography. His *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (1995) was well received and remains highly respected. Here, he argues that "[t]he Great Story, or what others might call the 'metastory' or the 'metatext,'...narrativizes the source material as evidence for all of the past as history" (1995, 38). He does "not intend [his] term 'Great Story' to be merely a translation of *meta-récit*, or "metanarrative," although it, too, is always constructed in some way to give meaning as well as context to a history. Although the Great Story need not be equivalent to any one metanarrative, all metanarratives are Great Stories" (1995, 39). This raises questions familiar to readers of Eliade of the relation of religious belief to the Great Story and thus to the understanding of time and history (see, for example, chapters 8 and 9 of my *Reconstructing Eliade* [1996]).

Berkhofer points out that

The most thrilling Great Stories are those that seem to make sense of the grand sweep of history and illuminate human destiny itself...the Spenglerian decline of Western Civilization or the stages of the class struggle in history according to Marxian dialectics.... A good Great Story not only orders the past and interprets the present but also predicts the future.... Today's historians and social scientists can agree on world history of some proper kind as desirable, because they cannot write and teach without some Great Story either to understand their own times as a product of the past or to interpret the past through the lens of the present.... Although historians may be wary of Great Stories...it seems that they cannot do without them.... Great Stories at bottom not only serve as the larger context for histories by colligating facts of (a) history but also provide the political and ethical grounding for history as text and as discursive practice. In this sense, Great Stories serve a symbolic or allegorical function in the narrativization of histories. Given the necessary function of Great Stories in historical narrativization, the postmodernist's slogan about the crisis of metanarratives resides in the dilemma between poststructuralist efforts to deconstruct all grand themes and revisionist desires to recon-

struct allegorical Great Stories for ethical ends. (1995, 40, 42, 43, 44)

There are several points on which Eliade can be seen to have anticipated this and other connected positions. From Berkhofer's work I have extracted several ways in which Eliade anticipates this "new" and "postmodern" approach to historiography. To be perfectly clear, I am not claiming that Eliade was in some way the causal progenitor of this approach, but that his sympathy for the other anticipated contemporary historiography in rather inarticulate ways:

1. I have mentioned already the Eliadean principle of the final continuity of binary opposites in narrative construction. Historiography is both science and art. Like Hayden White (and Eliade), Berkhofer concludes that, "History is both science and art, both a reconstruction and a construction" (1995, 62).

2. An interesting anticipation by Eliade of current historiographical theory is the realization of the utility of the belief in the inevitability of the contemporary status quo. He writes, "We live in a society whose past is given to us in images that assert the inevitability of the way things are...politicians and the media invoke history to show that the contemporary distribution of wealth and power is at once freely chosen and preordained" (Abelove 1984, ix; in Berkhofer 1995, 215-15). Eliade had already said that it is precisely this belief in the inevitability, the necessity, of historical event, that makes it tolerable (1954, 132). This necessity is narratized in very different ways in secular societies and in the various traditional religious societies, but the end result is the same.

3. Eliade's realization of the subjectivity of the perception of truth also anticipates current theory. For Eliade the hierophany or revelation of the sacred was always a relative and subjective phenomenon. My favourite illustration of this is from the preface to the French translation of *Domnișoara Christina*: "à savoir qu'un miracle n'est evident que pour ceux qui sont prepares, par leurs propre experience et leur propre cul-

ture religieuses, à le reconnaître comme tel. Pour tous les autres, le «miracle» n'est pas évident, il est donc inexistant" ("Awareness of a miracle is only straightforward for those who are prepared by their own religious experience and culture to recognize it as such. To others the 'miracle' is not evident, it does not exist," Eliade 1978, 7). Berkhofer states that, "The truthfulness of a history can also be judged by how well it accords with a reader's understanding and experience of how the world operates" (1995, 74). *Trāire*—authentic lived experience, and individual and personal experience—is the touchstone that permits the recognition of the real, the occurrence of the hierophany.

