

**The Political Discourse of Religious Pluralism:
World Religions Textbooks, Liberalism, and Civic Identities**

by

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Author's Declaration:

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Religious pluralism is a meaningful framework for many scholars and students of religion as well as citizens working to make sense of a religiously and culturally diverse society. It purports noble aims: bringing people together across differences and facilitating the inclusion of more people at the proverbial table of democracy. Pluralism has become an essential element in the management of religious diversity in the American public sphere. While presenting itself as politically neutral, the discourse of pluralism is, in fact, embedded with veiled politics. While it embraces a democratizing agenda, it simultaneously engages in regulatory activities that impose limitations and exclusions on people's beliefs and behaviors. My work investigates this tension.

I use Norman Fairclough's theory of critical discourse analysis to analyze world religions textbooks as discursive sites for the production of the discourse of religious pluralism. I contend that pluralism is a formally non-political discourse that reproduces and legitimates liberal norms and ideology. It functions as a practice of liberal governance—a mode of governmentality. Its discursive practices serve as tools for orchestrating social cohesion and regulating religion within a liberal social framework. By framing this analysis through the concept of governmentality, I aim to explore the enduring salience of liberalism in American society and the multiple discourses that support liberalism's totalizing tendencies. I investigate the ways in which the rhetoric of liberalism touts individual freedoms as a foundational value, while it simultaneously works in other ways to implicitly manage, regulate, and limit many of those freedoms. As I look at how these world religions textbooks help to mediate and transmit the liberal public sphere, I also consider how these discursive practices reveal the ambivalence and complexity involved in religious diversity in the U.S.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 2000s, I directed educational programs at an interfaith organization in New York City. I remember a conversation with a colleague as we were working together on a grant proposal for a program that would take a religiously and culturally diverse group of high school students to visit a different religious site each month over the course of ten months so that they could learn about these communities and engage in dialogue. My colleague insisted that one of the objectives of the program was to create pluralists, citizens who appreciated the religious and cultural diversity of American society and recognized the importance of engaging religious and cultural differences as part of the task of building a shared democratic society. I was less sure that this should be an explicit objective. I knew we wanted to teach participants about religions and religious diversity, but I was not sure that the success of our program depended on their acceptance of this diversity or that we should insist on it. Insisting that our participants eschew exclusivist views produced another kind of exclusion, which seemed to contradict our inclusivist aims. I was not sure how to reconcile this tension, though I recognized that our work was grounded in pluralist assumptions.

Around the same, I also served as an instructor in a religious studies department at a liberal arts college in downtown Brooklyn, teaching introductory world religions courses. On the first day of class one semester, I asked students what they hoped to learn in the course. One student said that he wanted to learn more about the people he regularly saw “with those funny-looking hats and curls.” (Brooklyn, of course, has the largest Hasidic population in the U.S.) At the time, I remember thinking that it would be a worthwhile accomplishment if my students could learn enough about religious diversity to cease thinking of their neighbors as “funny-looking.” I used

a textbook, Mary Pat Fisher's *Living Religions*, in this effort.¹ In my world religions classroom, not unlike the interfaith organization where I also worked, I was also working to create pluralists.

Many interfaith organizations in New York, particularly in the years immediately after the attacks of September 11, justified their work as an important tool in promoting social cohesion in a city that had recently seen what was commonly labeled as religiously-motivated violence. My interfaith work was clearly activist work. It is worth noting, however, how easily its values and objectives also operated in the world religions courses I taught and the textbook I had assigned.

Given the context of the early 2000s, I felt it was salient and important to help students better understand religious diversity. This seemed to be an opportunity for academic knowledge to benefit the greater good and wider society outside the "ivory tower." Yet, I was not just teaching about religion or the academic study of religion. I was teaching a kind of civic ethos, grounded in the idea that understanding and respecting religious diversity would contribute to a greater common good and protect democratic ideals of religious freedom, human rights, and justice.

Many students enrolled in my classes because they were interested in spirituality. I informed them that, instead, we would be learning about the diversity of religions in their midst. When Stephen Prothero's book *Religious Literacy* was published in 2005, I gave my classes the quiz included in its appendix, which, according to Prothero, was meant to test the basic knowledge that one ought to have in order to understand and engage religion in the American public sphere.² We engaged in some discussion about the general social benefits of knowing more about religious diversity, but we did not explicitly discuss norms of citizenship or governance. While I

¹ Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, Fifth Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall,

² Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 235.

implicitly promoted a civic ethos of inclusivity, we did not discuss who remain excluded in these dynamics of religious pluralism. Is promoting a particular kind of civic engagement what pluralism and its subsequent study of religion entail? What is at stake in this approach? What social interests are operative and being protected? These questions about the world religions course and its implicit politics and pluralist assumptions—especially the larger implications, its hidden costs, complexities and dilemmas— have sparked an academic interest that has resulted in this dissertation.

1.1 World Religions Textbooks and Religious Pluralism

In this thesis, I use Norman Fairclough’s theory of critical discourse analysis to analyze world religions textbooks as discursive sites for the production of the discourse of religious pluralism. I contend that religious pluralism is a formally non-political discourse embedded with veiled politics that reproduce and legitimate liberal norms and ideology. In doing so, pluralism functions as a rhetorical practice of liberal governance—a mode of governmentality. These discursive practices serve as tools for orchestrating social cohesion and regulating religion within a liberal social framework. By framing this analysis through the concept of governmentality, I aim to explore the enduring salience of liberalism in American society and the multiple discourses that support liberalism’s totalizing tendencies.

Religious pluralism is a meaningful framework for many scholars and students of religion as well as many American citizens working to make sense of a religiously and culturally diverse society. For many people, pluralism entails not just tolerance, but also respect and understanding as well as compassion, empathy, and justice. It is a force for good in a complex world. It purports noble aims: bringing people together across differences, helping neighbors get to know one another, serving as an impetus and justification for enacting more equitable policies, and facilitating the inclusion of

more people at the proverbial table of democracy. Pluralism has become an essential element in the negotiation and governance of religious diversity in the American public sphere. It frequently presents itself as objective and universal. Yet the discourse of pluralism is embedded with often veiled politics. While it embraces a liberating, democratizing agenda, it simultaneously engages in regulatory activities that impose limitations and exclusions on people's beliefs and behaviors. My work investigates this tension.

The discourse of religious pluralism is also found in the discipline of religious studies. Consequently, my research is situated in an emerging critical discourse that explores the socially constructed or "invented" nature of contemporary taken-for-granted categories in that discipline. Asking how the discourse of pluralism and the dominant approaches to world religions function in the service of liberal governance and shape certain liberal civic identities brings a new dimension to this critical inquiry, bridging religious studies, critical social theory, and political theory. Through my critique of the dominant discourse of liberal pluralism, I theorize a critical pluralism, a counter-hegemonic discourse that interrogates the power, privilege, and assumptions naturalized by the dominant discourse. By uncovering obscured assumptions and biases, this project aims to consider how the study of religion can more effectively support more equitable, less coercive forms of knowledge production and enhance public discourse on the accommodation and recognition of religious and cultural diversity.

This project focuses on liberalism and religious pluralism in the American context. Yet, I write this dissertation from the frame of reference of a Canadian university. Viewing the American context through an expatriate lens and drawing from the resources of the Canadian discourse on pluralism and multiculturalism has

provided me with a broader perspective from which to interrogate otherwise taken-for-granted assumptions about the American social order.

1.2 Thesis Overview

In **Chapter 2**, I develop a theoretical framework drawn from the social theory of critical discourse analysis, primarily the work of Norman Fairclough, and the concept and approach of governmentality, initially developed by Michel Foucault. These approaches shed light on modern formations of political power and the relationship between liberalism, ideology, and hegemony. Critical discourse analysis illumines how texts and talk—discourse—shape social and material realities, especially the modes by which discourse processes negotiate normativity, or latently construct and support certain systems of dominance. Discourse exists in a dialectical relationship with social structures, functions as a mode of political and ideological practice, and operates through processes of hegemonic struggle. Approaching religious pluralism as a discourse involves keeping in view not just the phenomena that the discourse of pluralism seeks to describe, but also the ways in which these discursive practices of describing and analyzing the subject of religious plurality simultaneously construct, reproduce or transform their subjects.

The conceptual framework of governmentality defines governance in broad terms, not just as the formal government of a state in its exercise of authority over populations, but also as self-governance, or how we govern ourselves. Theorists of governmentality, such as Foucault, Colin Gordon, and Mitchell Dean, argue that liberal governance is dispersed in nature and accomplished through a wide range of mechanisms—including discourse— that are frequently seen to be apolitical.³ Thus, I

³ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991);

use this framework to explore how these world religions textbooks—a discursive site typically seen as not formally political—reproduce and maintain the liberal public sphere, especially in the ways they prescribe a normative role for religion in civil society.

As I explore pluralism as a discourse of liberal governance, I engage in a brief overview highlighting the ideological foundations of modern liberalism that support a liberal social order and inform the dominant discourse of religious pluralism, particularly focusing on: individualism and autonomy; secularism and the public sphere; and liberal tolerance. I explore a range of liberal theorists, from John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant to John Rawls, Will Kymlicka, and Charles Taylor. Drawing from theorists of governmentality, liberalism is not just a doctrine or political theory, but a “style of thinking quintessentially concerned with the art of governing.” It is both attentive to and challenged by the management of difference and competing values.

In **Chapter 3**, I define the discourse of religious pluralism and situate it in an American context. The dominant discourse of religious pluralism is a liberal ideology that entails a broad commitment to recognize, value, and understand perceived religious differences.⁴ While some scholars use pluralism interchangeably with plurality or diversity, others argue that the term carries prescriptive norms and thus should not be seen as synonymous with diversity, a more neutral term that describes a demographic and social reality. Rather the discourse of pluralism in the United States

Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, Second Edition (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

⁴ Pamela E. Klassen and Courtney Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, ed. Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 2.

today works to define and order religious diversity. In this sense, pluralism is just one possible response to religious diversity.

Several central features characterize the American social context in which pluralism operates—demographic diversity; institutionalized liberal norms, especially freedom, tolerance, and secularism; the lingering effect of the domination of Protestant culture; and an evolving multicultural narrative. After exploring this social context, I examine the ways in which the dominant discourse of pluralism is produced by scholars within the academic study of religion. Considering the work of Charles Lippy, Peter Berger, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, Catherine Albanese, William Hutchison, and Diana Eck, I look at two major approaches to American religious pluralism—pluralism as multiplicity and pluralism as a tension between diversity and unity— in order to discern some common rhetorical features of the discourse of religious pluralism as well as their regulatory effects.

In the dominant discourse of pluralism, I uncover a number of common claims, i.e., that religion is important; that it is or should be a positive force in the world; that religious plurality or diversity is good for society; and therefore, that religion and religious diversity ought to be respected. Yet, many scholars now question these assumptions and practices, asking how it is that religious difference has been construed as a problem that religious pluralism is set to solve. They wonder whether religious pluralism, with its ostensible objectives of engaging and understanding religious difference, actually involves a process of imagining and ordering those differences. While religious pluralism claims to celebrate and affirm difference, does it simultaneously promoting a hegemonic unity and engage in unseen sociopolitical work? Scholars who critically theorize pluralism, such as Russell McCutcheon, Timothy Fitzgerald, Tomoko Masuzawa, Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen, argue that in

American society and scholarship, pluralism relies on an essentialist, *sui generis* definition of religion that privileges Protestant norms and positions religion as essentially private, voluntary, individual, and belief-based.⁵ In my research, I build on these critiques and approach pluralism as a regulatory discourse that works to manage religious diversity in a liberal democratic society. I identify and examine some common discursive practices of pluralism that serve this regulatory function, including the process of defining religion and the delineation of difference; the assertion that religious difference can be negotiated through education and dialogue; and the equation of pluralist values with liberal American civic values.

In **Chapter 4**, I explore the world religions textbooks as a discursive site, examining the interwoven relationship between the world religions textbook as genre and discourse. Drawing from the field of textbook studies, I look at the textbook as a discursive genre that carries often hidden power dynamics. The textbook is a tool and a symbol in education and the construction of knowledge. It represents a source of authority and legitimate knowledge. Thus, the medium of the textbooks plays an important role in the enactment of the discourses within its pages. I then turn my attention to the construction of the category of world religions and its relationship with religious pluralism. In this analysis I rely on Tomoko Masuzawa's genealogy of world religions, especially her analysis of the historical Eurocentric power dynamics deeply embedded in the category of world religions and the processes of classification and categorization in the academic study of religion.

⁵ Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Russell McCutcheon, "Critical Trend in the Study of Religion in the United States," in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion: Regional, Critical, and Historical Approaches*, ed. Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, Randi Ruth Warne, 2004; Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Klassen and Bender, "Introduction: Habits of Pluralism."

From here, I elaborate the method I use for my textbook analysis. I am interested in the power dynamics involved in the ways in which this information is presented-- how it constructs its subject, how it reproduces ideologies, as well as the larger social order in which it is produced. I look for patterns and recurring key elements and asking how they function in the production of meaning. I draw from the critical discourse analysis methods of Fairclough as well as Theo Van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak, especially their methods for analyzing discursive strategies of recontextualization and legitimation.⁶ The concept of recontextualization brings to light the ways in which the categories of religion and pluralism take a range of social practices and re-present or recontextualize them to fit within the narrative of a liberal social order.

My data set involves six widely used world religions textbooks, which I selected after conducting a short survey of members of the Religious Studies in Secondary Schools, a professional organization for secondary school teachers also engaged in teacher training on teaching world religions. I identified the six most frequently used world religions textbooks: 1. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* 3. Jeffrey Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 4. T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 5. William Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, and 6. Jacob Neusner, ed, *World Religions in America*.

In **Chapters 5 and 6**, I engage in a detailed analysis of these six textbooks, focusing on their discussion of religion and religious pluralism, as well as their

⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003); Theo Van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak, "Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse Historical Analysis," *Discourse Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 1999): 83-118; Theo Van Leeuwen, "Legitimation in Discourse and Communication," *Discourse & Communication* 1, no. 1 (2007): 91-112.

chapters on Islam and Buddhism, which Masuzawa argues were, along with Christianity, the first “world religions.” As I analyze these texts, I look at both what the texts say and how they say it, and then I consider the implications of these practices. I look at the wider discourses reflected in these descriptions, especially the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between discourses of pluralism, world religions, liberalism, and tolerance, and consider how they have come to be seen as natural accounts of the world.

In Chapter 5, I give considerable attention to prefaces and introductions as spaces in which authors set out to explain to their readers their task and their purpose, as well as concluding chapters as spaces in which authors aim to shore up the coherence of their narratives. I explore how these sections of the textbooks construct normativity. My analysis involves looking at the ways in which these texts address the reader, the kind of social realities they describe and the ways in which they prescribe that the reader should respond to these realities. I investigate discursive practices that work to construct subjects, unify diverse social practices under the category of religion, and build commonality and identification with a sympathetic approach to the study of religion. I look at how these texts define sameness among the world religions, while simultaneously inscribing difference. These texts mark the boundaries of religions and establish the “other.” I also analyze the ways in which the discursive practices of these textbooks operate to legitimate a particular role for religion within a liberal social order, outlining how they engage in practices that perpetuate certain dynamics of authority, designating some ways of thinking about and describing religions as legitimate and authoritative, and others as deviant or problematic. In Chapter 6, I draw from Masuzawa’s major insights on the elements of Eurocentrism and colonialism found in eighteenth and nineteenth century studies of Buddhism and

Islam and apply to them to an analysis of the chapters on Buddhism and Islam in the world religion textbooks in my study.

The textbooks in my study reveal common discursive practices. Each engages in the construction of normative religion; that is, they position certain discursive and social practices as standard, dominant, and natural. All assume that the term 'religion' is familiar to the reader, that it requires little or no definition or contextualization and that it is appropriate to begin with description. The texts that do address the definition of religion tend not address the social, historical, and political nature of the category religion; they define it as a separate sphere of the life of the individual and the community. Other textbooks in my study do not explicitly address the definition of religion at all. However, as we will see, definition begins with the world religions framework itself. World religion textbooks position each religion as an established, clearly demarcated tradition. This discursive practice naturalizes the boundaries between each religion. Moreover, it establishes a hierarchy, asserting positions of importance, privilege, and dominance for those religions included, while implicitly marginalizing religions that are excluded. Exemplifying the pluralism that the authors seek to promote, the textbooks also place all religions in dialogue. This comparative approach assumes that religions occupy discrete, coherent, and autonomous spaces that lend themselves to commensurate comparison. It assumes religions can be framed in comparable terms.