4. The conception of time as fluid and crucial to the narration of history is common to Eliade and contemporary theorists of historiography. Berkhofer puts it thus: "Must...the ordering of history as textualized presume the customary uses of time? What if assumptions about time as singular, uniform, irreversible, and so forth as the basis of chronology and emplotment are abandoned for several or more time-scales and time spans?... Would other conceptions of time produce other kinds of histories?" (1995, 136-37). Of course, it was a central feature of Eliade's analysis of humanity as *homo religious* that our conceptions of time are heterogeneous and variable. I argued in *Reconstructing Eliade* that "notions of time and history...represent an expression of the existential situation of humanity" (1996, 77). Different notions of time express different situations and give rise to different "spiritual creations," different worldviews.

5. Both Eliade and the contemporary historiographers emphasize that different worldviews and different conceptions of time and reality have the same "ethnographic authority" in their own cultures as do our own, and that this must be recognized as such. However, Berkhofer points out that much of written Western history still tacitly maintains a singular "best" or "right" viewpoint "incorporating both the actors' viewpoints and their context into the historian's own 'larger' multiculturalist viewpoint" under which the voices of the Others are subsumed even if not actually repressed as formerly (1995, 188). What is needed to combat this is a forthright embrace of Eliade's observation that there

are an infinite number of centres of the universe. Each local viewpoint is the centre of the universe: “Any local goddess tends to become *the* Great Goddess; any village anywhere *is* the ‘Center of the World’ ” (1961, 120).

6. In order to reconstruct the situated and original significance of the local viewpoint, Eliade insisted that we must always consider the “spiritual creations” of alternative cultures “in their own terms.” We must “take seriously these oeuvres—in the same way we take seriously the Old Testament, the Greek tragedies, or Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe” (1973, xvii). The possibility of appreciating the constructions of other cultures from their own point of view is a source of considerable concern in the study of religions—see for example, Russell McCutcheon’s “Introduction” to *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (1999). An explicit and more nuanced statement of this principle now arises in Berkhofer’s analysis of contemporary historiography. One historian who has wrestled with these problems, Patricia Limerick, comments that “the historian is obligated to understand how people saw their own times, but not obligated to adopt their terminology and point of view” (Limerick 1978, 25). According to such an approach, “plural viewpoints do not lead to plural pasts,” rather combining a multitude of viewpoints into a singular narrative “approaches ever more asymptotically to reality.” Thus it still “conceives much of that reality according to the cultural and disciplinary conventions of historical realism—a reality seen from a single best synoptic viewpoint” (Berkhofer 1995, 190).

7. However, in constructing a singular narrative from this “best synoptic viewpoint,” it becomes increasingly clear that we must incorporate somehow the “voices of the marginal,” a conclusion I have already argued to arise from Eliade’s work (Rennie 1996, 99). Recent historians such as Ruth Roach Pierson and Jesse Lemisch have identified this principle as the “epistemic privilege of the oppressed” (Pierson 1991, 90) and pointed out that “sympathy for the powerless brings us closer to objectivity” (Lemisch 1968, 6). From a completely independent position, the Chicago-based psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,

has similarly insisted that “the larger the group with which one identifies, the closer to ultimate reality one gets” (1993, 59). In other words, the greater the number of alternative voices we can incorporate into our own narration, the more veridical that narration becomes. Another historian, R. S. Khare, has, according to Berkhofer, argued that “[n]ot until postcolonial, postmodern anthropologists accept the others’ thinking and worldviews as equal or superior to their own will their practice meet their dialogical, multiculturalist ideals” (Berkhofer 1995, 196). An acceptable approach “accords intrinsically equal authenticity to the Other’s existence and epistemology” (1992, 13). This is not the place to tackle the ethical dilemma raised by such egalitarianism. Suffice it to say at this point that this is more than simply reminiscent of Eliade’s statement to Claude-Henri Roquet in the conversations published as *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, “that is why I am so very proud of being a human being, not because I am a descendant of that prodigious Mediterranean culture, but because I can recognize myself, as a human being, in the existence taken upon himself by an Australian Aborigine. And that is why his culture interests me, and his religion, his mythology” (1982, 137). It is fundamental to an Eliadean study of religions that the scholar precisely “accords intrinsically equal authenticity to the Other’s existence and epistemology” in this way.