My analysis uncovers how religion is positioned as an autonomous, universal aspect of human experience that individuals have the capacity for, regardless of their cultural contexts. Moreover, this common human experience is oriented around the individual— religion is defined first and primarily as an experience had by individuals, and, only secondarily, in terms of institutional forms such as rituals and practices. The

positioning of the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis reflects the permeation of liberal norms.

These practices of normatively positioning religion are just one part of a larger process of ordering religion. All of these textbooks also include arguments for the importance of both religion itself and its study. They argue that religious diversity is part of a healthy society. Some argue that religion can be a potential source of conflict. At the same time, they argue that religion is good and largely plays a positive role in society. Thus, religion causes conflict when it is either distorted or misunderstood, or both. Many assert that the religion to be embraced and celebrated is the religion that also embraces and celebrates other religions. They suggest that good religion, authentic religion, allows people to be individuals, to be free, and to be different. Good religion is liberal religion.

These textbooks argue that learning about religions, developing an understanding of religions, will lead to respect for religions and religious diversity. This, in turn, will alleviate potential for social conflict. Indeed, some explicitly argue that this religious literacy is essential to good citizenship. Others argue that religious literacy will cultivate one's moral character. I see both lines of argument as forms of governance. This discourse works to regulate our society. By having students read these texts, by telling them that this is what religion is about, it tells them this is how they ought to think and behave as good citizens in a liberal democracy. Viewed from this perspective, these practices illuminate ways in which the construction of religion simultaneously aims to shape civic norms.

The central social order or practice that I problematize here is the hegemonic regulation of religion in American society as a means of legitimating liberal norms and securing the dominance of liberal governance. I am interested in the ways in which the

rhetoric of liberalism touts individual freedoms as a foundational value, while it simultaneously works in other ways to implicitly manage, regulate, and limit many of those freedoms. I aim to better understand how the regulation of religion in civil society is enacted and naturalized. As I look at how these textbooks help to mediate and transmit the liberal public sphere, I also consider how these discursive practices reveal the ambivalence and complexity involved in religious diversity in the U.S.

In order to understand how these textbooks serve as a discursive site for the formation and regulation of good, liberal citizens, it is first necessary to understand how liberalism shapes the American social order, paying particular attention to the place of religion and religious pluralism in that order. Consequently, in the next chapter, I will engage in a brief discussion of liberalism.

Chapter 2: Liberalism, Critical Discourse Analysis and Governmentality

In this thesis, I examine how religious pluralism operates as a normative discourse in the study of religious diversity. I argue that pluralism is a formally non-political discourse embedded with veiled politics that reproduce and legitimate liberal norms and ideology. In doing so, pluralism functions as a rhetorical practice of liberal governance—a mode of governmentality. These discursive practices serve as tools for orchestrating social cohesion and managing religion within a liberal framework. In this chapter, I introduce the social theory of critical discourse analysis and the concept of governmentality that I use to frame my examination of introductory world religions textbooks. These entail conceptual approaches that illuminate the relationship between liberalism, ideology, and hegemony. First, however, I highlight the formative features of liberal ideology in the American context to which critical discourse analysis and my discussion of governmentality offer a critique.⁷

2.1 The Mechanisms of Liberal Discourse

Liberalism refers to a modern ideological project that involves a set of political theories as well as a practice of governance; as such it is a discourse about the social order, the broad organization of society. Liberal theory tends to universalize and aims to provide a universal theory for the best regime for all of humanity; yet, in practice, liberalism varies in its character according to particular socio-historical and cultural contexts. Thus, to be more precise, one should use the term liberalisms. There are numerous liberal theories— classical liberalism, economic liberalism, welfare liberalism, and neo-liberalism—as well as liberal traditions specific to particular social contexts, such as English liberalism, French liberalism, and American liberalism.

⁷ Portions of my discussion on liberalism, governmentality and critical discourse analysis appeared in Tiffany Puett, “Managing Religion: Religious Pluralism, Liberalism, and Governmentality,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 317–27.

Subsequently, there are many debates about what exactly liberalism entails, its central philosophical commitments and its implications for political practice.⁸ Yet, as John Gray argues, “it is none the less a mistake to suppose that the manifold varieties of liberalism cannot be understood as variations on a small set of distinctive themes.”⁹ Moreover, it is the dominant political ideology in the U.S., so constant and naturalized that it is often unseen. As Louis Hartz puts it, “There has never been a ‘liberal movement’ or a real ‘liberal party’ in America: we have only had the American Way of Life.”¹⁰ Interpretations of liberalism are often contested in American society; yet, I contend, these contentions take place within the parameters of or in response to a liberal social order. Contestations of liberalism are still defined by liberal norms.

My purpose here is not to detail an exhaustive genealogy of liberalism. Rather, I identify the ideological foundations of modern liberalism that support a liberal social order, shape liberal governance, and inform the dominant discourse of religious pluralism in the United States. Subsequently I focus on three continuous and overlapping sets of features of the liberal discourse on social order: 1) individualism and autonomy; 2) secularism and the public sphere; and 3) liberal tolerance.

2.1.1 Individualism and autonomy

Early liberal theory signifies a modern social transformation in which society was reframed around the individual, rather than the sovereign, the Church, or the clan, tribe or family. Theories of liberalism arose in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. The rise of liberalism coincided with the Scientific Revolution, as well as the rise of the

⁸ As another perspective, Mitchell Dean argues “The variant forms of liberalism, and indeed of neo-liberalism, stem less from fundamental philosophical differences and more from the historical circumstances and styles of government which are met by a certain form of critique, an ethos of review and a method of rationalization.” Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 74.

⁹ John Gray, *Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xiii.

¹⁰ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955), 11.

nation-state, the market economy, and, later, the Industrial Revolution. Broadly, liberalism advocates for the primacy of the individual, who is rational, autonomous, equal to all others, and endowed with natural rights to life, liberty and property. Liberalism legitimates a social and political structure in which the proper role of government is to protect the rights and freedom of the individual. Freedom or liberty involves the flourishing of autonomy. Political theorist John Gray argues that all variants of the liberal tradition assert a common modern conception of humanity. This anthropology is 1) individualist in that it “asserts the moral primacy of the person against any claims of social collectivity;” 2) egalitarian in that it recognizes all persons as having the same moral status, which is not impacted by political or social differences; 3) universalist, in that it asserts a universal and essential human morality; and 4) meliorist, in that it asserts the “improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements.”¹¹

Immanuel Kant’s “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” is widely heralded as a seminal essay establishing the philosophical roots of the notion of the rational, autonomous individual.¹² In this essay, Kant argues that enlightenment is the result of using one’s own reason as the ultimate source of authority.¹³ The use of one’s own reason is tantamount to autonomy. Those who rely on the authority of others, particularly the authority of institutions, to inform their understanding are guilty of a

¹¹ Gray, *Liberalism*, xii.

¹² Talal Asad qualifies the importance of the Kant essay, stating “I do not take him to be representative of the Enlightenment as a whole... in saying this I merely concede that no one text or authorially defined set of texts—or for that matter, no single generation of authors—can adequately represent a complex, developing tradition of discussion and argument.” With this caveat noted, Asad goes on to state “Kant’s text may nevertheless be taken as marking a formative moment in the theorization of a central feature of ‘civil society,’ the feature concerning the possibilities of open, rational criticism.” He notes that Habermas also claimed its importance for later liberal theory and the development of the “public sphere.” Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 201–202.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment,” in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What Is Enlightenment*, 2nd edition (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

self-imposed immaturity. Kant's position on the rational, autonomous individual is also a critique of the authority of the church. He argues that church doctrine places limitations on reason and freedom and, subsequently, is a significant obstacle to enlightenment. For Kant, moral principles are an object of rational choice. As John Rawls explains, Kant holds that "a person is acting autonomously when the principles of his action are chosen by him as the most adequate possible expression of his nature as a free and equal rational being," as opposed to acting upon principles dependent upon social contingencies.¹⁴

The notion of the autonomous individual is also grounded in the idea of the social contract, a concept that ultimately legitimates the existence and authority of liberal democratic political institutions, especially the state, and situates legitimate political authority as derived from the consent of the governed. According to social contract theory, individuals, who are naturally self-interested, exist in a state of nature that is characterized by some degree of brutishness or harshness. For Hobbes, humans in a state of nature live at war with each other.¹⁵ Locke does not see the situation of humanity as being quite so grim and believes that individuals guided by reason may live in coexistence. However, he also admits that there will always be individuals who do not defer to reason and thus threaten the basic rights to others. Consequently, individuals willingly consent to give up some of their natural freedoms or rights in this state of nature so that they may enter into a social contract, which ultimately insures their right to security, by protecting their lives, and, as Locke adds, their right to property.¹⁶

¹⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 252.

¹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994).

¹⁶ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. MacPherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980).

For Hobbes, the social contract requires an absolute sovereign, the state, for the guarantee of security and freedom. Ultimately, the sovereign functions to protect self-interest and autonomy. Hobbes observed a tendency among people to desire, as C.B. Macpherson describes, “not just to live but to live well or commodiously.”¹⁷ Thus, the sovereign functions to keep this desire in check, to insure that one’s self-interest does not detrimentally infringe upon another’s. Hobbes’s rather low view of human nature has little concern with virtue and self-actualization. Rather, Hobbesian individualism, as Gray explains, sees that “civil society, as assured by the authority of the sovereign, is a framework in which man may pursue his restless striving for pre-eminence over his fellows without thereby inaugurating a disastrous war of all against all.”¹⁸ As Macpherson argues, Hobbes sets out a materialist model of the individual and the market model of society that establishes political obligation: “equality of need for continued motion and equal insecurity because of equal liability to invasion by others through the market.”¹⁹

Lockean individualism is slightly more generous than Hobbes in its view of persons as endowed with and guided by reason, which provides for a moral compass. Yet, this is still a conception of an autonomous individual, who is “essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them.”²⁰ This “possessive individualism,” which Macpherson first attributes to Hobbes, positions persons as consumers or proprietors and freedom as autonomy that is contingent upon one’s ownership of oneself. As Macpherson explains:

The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession. Society becomes a lot of free equal

¹⁷ C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 26.

¹⁸ Gray, *Liberalism*, 26.

¹⁹ MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 265.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities and of what they have acquired by their exercise. Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange.²¹

While differentiated from the economy, civil society still becomes framed in terms of economic relationships and, according to Macpherson, functions to regulate and protect those relationships.

In Rousseau's notion of the social contract, an individual, as a democratic citizen, consents to become part of a republic or body politic. Thus, the sovereign authority is composed of equal, rational individuals who have entered this social contract and given it legitimacy. Rousseau asserts: "Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over which he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has."²² Thus, for every right an individual gives up to become part of the republic, another one is gained.

This concept of the autonomous individual is profoundly interwoven with concomitant notions of freedom, authenticity, and morality. Following Kant, autonomy is freedom— "the freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters."²³ Or, as Gray puts it, autonomy as freedom is "the rational self-government of the individual agent."²⁴ Morality then becomes construed as a process of self-regulation, of "following a voice of nature within us."²⁵ Charles Taylor explains that this notion of a morality of

²¹ Ibid., 269.

²² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (London: J.M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1973), 192.

²³ Kant, "What Is Enlightenment," 120.

²⁴ Gray, *Liberalism*, 57.

²⁵ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 29.

self-determining freedom then forms an ideal of authenticity. Part of the exercise of autonomy entails being true to oneself. As Taylor puts it:

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*.²⁶

This individualism, from this perspective of authenticity, means that every individual has a unique way of being human. From here, one could argue that the actualization of one's authentic and autonomous individuality requires a pursuit of knowledge in the name of understanding one's true self.

Liberalism positions all of these notions as universal. Regardless of culture, religion, or circumstance, human beings are fundamentally equal and autonomous individuals. Even when liberal theorists who support multiculturalism, such as Rawls and Kymlicka, recognize that not all cultures view autonomy as the foundational quality of what it means to be human, they are hard pressed to posit an acceptable alternative social arrangement that does not rely upon the norms of liberal individualism and egalitarianism.

2.1.2 Secularism and the liberal public sphere

Reordering society around the notion of the autonomous individual— the liberal subject— also involves reshaping and resituating the place of religion in society in ways that encourage the social arrangement of secularism. If individuals are to freely exercise their reason to make decisions (i.e., if they are to be autonomous and authentic), then religion can no longer play the role of a coercive, overarching source of a unified and cohesive social reality. Religion had to become a matter of personal, private choice, and churches had to become “voluntary associations” to which free

²⁶ Ibid., 30.

individuals chose to belong because of what they believed rather than authoritarian social institutions into which one was born. Consequently, religion became oriented towards individual volition and subjective emotion, rather than objective dogma. This modern subjective shift also accompanied the reconfiguration of society into separate differentiated spheres—the state, the economy, civil society, and religion.²⁷

The secularization narrative, which has long held a prominent position in the sociological study of religion, theorizes these modern social shifts. Some versions of this narrative have contended that as religion loses its overarching authority, its social significance will decline.²⁸ In response, other theories have arisen to counter this narrative and highlight the persistence of religion, especially in American society, such as that of Jose Casanova who argues that the “decline of religion” argument is a weak and unnecessary component of secularization theory.²⁹ Many of these theories—those that support and those that dispute the secularization narrative—share a view of religion as differentiated and private or individually-oriented. As Courtney Bender puts it, “they agree that ‘religion’ in modern society is self-evidently identifiable and, through processes of differentiation, increasingly disentangled from state control and state regulation.”³⁰

²⁷ Jose Casanova argues that “the first cause which set the modern process of differentiation into motion” is difficult to pinpoint precisely, but four developments contributed to modern processes of differentiation and secularization: “the Protestant Reformation; the formation of modern states; the growth of modern capitalism; and the early modern scientific revolution.” Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 21.

²⁸ See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967); Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

²⁹ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; For a prominent alternative approach that strongly rejects secularization theory, see Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

³⁰ Courtney Bender, “Pluralism and Secularism,” in *Religion on the Edge: De-Centering and Re-Centering the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Courtney Bender et al. (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2013), 139.

Thus, secularism can be understood as a modern social process of differentiation through which religion loses its singularly and seamlessly unifying social authority and becomes relegated to its own separate social sphere. This process does not necessarily entail the decline of the social significance of religion—as evidenced by the American context—but rather a change of position and power dynamics. Moreover, this process is socio-historically situated and contextual, thus not universal.³¹ Conceptually, the liberal anthropology, rooted in a notion of the autonomous individual guided by reason, drives this reorientation of religion. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini make a similar observation:

secularism is central to the Enlightenment narrative in which reason progressively frees itself from the bonds of religion and in doing so liberates humanity... This Enlightenment narrative separates secularism from religion and through this separation claims that secularism, like reason, is universal (in contrast to the particularism of religion.)³²

To be clear, this separation of religion is also a process of defining religion, of constructing a modern norm of religion. It situates religion somewhere in the spectrum of individual, private pursuit and aspect of culture that informs individual identity.

Not only does this support the liberal conception of the autonomous individual, it also supports the formation of the liberal public sphere. Following the social contract theory of classical liberalism, the nation-state is defined as an entity that functions to protect individuals' rights to security, property, political representation and equality before the law. This legitimates social differentiation, in which the Church, and thus religious authority, are relegated to a private sphere distinct from the political and economic spheres. To enter the public sphere, participants must do so using the

³¹ See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), especially the chapter "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion," for a discussion of the contextual nature of secularism.

³² Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, "Introduction: Times Like These," in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

purportedly universal language of reason. In other words, the public sphere is regulated by liberal norms. Secularism also paves the way for religious pluralism. Once religion is no longer taken for granted or imposed upon people, religious communities begin to compete and market themselves to individuals, thus creating a social climate in which multiple religions can exist side by side.³³ Of course, these religions can only coexist so long as they remain in the private sphere and only interact in the public sphere through liberal norms of reason.

2.1.3 Liberal tolerance

Liberal discourse works to define and manage religion, a regulatory function that has historical roots in early liberal discourse. It is along these lines that a liberal case for toleration is developed. In “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” John Locke argues that religion itself ought to be more liberal, based on reason rather than revelation, and thus, focused on universal values that unite, rather than particularities that divide.³⁴ Locke argues for toleration of those with different religious beliefs, but it is clear that his scope of tolerable differences are delimited by Protestantism since he argues against toleration for atheists and Catholics. For Locke, liberal political theory was morally neutral, but the liberal commonwealth still required a moral foundation. Society still required the strong moral framework that Protestantism, but not atheism or Catholicism, provided. According to Locke, by denying God, atheism also denies reason, and, by giving legitimacy to papal authority, Catholicism is decidedly illiberal.

³³ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*. Here Berger writes on the relationship between liberalism, religion and secularization. Years later, Berger wrote that his secularization theory included one big mistake and one great insight. The mistake was his link between the decline of religion and modernity. The great insight was his recognition of the dialectical relationship between secularization and pluralism-- that the relegation of religion to a discrete sphere undermines taken-for-granted beliefs and values, which in turn supports religious diversity and pluralism. Peter Berger, “Protestantism and the Quest for Certainty,” *The Christian Century*, September 26, 1998.

³⁴ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Minneapolis: Filiquarian Publishing, 2007).

However, Protestantism with its emphasis on individual morality and salvation provides a liberal morality with universal relevance. Locke gives a Protestant rationale for autonomy and toleration with arguments such as, “God has given no man authority over another.”³⁵ Rousseau offers a similar sentiment in calling for a universal civil religion that provides a basic moral framework to support the state.³⁶

Locke’s “A Letter Concerning Toleration” not only calls for toleration for various Protestant sects, but it also articulates a sharp distinction between civil and political society, on the one hand, and the differentiated religious sphere on the other. Locke’s call for toleration has a number of significant consequences. First, it reduces the truth claims of religion to subjective, private belief, thus reducing the civil and political authority of religion. Second, it positions tolerance as pertaining to individual beliefs and practices, which fits into Locke’s liberal framework. It does not offer tolerance or recognition for group rights. This issue of recognition and group rights has become a focus in contemporary discourse on liberalism and religion. Wendy Brown asserts that with Locke’s contention,

tolerance of diverse beliefs in a community becomes possible to the extent that those beliefs are phrased as having no public importance; as being constitutive of a private individual whose beliefs and commitments have minimal bearing on the structure and pursuits of political, social, or economic life; and as having no reference to a settled common epistemological authority.³⁷

Consequently, religious groups lose claim to what happens in public or political life. This sentiment has resonated through tolerance discourse to this day. However, Locke’s letter privileges Protestant norms, imagined as universal. Thus, a kind of generic, universalized Protestantism, which maps neatly onto the values of liberalism, was set as the norm by which tolerance would be measured. Liberal tolerance

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

³⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*.

³⁷ Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 32.

continues to carry this bias, yet, assumptions of secularism mean that what might actually have a religious, Protestant tone is instead labeled as secular and culturally neutral.

Rousseau makes a similar argument for the role of religion in civil society and tolerance. He maintains that religion is a private matter and only concerns the sovereign or the republic in so far as it has “reference to morality and to the duties which he who professes them is bound to do to others.”³⁸ He argues for a kind of universal, civil profession of faith that expresses values for good citizenship, including respect for equality, democracy, the “sanctity of the social contract,” the rule of law, and justice. He also argues that all religions should be tolerated, so long as they tolerate other religions and “their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship.”³⁹ Essentially, religious tolerance may be extended to liberal religions, a principle that has carried through to contemporary liberal tolerance discourse, as well.

Twentieth-century philosopher and liberal theorist John Rawls positions tolerance as a central liberal value, but contextualizes it by distinguishing between the concepts of a “comprehensive doctrine” and a “political conception.” Rawls defines a “comprehensive doctrine” as one that “includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, as well as ideals of personal virtue and character, that are to inform much of our nonpolitical conduct (in the limit our life as a whole).”⁴⁰ A political conception on the other hand is not comprehensive and only relates to political life. It is a “module, an essential constituent part, that in different ways fits into and can be

³⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, 307.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 175.

supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it.”⁴¹

Rawls recognizes that there are competing comprehensive doctrines and that it is not feasible, or liberal, to claim a single comprehensive doctrine as universally relevant; therefore, no comprehensive doctrine is “appropriate as a political conception for a constitutional regime.”⁴² However, a political conception may be acceptable to multiple comprehensive doctrines. This is accomplished through a process of “overlapping consensus,” which requires “the criterion of reciprocity,” that is the terms of consensus must be reasonably accepted without manipulation or political force.

Rawls critiques the traditional liberal view of autonomy as a foundational liberal value. While he acknowledges its importance, he raises concerns that autonomy as a moral value has significant limitations in that not all comprehensive doctrines place importance upon it and some even reject the notion. Thus autonomy as a liberal value fails to satisfy the criteria of reciprocity. Rawls instead posits tolerance as a central liberal value.

Rawls struggles with the liberal problematic of cultural imperialism and accommodation for non-liberals. He recognizes the problem of positioning liberalism as a comprehensive philosophical doctrine and expecting it to have universal relevance. However, even by positioning liberalism as a political conception rather than a comprehensive doctrine, Rawls cannot avoid implying that liberalism has universal salience and a kind of cultural neutrality. Rawls argues all reasonable belief systems can be accommodated—and should be—in the name of tolerance. He does not want to impose liberalism on non-liberals. Yet this becomes unavoidable. In the end, non-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 135.

liberal doctrines are only acceptable as private belief. As he states, “For we always assume that citizens have two views, a comprehensive and a political view; and that their overall view can be divided into two parts, suitably related.”⁴³ There is no space for certain beliefs and doctrines in the political sphere, which means that they essentially have no power.

Will Kymlicka grapples with the question of whether autonomy or tolerance is the fundamental value within liberal theory. A concern arises that groups who do not value autonomy become alienated within liberal culture and may “undermine their allegiance to liberal institutions, whereas a tolerance-based liberalism can provide a more secure and wider basis for the legitimacy of government.”⁴⁴ Kymlicka criticizes the position of Rawls, who focuses on tolerance over autonomy. He points out that Rawls distances himself from autonomy as the foundation of liberalism, because he recognizes that it may not carry universal salience and may alienate those holding certain worldviews, or “comprehensive doctrines.” Rawls believe he can make liberalism more inclusive, or universal, by focusing on tolerance. Yet, as Kymlicka argues, liberal tolerance has historically been distinguished by its commitment to autonomy. It has focused on freedom of individual conscience, which entails the protection of individual rights to dissent from their group, as well as the right of groups to not be persecuted by the state. Kymlicka contends that it also entails freedom of choice, which includes the freedom for individuals to choose how they lead their lives. This choice may involve choosing one conception of the good life, reconsidering, and then choosing another. This is the liberal assumption that “our

⁴³ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 154.

beliefs about the good life are fallible and revisable,” which Kymlicka finds rooted deeply in the liberal tradition from Mill to Rawls.⁴⁵

This notion of choice informs the liberal understanding of religion. Religion is, and ought to be, a matter of personal choice. Liberal society must protect this choice, allowing individuals the freedom to pursue their existing religion, question it, abandon it, or share it with others. Liberal tolerance hinges upon the notions of autonomy and freedom of choice. As Kymlicka argues, essentially, tolerance and autonomy are two sides of the same coin. From the perspective of liberalism, tolerance and autonomy are intertwined. Thus, when pluralism extends tolerance to many religions, this comes with the assumption, or even the condition, that these religions have been freely chosen and freely allow choice. Illiberal religions fall outside the bounds of tolerance.

2.2 Analyzing Liberal Governance: The Concept of Governmentality

From highlighting some overarching facets of liberal discourse that feature centrally in the discourse of pluralism, I now want to elaborate the conceptual frameworks and techniques I will use to analyze patterns of power in liberal discourse in modern society. The concept of governmentality provides a means of describing the ways in which power is constructed and exercised in modern society. It views government as an activity or practice, something in formation, rather than a static entity.

2.2.1. Foucault and governmentality

The theoretical concept of governmentality was initially developed by Foucault. He defines government as “the conduct of conduct”—“that is to say, a form of activity

⁴⁵ Ibid., 81.

aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons.”⁴⁶ For Foucault, government used in this sense does not refer narrowly and exclusively to the ruling authority within a nation-state. Thus, Foucault does not use the term “government” in a conventional sense. Foucault writes that “Government, therefore, has a purpose, it arranges things... and it arranges things for an end... government is very clearly distinguished from sovereignty.”⁴⁷ Rather, government involves broad processes and activities of governance, which then entails more than just the exercise of authority over others, or entities such as states and populations; it also encompasses self-governance, or how we govern ourselves.⁴⁸ Mitchell Dean elaborates Foucault’s definition with his own:

Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects, and outcomes.⁴⁹

Along these lines, for Foucault, the state is not an entity with fixed properties or an inherent essence, nor is it tantamount to government or the singular organizing power of modern society. Rather the state is produced by practices of government more broadly interpreted, or to use the parlance of Foucault, it has been “governmentalized.”⁵⁰ Modern governance has a dispersed nature and “the powers and

⁴⁶ Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 98.

⁴⁸ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁰ Foucault, “Governmentality.”

rationalities governing individual subjects and the populace as a whole operate through a range of formally nonpolitical knowledges and institutions.”⁵¹

The notion of governmentality, then, gets to these varied and dispersed practices that construct governance. Foucault defines the term “governmentality” as dealing with “governmental rationality,” or “mentalities of government.” He lays out three general features of governmentality. First, he describes governmentality as:

the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.⁵²

He explains the second aspect of governmentality as “the type of power that we can call ‘government’ and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, and [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (*saviors*).”⁵³ The third feature, Foucault describes as “the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the 15th and 16th centuries and was gradually ‘governmentalized.’”⁵⁴ Governmentality points to the “art” of government, a craft that entails imagination and fashioning. It signifies the ways in which power is exercised through the governance and regulation of individual conduct and through knowledges that manifest in self-regulating practices. It addresses how the practices of government are largely taken for granted, as well as how they are constructed and embedded in discourses and other technologies often viewed as unrelated to political power, governance or the state. As Mitchell Dean explains, “discourses on government are an

⁵¹ Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, 79.

⁵² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78*, 108.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

integral part of the workings of government rather than simply a means of its legitimation; government is accomplished through multiple actors and agencies rather than a centralized set of state apparatuses.”⁵⁵ This kind of analysis, or “analytics of government” to use Dean’s term, seeks to uncover the ways in which social, cultural, and political practices of government produce so-called “truth.” It asks how these practices construct and depend upon particular forms of knowledge. It looks at how regimes of power beyond the state apparatus produce and maintain knowledges associated with governmentality and self-regulated governance.

Dean argues that a study of governmentality also entails looking at the ways in which modern governance constructs morality. Processes that aim to shape individual conduct produce moral questions. Modern morality and ethics, or the study of morality, assume an autonomous individual capable of self-regulation; they assume self-governance. As he explains: “If morality is understood as the attempt to make oneself accountable for one’s own actions, or as a practice in which human beings take their own conduct to be subject to self-regulation, then government is an intensely moral activity.”⁵⁶ Moreover, practices of government regularly assume or work to establish “what constitutes good, virtuous, appropriate, responsible conduct of individuals and collectives.”⁵⁷ Examining government from this view illuminates the relationship of “questions of government, politics, and administration to the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons.”⁵⁸ Dean also critiques normative political theory such as Rawls or Habermas, arguing that “claims to be operating in the service of ‘values’ must be scrutinized as components of the rhetorical practice of government and as

⁵⁵ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

part of different forms of governmental and political reason.”⁵⁹ Thus, the question of values in government is not about how certain practices are expressions of values, but rather how values function in governmental practices.

2.2.2 Conducting liberal governance

An analysis of governmentality provides a particularly helpful framework for parsing the relationship between practices of governance and liberalism. Liberalism is not simply a doctrine, but as Colin Gordon explains, a “style of thinking quintessentially concerned with the art of governing.”⁶⁰ Liberalism is primarily occupied with ordering the “conduct of conduct.” It is a critique of practices of governance; it simultaneously disdains too much governance and insists on universality. In this way, liberalism seeks both to individualize and totalize. As Dean argues:

The real innovation of the study of liberalism as a rationality of government, however, is not the emphasis on the respect for the rights and freedoms of subjects. Rather it is that the liberties and capacities of the governed are the mechanisms through which an art of government as a comprehensive management of civil society will come to operate.⁶¹

Liberalism proclaims freedom and liberty, while tending to impose a mode of public discourse that privileges certain forms of expression and silences others. Thus, it promotes individual autonomy and “liberty,” but within the bounds of the liberal state. It is a measured liberty.

Through hegemonic discursive practices, liberal discourse is inclined to attribute social change to individual agency, thus concealing the function and mechanisms of society and masking dynamics of power. As an example given by Wendy Brown, “the reduction of freedom to rights and of equality to equal standing

⁵⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁰ Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” 14.

⁶¹ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 63.

before the law eliminates from view many sources of subordination, marginalization and inequality that organize liberal societies and fashion their subjects.”⁶²

Brown sharpens Foucault’s theory of governmentality by looking at how dispersed governance and the de-centering of the state mask the functions of power and governance in modern society. She argues that Foucault underestimates the role of the state, that in fact, the state “remains the fulcrum of political legitimacy in late modern nations.”⁶³ As such, an analytics of government should look at the varied and dispersed practices of governance and consider not only how they order and govern, but also how they function to legitimate the state. While the liberal state engages in individualization— orienting its population around the autonomous individual— it must simultaneously universalize and totalize its control over its population within its sovereign authority.

This points to a tension between plurality and unity inherent in liberal democracies. A liberal democracy claims to be the government by and for its entire people. Composed of diverse, autonomous individuals, it must recognize plurality. However, insofar as it aims to be *the* government for this diverse population, there must be some unity and coherence to hold it together and give it legitimacy. Given this tension, there must be limits to either plurality or unity. Moreover, in view of the totalizing and hegemonic nature of liberal democracy, the limitations are usually placed on plurality. This relationship is more precisely framed as a dialectical one rather than a dichotomy, in which this tension between plurality and unity is not external to either, but rather constitutive of each. Plurality exists because the notion of the autonomous, inherently equal, free individual, which is at the heart of a liberal

⁶² Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, 17-18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 83.

democracy, calls it into being. This autonomous individual negotiates her or his relationships with all other individuals through a social contract, which affirms and protects her or his freedom, provides for her or his prosperity, and, importantly, legitimates the liberal state as the agent of these functions. Thus, the plurality of individuals calls for the unity of the sovereign for its security and perhaps its very existence.

Liberal discourses are vital to the legitimation of the liberal democratic nation-state and the practice of liberal governance. Moreover, as Mitchell argues, “liberalism is thus as much concerned with the appropriate normalizing practices to shape the exercise of citizens’ political freedom as it is with guaranteeing their rights and liberties.”⁶⁴ Wendy Brown looks at how contemporary tolerance discourse—a liberal discourse— functions as a mode of governmentality by asserting the normalcy of the powerful and the deviance of the marginal. As a practice of liberal governance, tolerance discourse poses as a universal value and neutral practice, as it “designates certain beliefs and practices as civilized and others as barbaric.” It “regulates the presence of the Other” and “legitimates the most illiberal actions of the state by means of a term consummately associated with liberalism.”⁶⁵ Tolerance fundamentally assumes that religious, cultural, or ethnic differences are inherently and naturally sites of conflict and hostility. Thus tolerance is positioned as “a tool for managing or lessening this hostility to achieve peaceful coexistence”⁶⁶

The talk and texts of tolerance advocate for multiculturalism, equality, and liberty; they promote social cohesion. At the same time, this cohesion entails a certain passivity that supports and legitimates the state. As Brown argues, it is precisely this

⁶⁴ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 145.

⁶⁵ Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

legitimation, the association of the state with liberal tolerance, that allows the state to pursue its security function and engage in actions that are decidedly illiberal—such as the compromise of civil liberties through the Patriot Act or the detention of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay forgoing due process and using interrogation techniques of torture. As Brown clarifies, “Defined against the unfree, intolerant peoples who menace us, a tolerant citizenry is a virtuous and free citizenry; and it is precisely this virtue and freedom that licenses the violation of principles of tolerance and freedom in the name of our security.”⁶⁷ Writing about the illiberality of liberal government, Mitchell Dean also points out that:

Within liberal forms of government, at least, there is a long history of people who, for one reason or another, have been deemed not to possess or to display the attributes (e.g. autonomy, responsibility) required of the juridical and political subject of rights and who have therefore been subjected to all sorts of disciplinary, bio-political and even sovereign interventions.⁶⁸

Essentially, tolerance discourse, as well as other liberal discourses engaged in hegemonic discursive practices, functions to mask its politics and power dynamics. In doing so, these discourses can legitimate or obscure illiberal and contradictory actions. These practices also highlight the complexity and contestation that underlie liberal ideologies. As Dean explains, “liberalism always contains the possibility of non-liberal interventions into the lives of those who do not possess the attributes required” by the liberal social order.⁶⁹

Brown calls this process of masking power and politics “depoliticization,” which she defines as a process that “involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from a recognition of the powers that

⁶⁷ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁸ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 158.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 162.

produce and contour it.”⁷⁰ Brown describes other liberal mechanisms of depoliticization as involving “construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other.”⁷¹ Brown’s notion of depoliticization is a particularly helpful concept for understanding the ways in which liberal norms and ideology permeate liberal societies. Liberal governance is not solely enacted by the state or by institutions formally recognized as governmental or political. Rather, it is dispersed in nature and accomplished through a wide range of apparatuses and mechanisms that are frequently not seen to be political. It is through these processes of depoliticization that liberalism becomes invisible in liberal societies, and especially in the United States. From this theoretical framework, I contend that the discourse of religious pluralism is also a discourse of depoliticization. It is a discourse with obscured liberal politics that operates in the service of liberal governance.