8. Finally, most importantly, and as a direct consequence of the previous points, is the insistence of contemporary historiography on the necessary pluralism and polyvocality of any adequate contemporary writing of history—of religions or otherwise. The words that Hayden White applies to Giambattista Vico can be equally used for Eliade. They both see that “the problem was to uncover the implicit rationality in even the most irrational of human imaginings, insofar as such imaginings had actually served as the basis for the construction of social and cultural institutions by which men had been able to live their lives” (White 1973, 52).⁴ Berkhofer inspects past attempts to develop criteria for the identification of the “Single Right or Best Interpretation” and concludes that the category itself is a “Fallacy” (1995, 50): “In the end, the quest for the single best or right interpretation denies multiple voices and viewpoints” (1995, 53). Howard Zinn, in 1970,

declared that radical history should “intensify, expand, sharpen our perception of how bad things are, for the victims of the world” (1970, 36), and Berkhofer adds to this that it should “dissolve the separation between the ‘us’ of the historian’s and the reader’s world and the ‘them’ in the victims’ worlds” (1995, 216). For Berkhofer, “Zinn’s first two principles emphasize the victimization of the other too much and need to be superceded or augmented by new ones. In either case, one of the new principles would stress an appreciation of others or the oppressed on their own terms rather than as victims, since the later approach still represents them in hegemonic terms” (1995, 217). I would argue that Eliade’s focus on the terror of history, his insistence on seeing the cultural creations of the other “in its own terms,” and his insistence on the ubiquity of religion does all of these things. It even anticipates Berkhofer’s further precisions to some degree.

Here, then, are eight ways in which Eliade can be seen to anticipate contemporary critical theory in historiography. It is only to be expected that some contemporary historians have now gone further than Eliade. For example, “Polyvocality in the past, as in the present, should not be presented as if all the players were equal on some pluralistic playing field, because the real world of voices, viewpoints, and discourses is structured by power, hierarchy, and social conflict” (Berkhofer 1995, 219).⁵ Or again, the historian Joan Wallach Scott has pointed out that “to accept experience as transparent to its own viewpoint and to judge its validity by that viewpoint is to fall prone to the liberal humanist delusion of the individual as autonomous subject.” For Scott, “experience is at once already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted” (Scott 1991; in Berkhofer 1995, 184-185). Nevertheless, in Eliade’s own day, to invoke such principles as listening to the marginalized Other in their own terms was novel, and in the specific arena of the study of religion, it remains indispensable. But more than this, I would suggest that Eliade has already gone further in providing a beginning of a coherent explanation for all of these features. First, he did so in his account of the process of historicization in the modern West as profoundly influenced by monotheism. Berkhofer claims that “[o]nly by predicating that the pleni-

tude and context of the past considered as history are comprehended from the viewpoint of a third person, an omniscient, or at least synoptic, narrator, can normal history practice be understood" (1995, 38). This supports Eliade's conception that historicism is intimately connected with monotheism. The pervasive application of the concept of an omniscient God tends towards the concept of the past as a single (hi)story (see, for example, Eliade 1954, 102ff). Although the concept of the omniscient deity was already extant in, for example, Mitra/Varuna, Zeus, Odin, or any sky god, in polytheistic religions that of other deities could always countermand the will of the omniscient god. Omniscience alone, without the omnipotence of authentic monotheism, was inadequate to authorize a wholly singular narrative. In monotheism, history, as "the narrative of the real" as opposed to fiction, becomes *Heilsgeschichte*. As Berkhofer puts it:

Historians...are not allowed to make up persons or events like novelists, who produce imagined or created worlds or persons and events. Realistic as a novelist's created world may seem to the reader, the novelist does not claim that these persons or events need actually have existed apart from the text in which they are found... Historians...claim accuracy with regard to their subjects and fidelity to the past in their texts on the grounds that they do not create persons or actions as existing without some evidence from past sources, do not allude to acts or events for which they lack documentary information. (1995, 68)

What is the function and significance of such a claim? What difference does it make to "claim that these persons or events...actually have existed apart from the text in which they are found?" Only with the elevation of historical time to sacred mythic status, that is, operating as the authentic source of exemplary models (Rennie 1996, chapter 7)—and the concomitant devaluation of traditional myths as "mere fantasy"—does this claim have any existential significance. Eliade's argument that the Christian mythos—*hapax*, *ephapax*, *semel*—contributes decisively to this revaluation (revelation) seems substantial (Rennie 1996, 86, 168).

Hayden White points out that for Nietzsche,

the history of human consciousness can be emplotted as a “fall” out of the original, Metaphorical mode of apprehending the world into the Synecdochic and Metonymical modes of comprehending it. Nietzsche described this “fall” as a transition from music, poetry, and myth into the arid world of science, religion, and philosophy.

There is, however, an intrinsic irony to this “fall,”... Religion denies art, science denies religion, and philosophy denies science, so that modern man is hurled further into the depths of a specifically Ironic consciousness, is deprived of faith in his own reason, imagination, and will, and is finally driven into despair of life itself.

In Nietzsche’s view, this despair accounted for his own age’s obsession with history. The modern historicist mentality is a product of the hope that the past might provide models for comportment in the present, or that the hypostatized “historical process” might by its own operations effect the redemption which man longs for. (1973, 371)

This needs little comment to those familiar with Eliade: myths are primarily paradigms for behaviour. History treated in this way becomes myth, and this is one of the elements of historicism that Eliade most repudiated on the grounds that history alone cannot provide adequate exemplary models for behaviour (the “is” does not reveal the “ought,” to echo the words of David Hume).

Historiography as Sacred Narrative

Berkhofer recommends a “reflexive” style for the historian, a self-conscious bouncing back from a deliberate awareness of one’s own paradigmatic assumptions and authorial role (1995, 7-8, 243). However, a postmodern historiography paradoxically seems to become its own metanarrative:

If postmodernism is a self-consciousness of a culture’s own historical relativity with the consequent loss of the absoluteness of any Western account of history, then what about the history assumed in the Great Story of postmodernism?... Must not the narrative, like the subject, be fragmented and mimetic realism be subverted in and through the discourse? (Berkhofer 1995, 226)

Reflexivity in this context is a sort of “feedback loop” of mutually supporting elements within a single paradigm, but also the dynamic of

mutually challenging paradigms. It is proposed by Berkhofer as both problem and solution (a *pharmakon* in Derridean style). I would suggest that the postmodern “metanarrative” should be held as a self-conscious local mythology. Metanarratives and myths are both exemplary narratives. The modern West sought the dominance of its own metanarratives as absolute realities and thus sacred truths. That is, myths in the sense I have proposed—narratives assumed, either uncritically or only with reference to other myths, to be the true revelation of the real and of reliable exemplary paradigms. The final failure of these metanarratives to achieve hegemony leads to the denial of all metanarratives as *absolute truths* and the resurgence of particular local metanarratives as *myths* in the self-consciousness of their unavoidable limitation and ego- or ethnocentrism.

Narrative as both revelation of the real and exemplary paradigm is a conception articulated in Clifford Geertz’s well-known description of religion as both model of (human experience of the real) and model for (future human behaviour), which thus establishes its efficacy and power. The narrative structure of the religious myth is apprehended as pre-existing in phenomenal experience (*trääre*). If the narrative structure is not so apprehended, then the myth will not be deemed a model of the real (which is to say a model of our *experience* of the real) and so will lack the power to produce the “long lasting moods,”⁶ which in turn empower the motivations of the myth as exemplary model. Geertz’s suggestions, although widely popular and frequently quoted, have been vigorously challenged by Nancy Frankenberry and Hans Penner (1999). It is of considerable importance to respond to that critique since it is not only a criticism of Geertz’s specific description but of any approach that focuses on the function of religion or myth and is thus vulnerable to the criticisms levelled against all “functionalism.” Despite the importance of their detailed and well-argued paper, I cannot in this context give it the complete consideration it deserves. Suffice it to draw attention to the most serious faults in their critique, which prevent it from being an effective refutation of either Geertz or the position suggested above. While Geertz’s anthropology may have its flaws, the utility of his suggestions should not be denied on these grounds.

First, the general argument is levelled against all functionalist approaches that they commit the fallacy of affirming the consequent. That is, they are rather like saying that if one has an automobile then one can travel, and therefore if one can travel then one has an automobile. Geertz's article is described as abounding "with strong evidence of Geertz's retention of a functionalist approach to religion" (Frankenberry and Penner 1999, 626). For example, he

casts religion in the role of being a response to needs, that is, the need to reduce uncertainty, to order chaos, to have meaning. It is precisely this kind of attempt to explain religion, or other cultural elements, or symbols systems, as responses to certain needs by means of causal analysis, that is known as functionalism in the social sciences. (1999, 627, 628)

His argument is presented as having the form: Premise 1: if the symbol system of belief in gods is present then as an effect the need will be satisfied; Premise 2: the need is fulfilled; Conclusion: therefore, the symbol system of belief in gods is present (and persists).