2.3 The Social Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis

My analysis of normative politics and patterns of power dynamics in liberal discourse draws not only from the conceptual frame of governmentality, but also from the social theory of critical discourse analysis. Here I want to elaborate this theory, drawing especially from the work of Norman Fairclough, a linguist whose social theory aims to explain power, social change and transformation through the analysis of discourse, with attentiveness to the connection between discourse processes and the social practices of which they are a part.⁷²

⁷⁰ Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Fairclough calls this theory Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) and attends to his assertion that linguistically-oriented theories of discourse analysis tend to be weak on social analysis, particularly regarding discourse, power and transformation.

2.3.1 The dialectics of discourse

Discourse is a mode of representation, as well as a mode of action, a way in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other.⁷³ It represents social realities and forms them through the construction of social identities, relationships between people, and systems of knowledge and belief. Central to Fairclough's theory is his emphasis on a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure. Discourse is shaped and confined by social structure, while at the same, socially constitutive; that is, it plays a role in reproducing society, while simultaneously transforming it. Fairclough adapts the constitutive view of discourse from Foucault's social theory on discourse, which examines the relationship between language, discourse, knowledge and power.⁷⁴ Foucault is interested in the larger domains of knowledge constituted by rules of discourse and discursive formations, systems of rules which make it possible for certain statements, but not others, to occur at particular times, places and institutional locations. A major theoretical insight from Foucault highlighted by Fairclough is this constitutive view of discourse, which positions discourse as actively constructing society through complex and typically unseen processes.⁷⁵ As Fairclough explains this constitutive view, discourse functions

as contributing to the production, transformation, and reproduction of the objects [and subjects] of social life ... discourse is in an active relation to reality, that language signifies reality in the sense of constructing meanings for it, rather than that discourse is in a passive relation to reality, with language merely referring to objects which are taken to be given in reality.⁷⁶

⁷³ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 63.

⁷⁴ However, Fairclough is critical that Foucault's theory is theoretically sophisticated, but not practically usable, or perhaps too narrow. Foucault is more focused on the domains of knowledge that are constructed by discourse than on discourse itself. Fairclough explains that it is not sufficient to simply apply Foucault's insights on discourse to discourse analysis, but rather to parse out the elements that can make for a more robust theoretical framework.

⁷⁵ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 39.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

Yet, Fairclough warns against a temptation to overemphasize the constitutive aspect of discourse and ignore its social determination, or to reduce social practice to discourse. Rather, he emphasizes a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure, in which the discursive constitution of society stems from “a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented to real, material social structures.”⁷⁷ He explains this dialectical relationship in these terms: “Discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them.”⁷⁸

2.3.2 Discourse and power

Fairclough highlights Foucault’s move toward decentering the subject, which entails “the view of the subject as constituted, reproduced and transformed in and through social practice, and the view of the subject as fragmented.”⁷⁹ Foucault argues that modern subject formation involves the construction of individuality, or individual identity, as a means of regulation. Yet, Fairclough objects to the ways in which this positioning of the subject can exclude active social agency and instead advocates for a dialectic approach to the subject, one that “sees social subjects as shaped by discursive practices, yet also capable of reshaping and restructuring those practices.”⁸⁰

Fairclough draws from Foucault to outline the relationship between power and discourse. For Foucault, power, particularly in modernity, is not an ontological entity or a force for good or evil. Rather, it is better understood as a complex cluster of relationships, constantly in flux. Foucault sees power as omnipresent: “not because it

⁷⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 45.

has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another.”⁸¹ At the same time, while omnipresent, power is also evasive. It “is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.”⁸² As part of its elusiveness, modern power rises “from below” rather than being imposed from above. Foucault asserts: “Power does not work negatively by forcefully dominating those who are subject to it; it incorporates them, and is ‘productive’ in the sense that it shapes and ‘retools’ them to fit in with its needs.”⁸³ It grows out of certain “microtechniques” that involve the formation and regulation of the individual subject, such as the examination. Fairclough explains that there is

a dual relation between power and knowledge in modern society: on the one hand, the techniques of power are developed on the basis of knowledge which is generated for example, in the social sciences; on the other hand, the techniques are very much concerned with exercising power in the process of gathering knowledge.⁸⁴

Significantly, the practices of power in modernity are largely discursive. To analyze social structures and institutions in terms of power requires understanding and analyzing their discursive practices.⁸⁵ It entails looking at the ways in which “the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1* (New York: Random House, 1978), 93.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸³ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” in *Language and Politics*, ed. M. Shapiro, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 110 as quoted in Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 50.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 216.

As he conceptualizes the relationship between power and transformation, Fairclough sees discourse as a mode of political and ideological practice, which creates and transforms power relations, as well as the collective entities that power relations shape. It is both a site of power struggle and a stake in power struggle. In other words, power struggles are enacted through discourse. Part of the power struggle is over access to shaping discourse, over who gets to set the terms of the conversation. Fairclough quotes Foucault to illustrate this relationship: “Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.”⁸⁷ Illustrative of the evasive nature of power, individuals do not tend to be aware of how their discursive practices are shaped by social structures and relations of power nor are they cognizant of how their discursive practices effect and shape social structures and relations of power.

2.3.3 Discourse and ideology

For Fairclough, ideology is another essential conceptual component located in the realm of sustaining or restructuring power relations. Fairclough asserts three important claims about ideology: 1) it has a material existence in social practices of institutions; 2) the constitution of subjects is one of the more significant ‘ideological effects;’ and 3) institutions are both “sites of and stakes in struggle, which points to struggle in and over discourse as a focus for an ideologically-oriented discourse analysis.”⁸⁸ The struggle in and over discourse is also a part of hegemonic struggle.⁸⁹ Fairclough defines ideology as “significations/constructions of reality (the physical

⁸⁷ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁹ Fairclough develops his notion of ideology from Althusser. He also points out limitations in Althusser’s theory, namely that dominant ideology is positioned as one-sided and monolithic while struggle, contradiction, and transformation are marginalized.

world, social relations, social identities), which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination.”⁹⁰ Ideologies that work to establish or sustain domination serve this purpose best when they are naturalized or taken as common sense. Yet, their naturalized status should not be taken as stable; ideologies are often contested and subject to the struggle to reshape discursive practices in the context of transforming relations of domination.

Ideologies are embedded in social structures, which allows for their continual reproduction, while, at the same time, also located in events that lead to the transformation of structures.⁹¹ This relationship between structures and events is dialectical. All of these practices and processes typically take place without the awareness of individuals; they are naturalized and taken for granted. As such, ideology tends to legitimate existing social practices and power relations. However, while ideology may function in the construction of subjects as naturalized, thus giving the illusion of an autonomous subject, there are also occasions in which the subject encounters contradictory ideologies, leading to confusion and the problematization of convention. These are the conditions under which awareness, as well as transformation is most likely to develop.⁹² Fairclough again emphasizes his dialectical position:

subjects are ideologically positioned, but they are also capable of acting creatively to make their own connections between the diverse practices and ideologies to which they are exposed, and to restructure positioning practices and structures. The balance between the subject and ideological ‘effect’ and the subject as active agent, is a variable which depends upon social conditions such as the relative stability of relations of domination.⁹³

2.3.4 Hegemonic discourses

⁹⁰ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 87.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 91.

Fairclough develops his view of ideology and power by situating it within a theory of hegemonic power. The notion of hegemony allows for the explanation of change and transformation in discursive practices and power dynamics. Hegemony is a means and structure of power in which one social or economic class or group establishes dominance over others through a complex process of consent and concessions: “Hegemony is about constructing alliances, and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes, through concessions or through ideological means, to win their consent.”⁹⁴ Hegemonic power explains why subordinate groups of people participate in social structures and actions that do not benefit them but rather benefit a dominant group instead. This process of consent and concessions is largely unseen and naturalized. It is facilitated by the ideological and political practices of discourse. It often takes the form of ‘common sense.’ It is also involved in the formation of subjects. Of course, hegemony is not the only form of organizational power in contemporary society. There is also the form of power in which domination is achieved by uncompromising imposition of rules, norms, and conventions, i.e. coercive power.

According to Fairclough, the concept of hegemony provides a means for analyzing social practice, in which discourse plays a role in power relations—reproducing, restructuring or challenging hegemony. The concept of hegemony also offers a means for analyzing discursive practice itself as a mode of hegemonic struggle. Fairclough describes discourse within hegemonic struggle in terms of articulation, disarticulation, and rearticulation, the latter two of which lead to discursive change. The problematization of conventions in language (e.g., patriarchal language) often produces discursive change—“disarticulating existing orders of

⁹⁴ Ibid., 92.

discourse and rearticulating new orders of discourse, new discursive hegemonies.”⁹⁵

These discursive changes are always rooted in previous or existing orders. They do not reflect new language or conventions, but rather new combinations of existing conventions, codes or elements—in a word, intertextuality.

2.3.5 Intertextuality and interdiscursivity

Fairclough uses the concept of intertextuality to convey that the idea that discursive practices have an interdependent relationship that constitutes, defines and transforms them. Thus, texts always take or render from other contemporary and historically prior texts.⁹⁶ Intertextuality refers to the ways in which texts are shaped by previous texts to which they are responding and future texts they are anticipating. Each text is a link in a chain.

Fairclough connects this with the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice. Texts are historical. They absorb and are built out of previous texts; at the same time, they rework and rearticulate these texts, influencing mentalities and bringing about social change. In this sense, texts are productive. Fairclough once again reminds us, however, that the productivity of texts is not a boundless “space for textual innovation and play.”⁹⁷ Rather, it is socially constrained and restricted by relations of power. The constraints of power upon intertextuality can be explained through the concept of hegemony, which frames “intertextual processes and processes of contesting and restructuring orders of discourse as processes of hegemonic struggle.”⁹⁸ Thus, to bring the conceptual approach of intertextuality to the analysis of discourse “entails an emphasis upon the heterogeneity of texts, and a mode of analysis

⁹⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 103.

which highlights the diverse and often contradictory elements and threads which go to make up a text.”⁹⁹ It is often the source of ambivalence and contradiction in a text.

Given the connection between texts and social reality, Fairclough argues that analyzing discursive change provides a tool for analyzing social change. Discursive practices within orders of discourse are heterogeneous. They can function as both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices. They can often be contradictory. This again gets to Fairclough’s emphasis on the dialectical and ambivalent nature of discourse, in which the change and flux demand analytic attention. While hegemonic struggle should not be reduced to discursive practice, there is an interdependent and dialectical relationship between the two, particularly when one aims to explain social change and transformation. Fairclough’s emphasis on the heterogeneous and unstable nature of discursive practice within orders of discourse points to the potential and actualization of social change. Again, this view of discursive, as well as social, change is complex and layered, grounded in a historical process of intertextuality, in which prior texts and conventions are rearticulated and transformed. Discursive practices have implications for social realities, as Fairclough explains:

discursive practice, the production, distribution, and consumption (including interpretation) of texts, is a facet of hegemonic struggle which contributes in varying degrees to the reproduction or transformation not only of the existing order of discourse (for example, through the ways prior texts and conventions are articulated in text production), but also through that of existing social and power relations.¹⁰⁰

An order of discourse can be seen as the discursive facet of hegemony. At the same time, the power to determine the articulation and rearticulation of orders of discourse is a stake in hegemonic struggle.

⁹⁹ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 104.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

Critical discourse analysis hinges on the idea that social reality is shaped by unseen, naturalized, and depoliticizing practices, that is, practices that function to hide the politics of their formation. For my purposes in this study, it offers an interpretive framework from which to view the construction of “religion.”¹⁰¹ To draw from Fairclough’s theory, especially the view of the constitutive nature of discourse, points the question beyond how “religion” is a discursive construction to how these discursive practices might shape social reality, including the experience of religion. Applying this framework to religious pluralism as a discourse involves recognizing that the texts and talks of religious pluralism not only point to social practices but are themselves social, political and ideological practices. It requires continuously keeping in view not just the phenomena that the discourse of religious pluralism seeks to describe but also the ways in which these discursive practices of describing and analyzing the subject of religious plurality simultaneously construct, reproduce or transform their subjects. It necessitates keeping in mind the co-constitutive relationship between the discourse of religious pluralism and the social and political realities of religious pluralism. Moreover, it illuminates intertextual and interdiscursive relationships.

In the next chapter, I draw from these theoretical foundations and turn my analysis to the discourse of religious pluralism. As I examine the construction of the concept of pluralism, the history of this discourse, and its discursive practices, I look at how it functions as a mode of governmentality as it aims to orchestrate social

¹⁰¹ There is already an academic discourse on the construction of “religion,” which includes some discourse analysis. Some works by scholar critically examining the construction of the category of “religion” include Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) and Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

cohesion and manage religion within a liberal framework. I parse its interdiscursive and intertextual relationship with the discourses of liberalism and tolerance and bring to the surface a few of its discursive practices that serve a regulatory function.

Chapter 3: Situating the Discourse of Religious Pluralism

“Today, as in every era, Americans are appropriating anew the meaning of “We, the people of the United States of America. . . .” What does it mean to say “we” in a multireligious America? How do “we” relate to one another, when that “we” includes Buddhist Americans, like the Hawaiian born Buddhist astronaut who died on the Challenger, Muslim Americans, like the mayor of a small town in Texas, and Sikh Americans, like the research scientist in Fairfax, Virginia. What, then, is pluralism?”

—Diana Eck, 1997¹⁰²

“I realized that it was precisely because of America's glaring imperfections that I should seek to participate in its progress, carve a place in its promise, and play a role in its possibility. And at its heart and at its best, America was about pluralism.”

—Eboo Patel, 2010¹⁰³

3.1. Defining Pluralism

In these statements, scholar/activists Diana Eck and Eboo Patel situate religious pluralism as an essential element of and ethos for the American public sphere.

However, the dominant discourse of religious pluralism— of which these statements are examples— does not just work to describe a plurality of religions; it also *prescribes* an ideal approach to diversity rooted in liberalism. It functions to regulate and govern religion in ways that reproduce liberal norms and ideologies. In this chapter, I define and situate this discourse.¹⁰⁴

Parsing the discourse of religious pluralism involves identifying various ways in which the term “pluralism” is framed. Broadly, pluralism is a term that indicates diversity of some kind, typically affirming that diversity. In early usage in the twentieth century, philosopher Horace Kallen brought the term into currency around 1924

¹⁰² Diana L. Eck, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁰³ Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 89.

¹⁰⁴ Portions of my discussion of the discourse of pluralism and how it operates as a mode of governmentality appear in Puett, “Managing Religion: Religious Pluralism, Liberalism, and Governmentality.”

writing about cultural pluralism in order to advocate for respect for ethnic diversity.¹⁰⁵ A few decades later, sociologist Will Herberg, in the influential 1955 book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, used the term “pluralist” in contrast to “melting pot assimilationist” as part of his argument for recognition of difference and diversity.¹⁰⁶ He argued that Americans believe “the plurality of religious groups is a proper and legitimate condition.”¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Herberg contended that pluralism entailed a “unity in multiplicity,” grounded in a “common faith,” a kind of civil religion, and involving cooperation and coexistence.¹⁰⁸ He asserted that this common faith was at the core of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, which he designated “religions of democracy,” and that religious pluralism was a key to American social cohesion, “an essential aspect of the American Way of Life.” He suggested that it served as an unofficial religious establishment.¹⁰⁹ Thus, for Herberg, pluralism entailed both diversity and a unifying common ground.

A look at theories of multiculturalism as governance for managing diversity reveals parallels with pluralism. Augie Fleras describes three major models of multiculturalism as governance: conservative, liberal and plural. Conservative models advance diversity or culture-blind governance. They tend to focus on equality despite differences and tend to offer limited recognition of group-based differences. Liberal models are more tolerant of diversity. They advocate for the dominant culture to accommodate difference. As Fleras explains, they endorse “a governance (or society) of many cultures as long as people are treated the same (equally) as a matter of course, yet treated similarly (as equals) by taking differences into account when necessary to

¹⁰⁵ Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

¹⁰⁶ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

ensure equality, belonging, and participation.”¹¹⁰ Plural models of multiculturalism then are more diversity conscious. They take differences seriously and tend to advocate for autonomous coexistence rather than assimilation or adaptation to a dominant culture. As Fleras explains, the distinctions between these models are often more analytic than actualized. In practice, multicultural governance may draw from varying aspects from these three models.

The dominant discourse of religious pluralism that I explore in this project is predominantly a liberal pluralism. While it does advocate for taking differences seriously, it does so within a liberal framework. It encourages diverse religions to participate in a dominant culture—that of liberalism. Through my critique of this discourse, I theorize a critical pluralism, a counter-hegemonic discourse that interrogates the power, privilege, and assumptions naturalized by the dominant discourse.

For my purposes in this project, I understand religious pluralism as a second-order concept used to manage a multiplicity of diverse social practices and institutions. It broadly entails “a commitment to recognize and understand others across perceived or claimed lines of religious difference.”¹¹¹ While some scholars use pluralism interchangeably with plurality or diversity, which I will elaborate later in this chapter, I argue that the term pluralism carries prescriptive norms and thus, should not be seen as synonymous with diversity. Rather, pluralism works to define and order religious diversity. In this sense, I concur with Diana Eck’s claim that “pluralism is only one of the possible responses to this diversity.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Augie Fleras, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Multicultural Governance in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15.

¹¹¹ Klassen and Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” 2.

¹¹² Eck, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*.

Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen elaborate a brief genealogy of religious pluralism in which they highlight the historical fluctuations in the use of the term to illuminate the ambiguous nature of pluralism, a category and discourse that frequently shifts between descriptive and prescriptive positions.¹¹³ As they argue, it is “a fully modern concept arising in concert with equally modern ideas of secularity and religion.”¹¹⁴ Religious pluralism is often used to refer to plurality or religious diversity, thus seeming to function as a descriptive term. Many studies of religious pluralism in the U.S. involve mapping religious terrain and they often highlight a growing religious diversity, described as a “new” plurality or pluralism that has occurred in the U.S. since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Yet, pluralism tends to quickly shift from a descriptive to a prescriptive category; or it appears to be used as a descriptive term, while implicitly reproducing prescriptive norms. For example, the knowledge of religious diversity gained from mapping religious terrain is often used to advocate for practices of tolerance, respect, and understanding. This normative usage prescribes a positive affirmation of plurality and represents an ethos for engaging religious diversity, negotiating religious difference and fostering social cohesion. Bender and Klassen argue that these empirical studies may offer a valuable view of the American religious landscape, but they do so while simultaneously embedding “prescriptive models of interaction and normative understandings of religious communities.”¹¹⁵ As the category of religious pluralism ostensibly works to describe religious diversity, which assumes multiplicity and difference, it simultaneously defines and orders difference, which assumes a commonality. What remains hidden are the values, beliefs, and practices prescribed by those assumptions of common ground.

¹¹³ Klassen and Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” 6-7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

Moreover, as these discursive practices describe a certain reality, they simultaneously shape and form that reality. Thus, it is the nature of values, ideas, and practices and how they operate to construct reality and regulate behavior that I aim to illuminate in this thesis from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

3.2 The Social Context of Pluralism

As a discourse, religious pluralism is a way of talking about a set of social practices and structures. Thus, it arises out of and responds to a social context. Yet, it simultaneously constructs this social context, by shaping meanings that order these social practices. Here, I want to look at some of the social structures that provide the context for the discourse of religious pluralism. Several central features characterize the American social context in which pluralism operates—demographic diversity, institutionalized liberal norms, especially freedom, tolerance, and secularism, a lingering Protestant cultural establishment, and an evolving multicultural narrative.

3.2.1 Demographic diversity

The national narrative that celebrates tolerance and freedom has a long history in the United States. From the early colonial period onward, this narrative has also extolled America's remarkable demographic, religious and cultural diversity. To that effect, the American story has been constructed through accounts, such as one written in 1782 by Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, a French immigrant who spent many years traveling through the colonies, that described a diverse young nation: "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men."¹¹⁶ This report was not unique. Many European observers, themselves all too aware of battles in their home countries over church establishments and religious freedom, made a point to highlight the distinctive circumstances of religious diversity in America, either to celebrate it or condemn it.

¹¹⁶ As quoted in William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 12.

For example, Alexis de Tocqueville described the character of the U.S. as the result of “the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty,” which he argued “elsewhere have often been at war but in America have somehow been incorporated into one another and marvelously combined.”¹¹⁷

Despite the celebration of this great social experiment in diversity and tolerance, early America was not really so diverse initially—nor so tolerant. Before 1820, over 95 percent of the population adhered to some variety of European Protestantism.¹¹⁸ A significant shift in diversity came in the early to mid-nineteenth century, which saw a more radical demographic shift than any other period in U.S. history.¹¹⁹ Prior to this time, what counted as diversity was largely Anglo, Protestant, and more specifically Calvinist. By 1850, immigration demographics had shifted to include large numbers of Irish and Germans, many of whom were Catholic (about a third of German immigrants and nearly all Irish immigrants). Protestant Germans were Lutheran, which began to erode the Calvinist hegemony within American Protestantism.¹²⁰ At the same time, there was the first substantial immigration of Chinese immigrants—around 50,000 between the late 1840s and 1860. Territorial acquisitions in the South and Southwest, home to many Roman Catholic Spanish-speaking residents, also contributed to an increase in the Catholic population of the young nation. Historian William Hutchison writes that between 1820 and 1860, the percentage of the population that were Protestant was reduced to only 75 percent.¹²¹

This increasing diversity at times contributed to social tensions and fuelled nativist movements, which have waxed and waned throughout American history. The

¹¹⁷ Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 48.

¹¹⁸ Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 20.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

Immigration Act of 1924 evinced these tensions and the negative responses to shifting demographics they often inspired. The Immigration Act established a system of national origin quotas in immigration that resulted in the privileging of western European applicants over southern and eastern Europeans. It also excluded Asian immigrants. It remained in effect until 1965 when the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished the national origin quota system. Consequently, immigration patterns changed to include a considerable increase of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. This has led to an increase in both non-Christian religions and diversity within Christianity in the United States. As of 2008, Protestants make up approximately 51% of the U.S. population. This encompasses hundreds of different denominations. Catholics make up the next largest group at 23.9% of the population, followed by the unaffiliated at 16.1%. Judaism is the next largest religion at 1.7%, followed by Buddhism at .7%, Islam at .6% and Hinduism at .4%.¹²²

3.2.2 The First Amendment and the Institutionalization of Liberal Norms

American commitments to religion and religious freedom led to the adoption of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution with its protection of the free exercise of religion and guard against state establishment of religion. These legal protections of religious freedom give the appearance of an unregulated public sphere in which religion can be freely enacted and exercised. However, this mode of governance has shaped an American style of secularism, in which religion is highly regulated and best recognized as an individual, private belief exercised in the private sphere. The enforcement and protection of religious freedom and First Amendment rights has generally fallen to the judicial branch of the American government. In judicial cases that involve religion, courts find themselves in the position of defining religion.

¹²² *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic* (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 2008), 5.

Frequently, this ad hoc definition stems from a dominant model of religion, the norms of Protestantism.¹²³

3.2.3 The Protestant Establishment

For all the diversity and shifting demographics in the American population, American culture has continually been dominated by Protestant norms. While Americans have ideologically valued religious freedom and disestablishment, in practice, Protestant Christianity has historically occupied a place of dominance that resulted in an informal or “social” establishment. During its history of rapid change, Americans have sought unity, order, and coherence. Hutchison argues that “a religious establishment, even if its legal sanctions were scattered and miscellaneous, as in the American instance, could serve as a vehicle of social as well as religious coherence.”¹²⁴ The hegemonic nature of the Protestant establishment has entailed a slow process of naturalizing Protestantism so that it has ceased to seem particular and instead seemed normative, universal, and significantly, quintessentially American. Hutchison argues that Protestant establishment permeated American society in such a way that it provided the foundation for what came to be seen as a universal American ethos, involving individualism, moralism, activism, and millennial optimism, also distinctly Protestant in character.¹²⁵ For most Americans, this informal religious establishment was just enough to provide for social cohesion without sacrificing ideals of religious freedom and disestablishment.¹²⁶

Historian Charles Lippy also describes the diffusion of Protestant thought in American culture. Protestantism, as the dominant religion in American society,

¹²³ See Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹²⁴ Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 60.

¹²⁵ Hutchison identifies five prominent elements of the Protestant ethos of nineteenth-century America: “biblicism, individualism, moralism, activism, and millennial optimism.” *Ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

gradually “liberalized” and “Americanized” to become less particular and more universal, which meant that it underwent a “gradual homogenization,” in which denominations accustomed to dominance “downplayed what made each distinct from the other.”¹²⁷ Simultaneously, the center of authority in Protestantism shifted away from doctrine and tradition to private, subjective feeling and spirituality. As part of the privatization of religion, personal experience became the foundation for belief and the starting point of theological understanding.¹²⁸ Moreover, Lippy argues that spirituality, a term he uses to refer to a private, rather than communal endeavor, eventually replaced religion as the locus for talking about meaning in life in American public discourse.

3.2.4 From Tri-faith to Multiculturalism

By the middle of the twentieth century, the narrative of Protestant America expanded to become Protestant-Catholic-Jewish America. It began shifting during the war years and especially after World War II as Protestants, Catholics, and Jews saw themselves sharing in a common belief in America as a privileged and chosen nation that was united in opposition against foreign enemies, first Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and later atheist communists. Nevertheless, the Protestant-Catholic-Jewish dynamic has been defined by Protestant norms and the ways in which Catholics and Jews shared beliefs in common with or similar to Protestants. Moreover, in this dynamic, only these three religions were deemed acceptable and legitimately American.¹²⁹

After World War II, the discourse of religious pluralism—a discourse that affirmed and even extolled religious diversity—developed as a moral advance away

¹²⁷ Charles H. Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 154.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁹ Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 202.

from a long history of religious intolerance and discrimination in the United States. Along with a rising civil rights movement, pluralism grew out of a move toward increased social inclusion and equality and, eventually, a recognition of diverse group identities, those of immigrant ethnic groups as well as African Americans, Native Americans, women and others.¹³⁰ The discourse of pluralism promoted the idea of the equal moral worth of all citizens regardless of their race, ethnicity, or religion.

3.3 Pluralism and the Study of Religion

The dominant discourse on pluralism is not just the product of on-the-ground interactions among diverse religions or public conversations in civil society but has developed through a dialectical relationship with the discourse on pluralism in the academic world. Pluralism has received attention throughout the social sciences, but it has occupied a special position in the academic study of religion. Scholars such Russell McCutcheon, Timothy Fitzgerald, and Amanda Porterfield argue that it has become a dominant interpretive framework within the discipline of religious studies.¹³¹ Given that this thesis examines themes of pluralism in religious studies textbooks, I want to examine the role that pluralism plays in that discipline in some detail.

3.3.1 Pluralism, Protestantism, and theologies of religion

After WWII, the field of religious studies saw dramatic growth in the U.S., with increased demand for world religion courses, “a result of widespread cultural approval of religion as an essential component of American democracy.”¹³² Amanda Porterfield argues that the discourse of religious pluralism was shaped in Protestant academic

¹³⁰ Ibid., 218.

¹³¹ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*; Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*; Amanda Porterfield, “Religious Pluralism in Religious Studies,” in *Gods in America: Religious Pluralism in the United States*, ed. Charles L. Cohen and Ronald L. Number (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58–94.

¹³² Porterfield, “Religious Pluralism in Religious Studies,” 62. Notably, the growth of the world religions paradigm coincides with pluralist ideology and discourse, which I will discuss in more detail in the preceding chapter.

institutions, from which it emerged “to operate as a dynamic factor in the growth of religious studies” and eventually came to occupy a place in the study of American religious history, both as a subject of inquiry and an interpretive framework.¹³³ The American field of religious studies emerged out of Protestant seminaries and their focus on scripture and theology. While scholars in religious studies have worked to distinguish their method and focus from those of theology, remnants of the Protestant theological roots of the discipline linger. Porterfield argues that the concept of religious pluralism in religious studies has been shaped by liberal Protestant ideals of ecumenism and interfaith cooperation as well as the influence of scholars such as Mircea Eliade and Paul Tillich, who “promoted variants of a romantic approach to religion that appealed to universal structures of human consciousness, and to a universal human quest for meaning at work in all the different cultures and religious traditions of the world.”¹³⁴

Pluralism also has resonance with Christian theological studies, though usually identified as pluralist theology or theology of religions. Made popular by theologians and scholars such as John Hick and Paul Knitter, pluralist theology aims to affirm the validity of all religious traditions including those outside of Christianity and the value of religious diversity. It involves an epistemological and theological perspective toward “other” religions regarding their claims to truth and ultimate reality, often as part of a typology of theological approaches to other religions contrasted with Christian exclusivism, the view that Christianity is singularly true, as well as Christian inclusivism, the view that Christian truth is available to non-Christian religions. Many scholars of religious studies claim that pluralist theology is outside the scope of concern of the category of pluralism as it is deployed in religious studies. However,

¹³³ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 71.

essentialist notions of religion informed by Protestant norms suggest an enduring legacy, a point argued by McCutcheon, Fitzgerald, and Masuzawa.¹³⁵

3.3.2 The turn to pluralism: American religious history and the sociology of religion

In the second half of the last century, historians of American religions turned their focus to pluralism and, Porterfield argues, “came to define religious pluralism with increasing clarity in the process of grappling with the problem of comprehending growing religious diversity in the United States.”¹³⁶ For many years, the study of U.S. religion hardly extended beyond the study of mainline Protestantism. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, the historiography of religion in America began to shift. It had previously been viewed as either a subfield of Church History or subfield of U.S. History that focused primarily on Protestantism and its role in the public sphere. Sydney Alhstrom’s *A Religious History of the American People*, published in 1972, gave more attention to a wider diversity of religions than any scholar before. By the 1980s, “Religion in North America,” or “American Religious History,” was recognized as a distinct field, or subfield, largely due to the work of scholars such as Catherine Albanese and Thomas Tweed, who advocated for multiple narratives and telling all the stories of religion in America, not just the Protestant stories. Tweed argues that during that same time, an “ethnographic turn” led many scholars to focus on participant observation and religious practice. Along with this new approach to “lived religions,” many scholars worked to illuminate the breadth of America’s religious diversity, which had previously received little attention in the academic study of religion.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Russell McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*.

¹³⁶ Porterfield, “Religious Pluralism in Religious Studies,” 60.

¹³⁷ Thomas A. Tweed, “Expanding the Study of U.S. Religion: Reflections on the State of a Subfield,” *Religion* 40, no. 4 (2010): 252. In offering prominent examples of works that indicate

During this time period, in the sociology of religion, pluralism was primarily understood within the context of the grand narrative of secularization theory, often taken for granted as the defining narrative about religion in North America. Early sociologists of religion Max Weber and Emile Durkheim both linked the increasing social differentiation of modernization with secularization. Peter Berger's 1967 book *The Sacred Canopy* made the move to link pluralism with secularization and the declining significance of religion in modern society. According to Berger, once a singular religion no longer provided the sole source of legitimacy and authority for all aspects of society, i.e., "the sacred canopy," religion became a matter of personal choice. Subsequently, religions began to compete for individuals' preferences, thus creating a social climate in which multiple religions could exist side by side, a climate of pluralism.¹³⁸ However, some twenty years later, sociologists began to highlight the seeming persistence of religion and question the accuracy of secularization theory, particularly the claim that modernity has led to the declining social significance of religion. Thus, sociologists addressing diversity in the past fifty years tend to frame pluralism as either an indication of religion's waning social authority or a sign of its enduring importance.¹³⁹

Accordingly, studies of American religion invariably connect it with religious pluralism, constructing and reproducing the dominant, liberal discourse of religious

this "ethnographic turn," as well as bringing attention to greater diversity in American religions, Tweed cites Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); and his own *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³⁸ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*. Years after the publication of this text, Berger wrote that his secularization theory included one big mistake and one great insight. The mistake was his link between the decline of religion and modernity. The great insight was his recognition of the dialectical relationship between secularization and pluralism-- that the relegation of religion to a discrete sphere undermines taken-for-granted beliefs and values, which in turn supports religious diversity and pluralism. Peter Berger, "Protestantism and the Quest for Certainty," *The Christian Century*, September 26, 1998.

¹³⁹ As an example of the former, see Bruce, *God Is Dead*; As an example of the latter, see Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*.

pluralism. They define and describe what pluralism entails, or ought to entail. They situate pluralism within an American narrative, naturalizing pluralism as a standard category through which to describe and understand religious diversity. Moreover, their framing and description of religious diversity has influenced broader public discourse on religious pluralism and managing religious diversity.