Not only does this clearly commit the fallacy indicated, it is also entirely trivial since the conclusion that the belief is present is a simple observation and requires no further argument. The addition of the "and persists" clause has no justification whatsoever in the argument as stated. Obviously what is implied is that the conclusion might be drawn that the religious belief is present *because it is caused by* the need that it thus fulfills. This conclusion cannot be justified by the hypothetical premise that if the belief is present then that need will be fulfilled and it is not actually stated by the argument as given. As presented, the argument is entirely invalid. To claim that the belief is present and persists *because* of the second premise simply reverses the implication from "religion \supset fulfillment of need" to "fulfillment of need \supset religion." Of course material implication is not commutative; that is, it cannot be reversed like this. If it could, it would be logical equivalence ("religion \equiv fulfillment of need"). This is the whole problem with the kind of functionalism attacked here: it simply *equates* religion with the function of fulfilling some such need. If one observes that a religious belief exists, and observes that it fulfills a certain need, it cannot,

on those grounds alone, be concluded that the belief is identical with the fulfillment of the need. Nor can it be concluded that the belief is *caused* by the observed fulfillment of need. However, that would be a very different argument:

P1: The belief is present

P2: The belief fulfills a need

C: The belief is present *because* it fulfills that need

This is not actually fallacious, but it is a very weak inductive argument, which simply ignores the possibility that the fulfillment of the need is a *consequent* of the existence of the belief and not its cause, and that other factors could cause the belief.

However, it seems to me that Geertz's argument is rather different from—and somewhat more sophisticated than—either of those considered so far. It is a less procrustean transformation of Geertz's text to interpret his argument as neither identifying religion with its function, nor leaving his inductive argument unsupported as suggested. I read him as claiming that some part of the power and persistence of belief is derived from its ability to produce moods and motivations by means of its characteristic of being a model *of* one thing and *for* something else. Note that I do not say “functioning as” a model, but *being* a model. That is, this is not (purely) functionalist but descriptive.

This raises the most significant weakness of the Frankenberg/Penner critique. They attempt to

make sense out of Geertz's discussion of models *of* by thinking of it as an epithet for a correspondence theory of truth. After all, blueprints and maps, and flowcharts are expected to “correspond,” in some sense of the word, to “pre-established non-symbolic” reality (p. 7). So...we can understand him as saying that symbolic systems *correspond* to non-symbolic physical, organic, or social systems in some complex way. But...correspondence theories are notoriously difficult to defend, and are elusive...in specifying the nature of the correspondence *relation*. (1999, 622)

“Does the blueprint of the house match the actual house?” they inquire, and continue that “[s]uch questions as these have been the

Achilles heel of all correspondence theories of truth, leading to their demise” (1999, 622). Just as their criticism of Geertz’s “functionalism” relies on assuming that Geertz’s discussion of the function of belief implies an exhaustive identification of belief with its function, so their critique of his concept of the symbol system as “model of” relies on identifying it entirely with a correspondence theory of truth. While it is undoubtedly true that the correspondence theory of truth suffers terminally from the inability to describe what is meant by the “correspondence” between a statement and a state of affairs, that is precisely what is avoided in the instance of models. Frankenberg and Penner display no understanding of what a model *is*, apart from “an epithet for a correspondence theory of truth.” The correspondence relation, while notoriously imprecise in correspondence theory in general, is very precise in the case of models:

A model is a representation of a physical system such that certain relational properties of the physical system are preserved in the representation, i.e. the model is structurally similar or “isomorphic” to the system...a model is a set of entities—physical objects, points, numbers, whatever—together with a set of relations between them such that the sentences of the [thing] modeled are true (Lambert and Brittan 1992, 108).⁷