3.3.3 Two Approaches to Pluralism

Here I want to look at two major approaches to American religious pluralism—pluralism as multiplicity and pluralism as a tension between diversity and unity— in order to discern some common rhetorical features of the discourse of religious pluralism, as well as their regulatory effects.

1. Pluralism as Multiplicity

Lippy

In the 2000 text *Pluralism Comes of Age*, Charles H. Lippy, a historian of American religions, examines expanding religious diversity in the U.S. through the category or lens of religious pluralism. While Lippy gives a broad historical overview, he focuses on the twentieth century, a time in which American religious culture is “more diverse and considerably more complex than it was at the dawn of the century—and all the richer as a result.”¹⁴⁰ Lippy never precisely defines pluralism nor his other key term, religion. Rather, he makes a number of descriptive statements about pluralism from which the reader might surmise something of a working definition. Generally, Lippy uses the term pluralism in a descriptive manner to correspond with plurality or multiplicity. Yet, he states that he aims to present more than “a portrait of increasing diversity;” rather he aims to “show that the shifts in the century when taken

¹⁴⁰ Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age*, ix.

together are more than that.”¹⁴¹ For Lippy, pluralism is “a lens through which to view” American religious patterns.¹⁴² He asserts that pluralism is the context in which American religious movements and trends can be understood. Lippy continually alludes to the substance of pluralism, but never precisely elaborates it. Rather, he makes numerous vague, ambiguous references to pluralism as “so much more” than diversity, or a story that is “more finely nuanced.”¹⁴³ These references are value laden, implying that pluralism benefits the social order by being “richer” and “more” than simple demographic diversity.

Lippy takes a teleological view of American religious history as a progressive trajectory of increasing diversity and pluralism, and he narrates the successive expansion of pluralism through U.S. history. He describes religion in America as innovative and novel. He identifies denominationalism as a noteworthy and distinctive American “contribution to the story of religion in human culture.”¹⁴⁴

Denominationalism led to pluralism, which eventually expanded beyond the denomination. What begins as diversity among Protestant denominations eventually grows to a diversity of many different religions. At the same time, Lippy identifies many different coexisting layers and locations of pluralism: within Protestantism, as power shifts away from mainline Protestants to emerging evangelical denominations and new forms of worship; within Catholicism, as changing immigration demographics lead to ethnic pluralism; within Christianity, as the ecumenical movement arises, and within society as a whole, as Catholicism and Judaism join Protestantism as the “three-pronged pluralism” of public religion in America. Notably, Lippy gives scant attention to Islam, Baha’i, several new religious movements, as well as Buddhism and Hinduism

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 3.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

(included under the troubling heading of “The Lure of the Orient,” which is not followed by a critique of Orientalism). They are subsumed under a chapter titled, “The Proliferation of Pluralism,” and seemingly included primarily to highlight the great multiplicity and diversity of the American religious landscape.¹⁴⁵

For Lippy, pluralism entails plurality, what Albanese calls “manyness,” but Lippy does not emphasize a tension with unity or oneness as Albanese does. Rather, Lippy sees an ever-increasing manyness, which he attributes to an increasing emphasis on personal experience and belief, individualism, and privatization. Lippy argues that pluralism has “come of age,” i.e., progressed to such a point that religious communities that once may have felt the need to identify themselves against a presumed Protestant majority no longer have to do so and instead “simply assumed the right to stake out a place for themselves on the religious landscape of the nation.”¹⁴⁶ As he moves to his conclusion, he argues again for a pluralism that is greater than the sum of its parts, “about far more than numbers... It is also about the myriad ways individuals construct a world of meaning through which they understand and interpret their own human experience.”¹⁴⁷ He ends his text with a claim that promotes pluralism as a positive value.

On balance, it may well be that the greatest contribution made by the United States to global religious life is its demonstrating that, however vast the pluralism, a vital religious culture can flourish. Pluralism does not undermine common life, but seems to enrich it.¹⁴⁸

How then does Lippy demonstrate that common life has been enriched? For Lippy, it would seem to be by the existence of pluralism. Thus, pluralism enriches common life by making it pluralistic. According to this tautology, pluralism—diversity or plurality—

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 108.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 122–123.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 160.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 162.

is good. Moreover, this claim makes a subtle nod to American exceptionalism, a view that this progressive unfolding of American history has led to the country's distinctive position in the world. Lippy proclaims that pluralism makes America great and positions pluralism as a quintessentially American value.

Berger, Stark and Finke

Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke also view pluralism as multiplicity. Their framing of pluralism is best understood as a response to secularization theory, thus I briefly want to describe the role of pluralism in classical secularization theory. Sociologist Peter Berger defines secularization as a social process that involves the lessening significance of religion. His sacred canopy metaphor refers to the canopy of legitimation that religion once provided to social arrangements that were socially constructed but imagined to be natural or God-given; to step outside this canopy was tantamount to stepping outside the social order and into chaos. Religions were once powerful mechanisms of world construction and world maintenance. However, with modern social differentiation, religion became a matter of personal choice. The social importance of religion declined and religion no longer provided this sacred canopy. Religion lost its plausibility structure.

Berger makes an argument for the relationship between secularization and pluralism, that secularization — and the problem of plausibility— create the conditions for pluralism. He describes a failure of legitimation where “the fundamental problem of the religious institutions is how to keep going in a milieu that no longer takes for granted their definitions of reality.”¹⁴⁹ For Berger, pluralism means a plurality of legitimate religions. It refers to cases “in which different religious groups are tolerated

¹⁴⁹ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 156.

by the state and engage in free competition with each other.”¹⁵⁰ Pluralism involves “an increasingly friendly collaboration between the different groups engaged in the religious market.”¹⁵¹ It is largely the result of the demonopolization of religion and individualization. The demonopolization of religion, as the church no longer provided the sole authority for all aspects of society, naturally paved the way for religious pluralism. It created an environment in which multiple religious traditions could exist side by side. As religion became a matter of personal choice rather than authoritative imposition, religions began to market themselves to individuals. Thus pluralism was part of a market situation. Berger argued that pluralism was a sign of secularization and the gradual decline of religion.

Yet the persistence of religion in the public sphere, especially in the U.S., points to flaws or even failures in classical secularization theory. In the last twenty years, Courtney Bender argues, many current sociological accounts of religious pluralism have been formed in response to the failure of the decline of religion thesis as part of secularization theory. Strongly critical of secularization theory, Stark and Finke have made a converse argument for the relationship between pluralism and the influence of religion in society. They argue from “rational choice theory” that “within the limits of their information and understanding, restricted by available options, guided by their preferences and tastes, humans attempt to make rational choices” and that this principle of human rationality should be applied to attempts to understand religious decisions and choices.¹⁵² They explain pluralism using a “supply-side” theory of religious economies, arguing that to the degree that religious economies are “unregulated,” that is, no religious monopoly is enforced by the state, they are more

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 135.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁵² Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, 38.

vibrant. They claim that increased diversity and competition leads to increased religious participation.

Stark and Finke agree with the proponents of secularization theory that there is evidence of decline among mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S. and Europe. However, they interpret this decline not as evidence of the decline of religion *per se* but of religious institutions that are no longer competitive and not adapting to meet market demands. For all the denominations in decline, there are other religious organizations and institutions growing in number and influence. As they argue, “effort pays—that to the extent that organizations work harder, they are more successful.”¹⁵³ They sum up their conclusions explaining that “societies with ‘universal’ religions aren’t very religious when it comes to organized participation” and “only in unregulated religious economies with a multitude of competing religious firms will there be high levels of commitment.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the more pluralistic a society is the more religion will thrive. Stark and Finke assume that religions in the U.S. operate freely.

They argue

government interference in the affairs of religious organizations is relatively rare... Of course some religious groups are considered deviant by most Americans. And of course groups constantly attack one another’s legitimacy. But the range of conventionality is far, far wider than in nations with regulated religious economies and state churches. And the range of legality is wider still.¹⁵⁵

Their view of American civil society as unregulated ignores the regulatory nature of liberalism and the ways in which liberal societies insist on universal conformity within liberal norms. Along these lines, Courtney Bender points out that the rational choice or free market model of religious pluralism depends primarily on data compiled from varieties of Christian groups. “The models take a conception of religious belonging

¹⁵³ Ibid., 257.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.

(voluntary membership in a congregation that the believer himself or herself chooses) as the norm into which other forms of membership are adapted or translated in order for analysis to proceed.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, this model of religious pluralism works to legitimate and reproduce liberal norms.

Bender argues that Stark and Finke’s market model of religious vitality shares secularization theory’s view of religion as differentiated and private. She writes that it “agrees that ‘religion’ in modern society is self-evidently identifiable and, through processes of differentiation, increasingly disentangled from state control and state regulation.”¹⁵⁷ These studies of American religious diversity “share a deep sedimented and taken-for-granted conception of the social conditions that generate pluralism.”¹⁵⁸ They assume that pluralism takes place within “a free and unregulated civil sphere, or civil society.” Rather, Bender explains, religious diversity is not stable, nor is its “political value.”¹⁵⁹ As such, studies of religious pluralism would do well to address “the sociological question of how ‘religion’ is socially constructed (and shaped and regulated) within an American secular society that is committed to certain kinds of governance and citizen or how ‘pluralism’ that takes shape within it relates to these forms.”¹⁶⁰

2. Pluralism as a Tension between Plurality and Unity

Other texts on American religious diversity frame pluralism as an ongoing process that involves negotiating tensions between plurality and unity, difference and common ground, manyness and oneness.

¹⁵⁶ Bender, “Pluralism and Secularism,” 140.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

Albanese

Catherine Albanese's groundbreaking book *America: Religions and Religion*, an overview of religion in America, represented a new approach to interpreting religious diversity when it was published in 1981, and it continues to occupy a pivotal place in the historiography of U.S. religions.¹⁶¹ Frequently used as a textbook, the fifth edition book description claims it has "become the standard introduction to the study of American religious traditions" as it introduces students to "the rich religious diversity that has always been a hallmark of the American religious experience." Albanese, a historian of American religions influenced by the study of comparative religions and the 'history of religions' perspective gained through her studies at the University of Chicago, acknowledges a condition of pluralism in the U.S. previously given too little attention. Critiquing convention in American religious historiography, she argues:

To be a pluralistic land means to be one country made up of many peoples and many religious faiths. Yet when we look at America's history books—and more to the point here, America's religious history books—we find that they generally tell one major story, incorporating the separate stories of many peoples into a single story line arranged chronologically.¹⁶²

She sets out to remedy this shortcoming by paying attention to plurality, telling many stories and then, searching for "the tentative oneness amidst the manyness of the United States."¹⁶³ She takes an approach to the study of religion that stresses "contact and combination."¹⁶⁴

Albanese gives significant attention to the plurality of religious forms and practices throughout U.S. history. She initially shies away from a precise definition of

¹⁶¹ John F. Wilson, *Religion and the American Nation* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 31.

¹⁶² Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), xv.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xxii. See also Catherine L. Albanese, "Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 200 - 226.

religion, calling it elusive and instead aims to describe religion. In line with her contact approach, she emphasizes the ways in which religions have arisen “in the context of dealing with boundaries”— territorial, temporal, corporeal, and social.¹⁶⁵ She also distinguishes between two types of religion: ordinary, or immanent, and extraordinary, or transcendent. She nevertheless ends up with a working definition of religion, “a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings, and values.”¹⁶⁶

In her narrative of American religious history, Albanese looks for what is distinctly American in this history and she gives pluralism a central role. Among the noteworthy features of this text, Albanese deemphasizes the Anglo-European Protestant influence on American religious history and gives significant attention to the religious forms, practices, and histories of Native Americans and those of Spanish, French, and African origin. She also attends to regional religion, looking at the role of space and *terroir* in the unfolding of communities and traditions. While she claims to eschew grand narratives in favor of multiple stories, she simultaneously constructs a comprehensive narrative of American religion, structured around tensions between the “manyness of religions” and the “oneness of religion” in the U.S., thus the subtitle “religions and religion.”

For Albanese, the one religion represents an impulse for social cohesion or religious unity in American society. It exists as an unofficial Protestant establishment. Historically the majority religion in American society, Protestantism has long permeated American culture. As Albanese argues, foundational principles of American governance, such as church-state separation, protections for religious freedom and

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 11.

democratic equality, are imbued with Protestant norms and have favored religious communities organized denominationally.¹⁶⁷

Albanese equates the manyness of religions with religious pluralism.¹⁶⁸ She positions pluralism as essential to the American narrative, “from the first, a central feature of American history.”¹⁶⁹ Her use of the term pluralism tends toward the descriptive, synonymous with plurality. She does not explicitly establish it as a norm of positive engagement among diverse religions. She describes its position in the American context as one of dialectic tension with the oneness of religion, or religious unity. Through pluralism, many religions each try to maintain their separate identities, while simultaneously, the one religion tries to bring them together to establish unity and “dissolve the differences in American life.”¹⁷⁰

Albanese discusses the tensions involved in this dialectic relationship between the manyness and oneness, pluralism and unity. Historically the one religion occupied a dominant position in American society, which subsequently resulted in negative responses toward pluralism and discrimination and conflict for non-Protestant religions. These many religions either resisted the coercive tendencies of the dominant culture by maintaining separate identities or acquiesced and opted “to ‘Americanize’ by becoming more like mainstream Protestants.”¹⁷¹ In fact, most communities did a bit of both. Finally, Albanese describes this condition of dialectic tension as a defining feature of American religious history, as well as the nation itself. She calls the U.S. “among the most pluralistic religious and social experiment in history.”¹⁷² She goes on

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 404.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 499.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 504.

¹⁷² Ibid., 529.

to emphasize the significance of American religious pluralism, especially in its dialectic tension:

But it is also a significant ordinary and extraordinary achievement, an achievement that suggests a potential to be tapped and a basic fund of regard and respect to be counted. Still more, the tension between the one and the many is not simply a burdensome condition with which American religious history has been saddled and with which it has dealt in a successful way. Rather, the tension created by point and counterpoint is an asset.¹⁷³

While Albanese infuses the conclusion of her text with sentiments of American exceptionalism, celebrating a pluralism laden with normativity, she also ends with some ambivalence. The new American religious experiment, the tension between the one and the many, is encumbered by a lingering millennialism derived from an older European idealism. For Albanese, this millennialism prevents Americans from fully confronting present-day challenges and building truly cohesive community, though perhaps there is still potential to be actualized. She concludes that “a completely American religion has not yet come to be. People in the New World are still learning to do something really new.”¹⁷⁴

Hutchison

In *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (2003), American religious historian William Hutchison aims to trace the development of religious pluralism through U.S. history. Whereas Albanese narrates religious diversity through American religious history and frequently uses pluralism as a descriptive category for this plurality, Hutchison’s text recognizes pluralism as a normative and ideological construct and offers a history of this category. Calling pluralism “a work in progress,” Hutchison directs his focus toward the power dynamics involved in religious diversity in the U.S. and the subsequent tensions

¹⁷³ Ibid., 530–531.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 532.

engendered by this diversity. He centers his attention on the Protestant establishment and the slow, often tense and conflicting, unfolding of pluralism, which he defines as “the acceptance and encouragement of diversity.” Like Lippy, Hutchison also takes a teleological view of American religious history and narrates the progressive unfolding of pluralism in the U.S. as a positive development. He outlines three major stages.