Thus the blueprint of a house does indeed match the house. It is not identical to it (or it would *be* the house) but it shares certain precise relational properties—the spatial relationships of the lines representing the walls preserve the spatial relationships of the actual walls. It must be noted that models of things are not restricted to scale drawings but can be “physical objects, points, numbers, whatever,” to which Geertz adds, “linguistic, graphic; mechanical, [and] natural” models (1972, 170). Examples might include Ohm’s law ($v = IR$) as an algebraic model of an electric circuit; the Crick and Watson model of DNA; an orrery as model of the solar system; the “four passing sights” of the life of Siddhartha as a narrative model of human development; and the Christian nativity as, among other things, a narrative model of the Winter solstice. The failure to understand the nature of models *of* as a precisely defined example of correspondence is further compounded by

Frankenberry and Penner confusing the very different roles of “model of” and “model for.” Models *of* “reality” are described as a “synoptic formulations of the character of reality” (1972, 170). They are thus apprehended as the “revelations of the real” referred to above. The “model *for*” is described as “a model under whose guidance physical relationships are organized” (1972, 169). In other words it is a model for behaviour, an exemplary paradigm. Yet Frankenberry and Penner state that “the Geertzian method of viewing religions as worldviews (conceptual schemes, epistemes, frameworks, or models *for*) results in either incoherence or hyperbole” and that “[s]ymbols formulate a general order of existence and clothe these conceptions with an aura of factuality. We can take this assertion as a clear example of symbols functioning as models *for* reality” (1999, 636, 639). Both of these instances are clearly of models *of* reality, not models *for* anything. The evident failure of Frankenberry and Penner to make sense out of Geertz’s argument by means of “their interpretation” (1999, 624) says more about the failure of their interpretation than about Geertz’s argument. Although this cannot be the last word on this complex debate, it should be sufficient to indicate that the analysis of religion in general, and religious narratives in particular, as models of “conceptions of a general order of existence” (Geertz 1972, 168, 171-74) and models for “appropriate” activity has not been effectively dismissed.

Seen in this light the structure of (sacred) narrative as a representative model of a limited human experience of reality from a viewpoint other than our own should add to our awareness of the range of human modes of being in the world. Hence the importance of pluralism, the epistemic privilege of the oppressed, and the other observations made by the authors considered above. In modernist “Great Story” historiography the narrative structure is said to be the one true account of the events of the phenomenal past. It is thus presented as both model of the past and model for the future and it is thus a narrative particularly effective in authorizing and perpetuating the *Weltanschauung* from which it springs. History is proposed as the accurate model of the only possible experience and thus the best available model for future behaviour (it should be borne in mind that models for behaviour can be both positive and negative, both *devas* and *asuras*, both the boy who put his

finger in the dike and the boy who cried wolf). Utilizing the narration of the phenomenal past in this way to authorize hegemonic religion (or ideology) stands in a reflexive reinforcing relation with historical monotheism and it also gives rise to the (particularly Anglophone) view of truth as accurate historical representation. This view has clearly been very useful in the development of modern science and modern historiography, but is just as clearly an inadequate concept of truth and is particularly damaging to the understanding of religious myths in which the truth is clearly not primarily couched in terms of accurate historical representation. As Peter Novick has pointed out, the concept of truth as accurate representation might seem “the merest common sense in the English-speaking world,” but it is “a view not held in Germany since Kant,” for example (1988, 31).

It can be claimed that we are all contributing to the production of such historiographic myth all the time in the guise of academic writing. The academic apparatus of scholarly discourse lends an authority to our work as having been approved and tested by the consensus of the academy. It is supposedly an accurate model of “reality” (for which, of course, read “our experience of reality”) and a reliable model for behaviour. It thus functions to authorize and empower the *Weltanschauung* of the author. In that sense academic writing can also be a religious tract, a *kerygma*, propagating the author’s worldview. Hence the insistence of some scholars, including Russell McCutcheon and Gustavo Benavides among others, that the study of religion must be studied in the same way as religion itself is studied—there is, finally, no *solution de la continuité* between religion and the study of religion.