In the first stage, pluralism entails simply tolerance or toleration. The second stage of pluralism expands to advocate for inclusivity. Both these stages assume the normative position of a Protestant establishment to which minority groups must assimilate or adapt. The third and current stage of pluralism in American society involves participatory pluralism. As Hutchison argues, “pluralism as participation implied a mandate for individuals and groups (including, quite importantly, ethnic and racial groups) to share responsibility for the forming and implementing of the society’s agenda.”¹⁷⁵ This state of pluralism, in contrast to the two previous stages, “stands for equal participation” and, as such, requires the accommodation of difference.¹⁷⁶ Hutchison’s main thesis in his narrative is that pluralism has not been a great American success story. Accounts of the acceptance and embrace of religious diversity are partly true, but largely exaggerated. Notably, he positions pluralism as a normative project, as an agenda. Pluralism is an ideology with an objective.¹⁷⁷

Hutchison describes a “myth of pluralist success” long embedded in the American narrative.¹⁷⁸ From the beginning, the British North American colonies, and then the young nation, were known for their remarkable religious and cultural

¹⁷⁵ Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 7.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷⁷ In an interview for the Harvard Divinity Bulletin, Hutchison reiterates his view of pluralism as a normative project not yet actualized and explains that it would be a “success story” if there were wide-spread acceptance of religious diversity, along with social cohesion and harmony. <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news-events/articles/2011/02/07/qa-with-william-hutchison>

¹⁷⁸ Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 15.

diversity, as well as their new social experiment in religious freedom. Yet there were inconsistencies between perceptions and reality. For all this new diversification and the institutional moves meant to protect it, there was still growing bigotry and social intolerance, a point Hutchison emphasizes. Moreover, this initial diversity was not really so diverse. Most, over 95 percent, represented some variety of European Protestantism.¹⁷⁹ Then in the early to mid nineteenth century, demographics began to more radically shift away from the largely Anglo, Protestant, and Calvinist majority to include Irish, Germans, Catholics, Lutherans, Chinese, and Hispanics. Hutchison describes nineteenth century attitudes towards religious diversity as fraught with a certain ambivalence, characterized by tensions between the celebration of “a remarkable onward march of religious freedom” and concerns for social stability.¹⁸⁰ Essentially, a wide range of beliefs was tolerated so long as they were kept mostly private and did not translate into a wide range of behaviors. Thus, what counted as pluralism during this time was the toleration of theological difference, but this was predicated on the control of these differences through assimilation into the liberal norms of the larger society. It was acceptable to think differently so long as one generally behaved like everyone else. As an example, Mormons found more social acceptance and a decrease in discrimination against them once they gave up the widespread practice of plural marriage, or polygamy.

Hutchison identifies a move toward participatory pluralism with the rise of identity politics in the 1960s. Calls for “genuine recognition of group identity” shaped the new pluralism with claims “that inclusion in itself is not enough” and that those who were once outsiders should be given “not just a place at the table but a right to

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 30.

speak and be heard, and a right to help formulate the agenda.”¹⁸¹ Yet Hutchison offers no rosy picture of advances in non-assimilative pluralism, as he points out that even up to the present, there remains ambivalence and concern “about the divisive potential in a new pluralism that seemed to leave little room for the forms of moral consensus that hold a society together.”¹⁸² He acknowledges that Americans are faced with a “difficult and confused” struggle to negotiate the tensions between unity and pluralism. He describes the two sides of this tension as on one side, “acceptance of pluralism itself as the only remaining common value for the society at large and at the other, a return to the kind of unitive ideal that, even in expanded form, would reprimarize and reimpose the common values of an older Protestant America.”¹⁸³ He advocates for a median position: “that we should accept pluralism as a primary value, but that we must also deal seriously and studiously with pleas concerning social and moral cohesion” or a “new symbiosis between pluralism and unity without returning to the traditional melting pot formula.”¹⁸⁴

For Hutchison, abandoning pluralism is not an option; commitments to pluralism as tolerance and as inclusivity are already woven into fabric of American society. Moreover, Hutchison argues that this participatory pluralism is a core value of liberal democracy, writing:

If pluralism has seemed inadequate as a unifying ideal, that may be because our civic and religious rhetoric has proclaimed it so inadequately-- so thinly and defensively-- when the pluralist ideal has been proclaimed at all... it deserves a more positive kind of advocacy, both as a leading element in democratic ideology and as an allowable, perhaps a necessary, element in theistic religion¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 218.

¹⁸² Ibid., 230.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 233.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 234.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 236.

The new pluralism is a work in progress. Hutchison describes it as an ongoing project of multiculturalism and recognition, in which dominant groups must come to realize that if they want respect for their own commitments, then “they will have to respect those of others.”¹⁸⁶ Yet, he does not attend to what respect for others actually entails, or how it manifests itself in practice and policy. Hutchison leaves his reader with less confidence in the promise of pluralism and more of a resigned commitment to the project of pluralism that must be pursued because there is “no turning back.”

Eck

Diana Eck’s *A New Religious America: How a ‘Christian Country’ Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, published in 2001 by popular press Harper San Francisco, stands in distinction as a text of American religious history grounded in academic scholarship, but aimed at a broad, general audience, rather than scholars. Eck, a scholar of comparative and Indian religions at Harvard University, has significantly shaped the discourse of religious pluralism through this text as well as through the work of her research organization, the Pluralism Project. As indicative of her influence beyond the academy, Eck received a National Humanities Medal from President Bill Clinton in 1998.

A New Religious America includes a historical overview of American religious diversity, with emphasis on the growth and transformations of Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism in the U.S. As she describes these communities, representative of the new pluralism and new immigration, she weaves history with personal ethnographic anecdotes. She emphasizes the ways in which these communities have adapted to American society, while retaining what makes them distinct. She looks at the development of a distinctly American form of these three religions. The crux of the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 235.

book, however, is the common ground of religious pluralism, which she champions through affective and emotive language.

Eck recognizes that the U.S. religious landscape has always been characterized by diversity and pluralism, but she argues that this landscape has “changed radically” since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, leading to a “new immigration” and subsequent “new pluralism.”¹⁸⁷ Eck describes the “new immigration” as shaped not only by new demographics but also by phenomena such as transnationalism and globalization; thus “as our own identities become increasingly multilocal, the formation of complex national identities becomes increasingly challenging.”¹⁸⁸

For Eck, this diversity poses a potential social problem if not understood in the proper context and perspective. Whereas Albanese describes pluralism in terms of a dialectic between the one and the many, Eck frames pluralism as both a challenge and a solution. She assumes that religious differences are often inherently and naturally sites of conflict and hostility. She writes: “For many Americans, however, religious pluralism is not a vision that brings us together but one that tears us apart. The controversies of the public square are just beginning.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, she sets out to address and remedy the problem of religious diversity through developing the notion of pluralism.

Pluralism involves a relationship between and among religions, but Eck does not precisely define religion. Instead, she describes it as “dynamic not static, changing not fixed” and “never a finished product, packaged, delivered, and passed intact from generation to generation.”¹⁹⁰ At the same time, Eck sees religion as a fundamental and enduring aspect of human experience. For Eck, pluralism is not merely a descriptive

¹⁸⁷ Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 1.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

term denoting plurality or diversity. She is clear that “diversity alone does not constitute pluralism” but rather pluralism entails “whether we are able to work together across the line of religious difference to create a society in which we actually know one another.”¹⁹¹ She positions pluralism as an approach to diversity found through U.S. history, along with exclusion and assimilation. Eck contrasts assimilationists, who urged immigrants to “come, but leave your differences behind as quickly as possible. In other words, come and be like us” with pluralists, for whom “the American promise was to come as you are, with all your differences, pledged only to the common civic demands of citizenship. In other words, come and be yourselves.”¹⁹²

Eck defines pluralism as “the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences.”¹⁹³ She explains that this process involves “active engagement with that plurality,” “requires participation, and attunement to the life and energies of one another,” and “goes beyond mere tolerance to the active attempt to understand the other.” She responds to a perceived criticism of pluralism as entailing cultural relativism or “anything goes” as she explains that it “is not simply relativism... It is, rather, the encounter of commitments.”¹⁹⁴

A New Religious America situates this prescriptive conception of pluralism as engagement and process within a liberal democratic framework, arguing that cultivating pluralism is central to establishing social cohesion and the American common good. Eck argues that this new, intense religious diversity that now characterizes American society has the potential to either create conflict and tension or harmony and cooperation. As she states, “Creating the *unum* from the *pluribus* is

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁹² Ibid., 47.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 70.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 71.

now more challenging than ever.”¹⁹⁵ She argues that in the near aftermath of 9/11, America sits at a crossroads faced with the question: “Will all these differences of race, culture, ethnicity, and religion fracture our communities, or will they lead us toward the common purpose of an informed, energetic, and even joyous pluralism?”¹⁹⁶ Of course, Eck endorses the latter. She references Horace Kallen, who brought the term pluralism into contemporary prominence with his work on “cultural pluralism,” and borrows his musical metaphor for illustrating the relationship of diversity to American society: “Our challenge today is whether it will be jazz or simply noise, whether it will be a symphony or cacophony, whether we can continue to play together through dissonant moments.”¹⁹⁷

Eck grounds her advocacy for pluralism within the fabric of American civic values and governance, i.e. the leitmotif of *e pluribus unum*, religious freedom, and the narrative of founding fathers who “intentionally founded a nation in which no form of religious belief would be privileged in the public sphere.”¹⁹⁸ She describes America as an idea and “the motto of the republic, *E Pluribus Unum*, ‘From Many One,’ is not an accomplished fact but an ideal that Americans must continue to claim.”¹⁹⁹ She argues that religious freedom leads to religious diversity and, as such, a positive affirmation of religious diversity—pluralism—is tantamount to upholding principles of religious freedom, which she emphasizes are “so basic to the very idea of the image of America.”²⁰⁰ Thus, the new pluralism, new immigration, and new demographics require

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

principles of religious freedom to be articulated in a new way, essentially a way that affirms pluralism.²⁰¹

Eck argues that America's religious diversity ought to be embraced and celebrated "to create a truly pluralist American society in which this great diversity is not simply tolerated but becomes the very source of our strength."²⁰² How does diversity become a source of strength? Essentially, when it is managed by pluralism. This entails creating pluralist citizens, who positively affirm diversity and difference in the service of liberal democracy and the common good. Eck argues that it is common liberal democratic citizenship that provides the common ground from which difference can be engaged.²⁰³

She argues that the engagement of difference must be negotiated through education. "We will all need to know more than we do about one another and to listen for the new ways in which new Americans articulate the 'we' and contribute to the sound and spirit of America."²⁰⁴ We must learn about each other and attempt to understand one another in order to cultivate respect and appreciation. When Eck looks at incidences of religious conflict and discrimination, she largely chocks them up to ignorance and lack of knowledge, which she argues can be resolved through a kind of engaged education. She writes:

Time and again, stories that begin with incidents of hatred or conflict evolve in time into stories of new neighbors who have, in the course of their conflict, learned much more about one another... Strangers, in time, become neighbors. And neighbors, even those who differ from us, become allies in creating our common society.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Ibid., 25.

²⁰² Ibid., 6.

²⁰³ Ibid., 24.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 6.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 332.

She calls this pluralist engagement “bridge building,” a means of negotiating religious difference that “builds upon our differences rather than ignores them.”²⁰⁶

3.3.4 Pluralism as the Promise of American Liberal Democracy

Of course, these texts are not exhaustive representations of the discourse of religious pluralism. Other scholars of religion write in support of religious pluralism as an essential civic norm. Sociologist Wade Clark Roof asserts that, “religious pluralism must be understood in its broadest sense-- as a normative system that is socially created and maintained. Such a normative system does not arise without human effort: it must be envisioned, cultivated, shared, and practiced.”²⁰⁷ Historian Martin Marty echoes this idea as he explains that “Careful listening to scholars and public figures who devote themselves to the subject would reveal that ‘pluralism’ implies and involves a polity, a civic context which provides some ‘rules of the game,’ refers to an ethos, and evokes response.”²⁰⁸

Similar to positions shared by Eck and Hutchison, Marty and Roof highlight a relationship between pluralism and the good of American civil society, linking pluralism to the norms and values of liberal democracy. In an essay in which he aims to describe “pluralisms,” Marty acknowledges concerns that too much plurality could threaten the common good and counters them by stating: “Among the issues posed in the face of religious pluralism is one that has civil consequences... also an urgent question: With how little pluralism can a polity exist and prosper without harming every one--including those who seek hegemony or monopoly-- within it?”²⁰⁹ Wade Clark Roof argues that America occupies a critical time, in which its national identity must

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 337.

²⁰⁷ Wade Clark Roof, “Introduction,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 612 (July 2007): 8.

²⁰⁸ Martin Marty, “Pluralisms,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 612 (July 2007): 16.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 6.

be rethought in light of increased religious and cultural diversity. He asks an implicitly prescriptive question: “Can Americans embrace a more widespread religious pluralism, one that communicates a genuine acceptance of an ever-expanding diversity of belief and practice? And religiously, can we as Americans rethink our identity and view ourselves as a ‘multireligious nation’ and not simply as Christian or Judeo-Christian?”²¹⁰

Roof and Marty, along with Albanese, Starke and Fink, Lippy, Hutchison, and Eck, all assert the conception that American religious pluralism is the result of religious freedom and the actualization of liberal democratic ideals. They seem to assume that, as a consequence of distinct American values and commitments, embodied in American governance and especially the First Amendment, religions in America operate freely. Accordingly, the more diligently American ideals are upheld and actualized, the more diversity there will be, and if properly managed, the more pluralistic American society will be. Pluralism is a product and a source of democracy. It arises from American liberal values of individualism, rationalism, equality, and tolerance. Some, such as Eck and Hutchison, argue that diversity and pluralism are not synonymous, that pluralism requires an active, positive engagement with diversity. Thus, while religious freedom might result in greater religious diversity, it is pluralism that truly allows this partnership of freedom and diversity to flourish, which then results in the flourishing of American liberal democracy.

While I have highlighted a network of discursive practices constructed through academic texts, the discourse of religious pluralism is not isolated to the academy. These sentiments of pluralism are also found in the texts and talk of civic organizations and government initiatives, for which the salience of the discourse of

²¹⁰ Roof, “Introduction.”

pluralism is instructive for addressing religious difference, protecting religious freedom and fostering a public culture of religious tolerance. Examples of civic organizations and government initiatives on the local level include the Interfaith Youth Core, a non-profit organization in Chicago that organizes service projects for high school and university students from diverse religious backgrounds. Its mission statement proclaims building religious pluralism as a “bridge of cooperation,” “creating positive, meaningful relationships across differences, and fostering appreciative knowledge of other traditions.”²¹¹ Moreover, illustrative of the relationship between the academy and public sphere, its founder and executive director Eboo Patel, who holds a PhD in the sociology of religion, teaches courses on interfaith cooperation at local seminaries and universities and publishes articles on the method and rationale of this work in academic journals.²¹²

On the national level, the President’s Interfaith and Community Service Challenge is a government initiative sponsored by the White House and the Department of Education that emphasizes “interfaith cooperation and community service – ‘interfaith service’ for short – as an important way to build understanding between different communities and contribute to the common good.”²¹³ The Interfaith Youth Corps is one of many partners in this project. The initiative is part of the White House’s Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, a project aimed to encourage community service. On its website, a statement by President Barack Obama explains, that the office does not “favor one religious group over another – or even religious groups over secular groups,” that its goal is to “work on behalf of those

²¹¹ “The Framework,” accessed May 1, 2013, <http://www.ifyc.org/about>.

²¹² See Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer, “The Civic Relevance for Interfaith Cooperation for Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of College and Character*, Volume 12, Issue 1, February 2011.

²¹³ “The President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge,” accessed May 1, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/interfaithservice>.

organizations that want to work on behalf of our communities, and to do so without blurring the line that our founders wisely drew between church and state.”²¹⁴ It offers a forum through which religious organizations and institutions may come together in service to liberal governance and it is informed by the ideology of religious pluralism, as it simultaneously promotes these ideals. As I argue, the discourse of religious pluralism— characterized by its positive view of religious plurality as a form of common good, frequently represented as an extension of the promise of American liberal democracy— has become a normative mode by which to address religious diversity, religious freedom, and social harmony in the public sphere.

3.4 The Critique of the Discourse of Pluralism

Thus, the normative model of religious pluralism, prevalent throughout public discourse on religion and civil society as well as the discipline of religious studies, advocates for an appreciation of religion and positive engagement of religious difference as a remedy to social and religious tensions and as a means for promoting social cohesion. As Amanda Porterfield explains, the discourse of religious pluralism attributes to religion a positive role in society as it implies “that religion is common ground in a shared democratic culture” and “presumes that different traditions are intrinsically compatible; indeed, they are resources to be drawn upon for national unity and strength.”²¹⁵ It also assumes that religion is a universal human experience and a sufficient category by which to compare that experience. In other words, religious pluralism is better than both religious uniformity and shared irreligion.

As the discourse of religious pluralism has developed over the past half century, many scholars now question the assumptions, practices, and politics underlying its

²¹⁴ “Preserving Our Constitutional Commitments and Values,” *White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships*, accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/values>.

²¹⁵ Porterfield, “Religious Pluralism in Religious Studies,” 58.

normativity. How is it that religious difference has been construed as a problem that religious pluralism is set to solve? Moreover, how does religious pluralism, with its ostensible objectives of engaging and understanding religious difference, actually involve a process of imagining and ordering those differences? While religious pluralism claims to celebrate and affirm difference, does it simultaneously promoting a hegemonic unity and engage in unseen sociopolitical work? These are a few of the questions that inform critiques of the discourse of pluralism.