Eliade’s insistence on representing the worldview of the other—the religious believer—rather than on representing, or indeed even disclosing, his own worldview was central to his methodology and to his style. Such a method and style is, I believe, admirable. It both avoids this kind of latent “evangelizing” and meets the need to communicate the voice of the other expressed by the historians considered above. This has, however, been one of the most frequent sources of misunderstanding Eliade’s work. Many commentators have attributed to him the beliefs that he describes, and have read the worldviews that he communicates as if they were his own. Generally speaking, this has led to

the frequent criticism that Eliade simply assumes the ontological independence of the sacred. (Of course, that assumption is made, almost by definition, by the believers whose worldview he communicates.) More specifically, this fallacious identification of Eliade's views with those of his subjects has encouraged some of Eliade's most bitter critics. For example, I have identified this error in the work of Daniel Dubuisson (Rennie 1996, 173-74) and of Steven Wasserstrom (Rennie forthcoming a). Perhaps this misunderstanding was itself comprehensible when Eliade's methodology was both original and inadequately articulated. Now, however, with the more precise articulation given by recent historians, it is to be hoped that Eliade's style will be more clearly understood, appreciated, and even emulated.

It is worthy of final comment that, by thus subordinating his personal metaphysics—the ontological assumptions that constitute his own worldview—to the clear communication of the position of others, Eliade maintained his status as a “scholar errant.” That is to say, a scholar who is still actually on quest—rather than a “sedentary” scholar, “post-quest,” already comfortably seated at the round table of revealed truth. It seems to me that the most appropriate position of scholars of religion is on quest. The research of experiences of the real represented in religious behaviour, which empower the formation of worldviews other than our own, should take priority over the propagation of our own present beliefs. The unfortunate consequence of Eliade's metaphysical restraint is that his concomitant silence about his own historical context is invoked, for example by Ivan Strenski and Leon Volovici, as evidence of his culpable complicity in his own history—particularly the Romanian fascism of the 1930s. However, it has long been common practice for scholars to withhold autobiographical detail even as they tacitly propagated personal metaphysics as the foundation of some “great story.” We have, since Eliade, realized that silence concerning personal history in no way assists the restraint of personal ontology—quite the contrary. That said, the salutary emphasis on historical contextualisation with which I began this article is *contemporary*, and Eliade's failure to conform to it is not as significant as his self-restraint on the one hand and, on the other, his commitment to communicating the worldviews of the other.⁸

Notes

¹ Eliade 1978, 7. The idea that “il n’y a pas un solution de la continuité entre” two apparently distinct categories appears as a constant theme in Eliade’s writing. In English to say that “there is no solution of the continuity between” two things does not make sense. In the French it more clearly implies both the absence of a break in the continuity between the two and also the absence of a solution to the riddle of the exact nature of the continuity. The two things do not stand in a simple relationship of continuity with one evolving out of the other. Rather, they are not discontinuous, the double negative serving to remind us of the complexity of their actual relationship. In *The Quest* he states that “a solution of the continuity does not exist...between archaic thought and the thought of the peoples who played an important role in ancient history” (1969, 73), and in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, “there has been no break in continuity from the ‘primitives’ to Christianity” (1958, 463). This is certainly connected to his insistence that “any genuine culture appears in antonymic and complementary spiritual creations” as he said in a lecture given in Paris in 1948 (1992, 162).

² This should also be compared to Benedetto Croce, who, according to White “defined art as a kind of knowledge, knowledge of the world in its particularity and concreteness, a knowledge that was different from, but complementary to, the conceptual knowledge of the world provided by science” (White 1973, 382).

³ The question of Eliade’s debt to Vico is raised by Donald Phillip Verene (1986).

⁴ For example, Eliade: “the strangest, the most aberrant behavior must be considered as a human fact; if considered as a zoological phenomenon or monstrosity it is not understood” (1965, 12).

⁵ These are Berkhof’s words but he attributes this approach to Mascia-Lees (1989), among others.

⁶ I am aware of the potential problem that Geertz was talking about religion as a whole where I am considering only exemplary narrative. Certainly ritual, art, sacred architecture, and other forms of religious behaviour can carry the same significance as model of and model for. This does not reduce the explanatory potential of describing narrative in this way.

⁷ I have given one of the simplest accounts of the idea of the model. For a considerably more detailed account see Aronson (1995), especially chapters three and five. It should be noted that the relation known commonly as “isomorphism” in the philosophy of science is in many ways better expressed by Eliade’s term “homology.”

⁸ On the significance of historical contextualisation of the scholar of religion see Rennie (forthcoming b).

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