Pamela Klassen and Courtney Bender point out in the introduction to *After Pluralism* that religious pluralism more accurately functions as a historically, politically, and theologically situated doctrine than a universal model. It operates as a set of tools, projects, and political claims. Along these lines, I have argued that religious pluralism is a formally non-political discourse that functions as a rhetorical practice of liberal governance, a mode of governmentality, as it works to orchestrate social cohesion—and manage religion— within a liberal framework. Now I want to take a closer look at this discourse to bring to the surface some of its discursive practices that are embedded with particular power dynamics, reproduce liberal norms and serve a regulatory function: 1) the process of defining religion and the delineation of difference; 2) the assertion that religious difference can be negotiated through education and dialogue; and 3) the equation of pluralist values with liberal American civic values.

3.4.1 Essentializing Religion and Delineating Difference

Religious pluralism seeks to describe the phenomenon of religion and a landscape of religious diversity. At the same time, it normatively positions its subject, religion, as both discrete and *sui generis*, which relies on a liberal, secularized definition of religion. In this sense, religion, as Winnifred Fallers Sullivan observes,

becomes defined as essentially private, individual, chosen, and belief- and text-based.²¹⁶ While pluralism celebrates the diversity of religions, it simultaneously subjugates them under the unified category of “religion.”²¹⁷ In this way, the practice of describing religion coincides with the construction of religion. Yet, “religion” is frequently not explicitly defined. Instead its meaning is implied; since religion is putatively a universal aspect of human experience, we all know what “religion” is.

Jonathan Z. Smith points out that “Religion is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define.”²¹⁸ In a similar fashion, Russell McCutcheon and Timothy Fitzgerald argue that the scholarly process of defining the term is laden with veiled politics. Russell McCutcheon posits that the field of religious studies is dominated by a *sui generis* approach to religion, which positions religion as an autonomous, universal aspect of human experience and ignores its historically contextual and situated nature.²¹⁹ It tends to privilege the authority of religious experience and insider accounts of religion in the study of religions, which McCutcheon finds problematic because they cannot be empirically verified or tested. It attributes an essence to religion that cannot be reduced to any other factor and refuses the possibility that religious phenomenon could be explained by nonreligious means. McCutcheon is concerned about definitions of religion centered on the notion of the sacred, which for him suggests a latent theological agenda, thus shifting the study of religion from a descriptive to a normative exercise.

²¹⁶ Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, 8.

²¹⁷ Klassen and Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism.”

²¹⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84.

²¹⁹ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*.

Timothy Fitzgerald shares McCutcheon's concern about an essentialist definition of religion that conceptualizes religion as a universal phenomenon, "a natural and/or a supernatural reality in the nature of things that all human individuals have a capacity for, regardless of their cultural context," which is embedded with Protestant theological assumptions.²²⁰ Like McCutcheon, Fitzgerald argues that religion is not a cross-cultural category but a Western Eurocentric construct, part of "a wider historical process of western imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism" and involves "establishing the naturalness and ideological transparency of capitalist and individualist values."²²¹ He criticizes the nebulous nature of the study of religion, which "imposes on non-western institutions and values the nuance and form of western ones, especially such popular distinctions as those between religion and society, or between religion and the secular, or religion and politics, or religions and economics."²²² He critiques the comparative religions or world religions model that assumes any one religion "is an entity with an essence that can be described and listed with other such entities."²²³ Thus for Fitzgerald and McCutcheon, the study of religion is compromised by use of an essentialist, *sui generis* definition of religion that functions to reproduce liberal Protestant assumptions and values. Daniel Dubuisson offers a similar critique, asking, "Is Western anthropology, religious anthropology in particular, in its quest for the Other and for our very humanity, capable of discovering anything but itself—that is, anything other than its own categories and its own ways of conceiving the world?"²²⁴

While I want to highlight the limitations of the category of religion, I do not concur with Fitzgerald's assertion that the category of religion is too limited for use or

²²⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 5.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²²⁴ Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 6.

that religious studies should be rethought as cultural studies (though I do agree that cultural studies offers insightful and effective disciplinary tools for the analysis of religion). Here I want to borrow concepts from Thomas Tweed's theory of religion and point them toward the political. As Tweed notes, broad categories "are theoretical constructs that function as more or less useful interpretive tools. We should not be surprised that they fail to conform to the full range of historical or contemporary cases. And their effectiveness is not challenged when we find some instances that do not seem to 'fit.'"²²⁵ By effectiveness, Tweed refers to how successfully these categories function within a particular framework or intellectual exercise. Rather, I understand the "effectiveness" of these categories as involving the work they do in constructing certain social and political realities. More precisely, I want to explore the ways in which the construction of the category of religion both represents and reproduces certain political and social power dynamics. The history of the construction of religion, embedded in colonial power dynamics, is not reason to abandon religion as a category. Moreover, to abandon this category would be to deny our own historicity, to suggest that somehow the endeavor of the study of religion could transcend historical limitations. We are 'stuck' with this category, as Tweed notes.²²⁶

Rather than abandoning the category, I agree with those scholars of religion who argue that one must work in constant awareness that the way one defines religion is never neutral and that it always reproduces and constructs certain social relations and

²²⁵ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 40.

²²⁶ Tweed states: "The disorienting variety, ambivalent history, and inequitable function of definitions only make scholars' obligations to assess previous accounts and to self-consciously redefine the category more complicated—and more morally urgent. Definitions matter." Subsequently, Tweed argues that as long as we are mindful of the limits of category and "the limits of cartographic metaphors and as long as we put the cartographers, the terrain, and the representations in motion, we can understand religions as always-contested and ever-changing maps that orient devotees as they move spatially and temporally." *Ibid.*, 140, 171.

realities. As Talal Asad argues, “there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes.”²²⁷ Thus, it is incumbent upon scholars of religion to illuminate the relationship between discursive practices and material realities.

The dominant discourse of pluralism—both in its academic and broader social forms—privileges essentialist definitions of religion. Klassen and Bender assert that often pluralism defines religions “more coherently than historical or ethnographic accounts might warrant.”²²⁸ These normative definitions of religion may seem to serve some practical utility. They assume discrete and distinctive boundaries around religions, which facilitate the study of religion and the tasks of delineating these boundaries, identifying differences, and describing the landscape within them. For the purposes of pluralism, dialogue and engagement of religions are made much easier when religious communities, which represent religious traditions, are clearly demarcated. It is much more difficult to talk about how to study, teach about, or interact with religions when there is no consensus on the term “religion” or means of identifying religions. If the goal is finding common ground, as Eck argues, then points of comparison, which might contain commonality or overlap, appear to be necessary.

Yet, the confines of the discrete, observable boundaries that pluralism requires of religions place significant limitations on pluralism as a framework for the study of religion, which may result in obscuring rather than illuminating its subject. Both Klassen and Bender describe how their ethnographic research of Canadian and American religious communities failed to fit into these neat models of well-defined religious traditions. Rather, they found far more instances of border-crossings,

²²⁷ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 29.

²²⁸ Klassen and Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” 12.

borrowings, appropriations, and transformations. As they point out, the hegemony of religious pluralism often insists that hybridity and mixtures lack authenticity and legitimacy.²²⁹ Subsequently, those deemed aberrant become excluded from public discourse on what counts as “religious.” Moreover, these marginalized religious individuals and groups must also struggle with the ways in which “religion” gets defined and delineated by the processes of recognition that they must negotiate with legal structures and other secular institutions.

Salient examples of negotiating these processes of recognition and representation can be found in Native American struggles for religious freedom. Tisa Wenger writes about a number of cases in which Native Americans have applied the non-native term “religion” to various aspects of their own traditions in order to gain legal protections. She points out that “religion” is not a static concept. Its boundaries are “always contested and changing” and in the U.S., “that designation is generally desirable because it affords constitutional protection.”²³⁰ She explains:

The category of religion, as it continues to be understood in mainstream American culture, is a product of Euro-American (and primarily Protestant) historical development and leaves little space for the integrated, communal, and land-based qualities of indigenous traditions. To make the case for religious freedom, Indians have had to represent their traditions according to prevailing concepts of what counts as religion.²³¹

Wenger argues that the dominant notion of religion is embedded with liberal norms, “taken to imply separation from a ‘secular’ sphere and is understood as exclusively a matter of individual conscience.”²³² As such, applying religion to Native American traditions and practices can result in misrepresentation and the transformation of these traditions in response to the pressures of liberal norms. Yet Wenger does not

²²⁹ Ibid., 13–18.

²³⁰ Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 4.

²³¹ Ibid., 237.

²³² Ibid., 238.

argue for a return to a idealized past. These appropriated notions of religion and the sacred have become integrated into Native American cultures; they “have become indigenous ones, and Indians have actively reinterpreted them to fulfill indigenous needs.”²³³ Rather, Wenger’s analysis illuminates ways in which essentialist definitions of religion fail to account for the complex historical, social, and political dynamics in the production of religion in America.

North American liberal democracies tend to recognize and accommodate some forms of religion—liberal forms—more readily than others. Moreover, the view of religions as distinct and separate is also a product of differentiation, which is deeply intertwined with secularization. Courtney Bender writes that

in order for religions to be free, they must be differentiated, both from each other and, more importantly, from the elements of society that would regulate them and keep them from being free. In fact, we could argue that our current political and sociological uses of pluralism depend upon—and demand evidence of—religion’s differentiation from other parts of social life.”²³⁴

A focus on religions as distinct and separate can easily overlook the forces of sociopolitical processes in constructing religious boundaries and differences.

Pluralism functions as a set of tools or tactics for responding to, as well as ordering and disciplining, “other” or “different” religions. As it establishes norms, it also defines what constitutes acceptable deviance from those norms. As an example of this regulatory practice, Rosemary Hicks writes about her ethnographic research with the community related to the Park51 project, a proposed Islamic community center in lower Manhattan that generated considerable controversy. She explains that the religious leaders involved in this project, such as Imam Feisl Abdul Rauf, were motivated by a desire to promote pluralism and to increase Americans’ understanding

²³³ Ibid., 265.

²³⁴ Courtney Bender, “The Power of Pluralist Thinking,” *The Immanent Frame*, April 11, 2012, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2012/04/11/the-power-of-pluralist-thinking/>.

of Islam. As Hicks explains, this endeavor to participate in pluralist discourse “involved translating Islamic beliefs and practices in light of previous narrative templates and into terms recognizable within legal, political, and economic structures that had developed over time in changing relationship to certain varieties of Protestantism.”²³⁵ Thus, in the pluralist framework, different traditions are welcomed in the public sphere once they have been reshaped in light of liberal norms. Subsequently, Hicks argues, the discourse of pluralism acts to both construct and discipline diversity, positioning the boundaries of what can be tolerated and how.²³⁶ The practices of pluralism are “as much about reifying difference and autonomy as about confusing or challenging such claims,” as Klassen and Bender make clear.²³⁷

At the same time, the dominant discourse on pluralism positions itself as a universal model, and in doing so, it masks its historically and politically situated formation, its relationship to liberal discourse and its privileging of Protestant norms. All the while, it appoints certain beliefs and customs as civilized and respectable and others as primitive or harmful. Difference itself gets naturalized. Discursive practices function to construct “difference” as having an essential reality, rather than being the product of political processes and power dynamics. Wendy Brown argues that individuals believe they must tolerate difference without ever questioning the ways in which differences have been “socially and historically constituted and are themselves

²³⁵ Rosemary R. Hicks, “Between Lived and the Law: Power, Empire, and Expansion in Studies of North American Religions,” *Religion* 42, no. 3 (July 2012): 413.

²³⁶ Lai, Paper, and Paper offer another example of the limitations of essentialist definitions of religion that plague pluralism, as well as their regulatory effects, with their case study of Chinese religion in Canada. David Chuenyan Lai, Jordan Paper, and Li Chuang Paper, “The Chinese in Canada: Their Unrecognized Religion,” in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005).

²³⁷ Klassen and Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” 22.

the effect of power and hegemonic norms, or even of certain discourses about race, ethnicity, sexuality, and culture.”²³⁸

By claiming that it advocates for inclusivity, acceptance, and tolerance, the dominant discourse of pluralism hides the ways in which it establishes deviance and marginalizes those who fall outside the boundaries of inclusivity. Its discourses of inclusion simultaneously construct discourses of exclusion. Thus, it regulates the presence of the “other.” As Klassen and Bender point out, pluralism “articulates and naturalizes the very boundaries of difference that it seeks to diminish, overcome, or mediate.”²³⁹ Moreover, in this way, the discourse of pluralism functions as a discourse of liberal tolerance. McCutcheon argues that pluralists such as Eck fail to recognize that “the difference between pluralism and tolerance is merely rhetorical.”²⁴⁰ The processes of defining religion and demarcating difference, which are largely unacknowledged and unseen in pluralist discursive practices, accomplish the regulation of tolerance, among other effects.

3.4.2 Negotiating Difference through Education

Pluralist discourse continually prescribes education about religion as the tactical remedy to the problem of religious intolerance, isolationism, and indifference. Advocates for religious pluralism, such as Eck and Patel, often call for a move beyond mere tolerance of other religions to a deeper respect and understanding. Calls for understanding are followed by arguments for increased education about religion and the cultivation of “religious literacy.” For such theorists of religious pluralism, religion and/or religious diversity are not the problem or source of conflict. Rather, it is a lack of understanding about religion and religious differences. The discourse of religious

²³⁸ Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*.

²³⁹ Klassen and Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” 15.

²⁴⁰ McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion*, 161.

pluralism often assumes that religious differences, if not properly ordered and disciplined, are inherently and naturally sites of conflict and hostility. As an example of this practice, Diana Eck states, “Religious pluralism is a challenge of faith for each and every religious tradition... Religious difference can be threatening and attitudes toward the religious other can be fraught with stereotypes.”²⁴¹ Pluralism is then positioned as a tactic for managing this antagonism to achieve peaceful coexistence. By framing religious diversity as a problem in this way, pluralism then constructs its own utility as a solution.

Better education about religion, and more specifically, education structured by a pluralist framework, is then offered as the tool by which pluralism is used to remedy the problems of misunderstanding. Given its intention to foster social cohesion that affirms religious diversity, pluralist approaches to the study of religion tend to take a sympathetic view of religion and present it as a resource and an asset. Moreover, these approaches often work to legitimate their position, warning their audiences that religion must be taken seriously and attributing a sense of social urgency to their agenda. As Amanda Porterfield argues, the pluralist approach to the study of religion then “accentuates the positive social aspects of religion and draw attention to the ways that religion draws people together in community” and “encourages idealized representations of religion that deflect skepticism and social criticism of religion.”²⁴² Work such as Eck’s demonstrates that pluralism as an interpretive framework “tends to lift up the most inspiring and socially constructive aspects of religion, and downplay

²⁴¹ Diana L. Eck, “Foreword,” in *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously*, ed. Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), xii.

²⁴² Porterfield, “Religious Pluralism in Religious Studies,” 59.

those aspects that fall short or fail to harmonize.”²⁴³ Those that fall short are characterized as distortions and not representative of the true essence of religion.

In recent years, the importance of understanding diverse religions has been framed by the notion of “religious literacy.” On the surface, the discourse on religious literacy concerns itself with knowledge about religions. The concept refers to what one knows about religion. In a conventional sense, the term ‘literacy,’ derived from ‘literate’ refers to being educated or learned. Yet in this discursive practice, religious literacy entails more than what one knows about religion. It becomes an ideal condition for civic engagement. Stephen Prothero, whose book of the same name brought the concept of religious literacy into greater prominence, defines it first as “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life.”²⁴⁴ It concerns utility, how one is able to use that knowledge in civic life: “the ability to participate in our ongoing conversation about the private and public powers of religion.”²⁴⁵ Prothero states his goal as “to help citizens participate fully in social, political and economic life in a nation and a world in which religion counts.”²⁴⁶

Prothero presents the concept in terms of a civic problem: “our descent into religious ignorance.”²⁴⁷ Americans know very little about religions, including their own, and this illiteracy compromises their abilities to be effective citizens in a liberal democracy. To be effective, one must be educated and informed. Prothero argues that both American and international politics cannot be understood without some basic knowledge of religion. As he says, “Religion is implicated in virtually every issue of

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 12.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

national and international import.”²⁴⁸ And he does not merely describe this social problem. He also prescribes a solution to this problem—religious literacy, as the product of education, adding that “teaching about religion is first and foremost a civic enterprise.”²⁴⁹

Prothero juxtaposes religious knowledge and religious ignorance and claims that religious ignorance is dangerous.²⁵⁰ In the introduction of his book, he argues for the importance of religious literacy with a number of examples of violent conflict in which “religious ignorance proved deadly”—including the Branch Davidian conflict at Waco and the post 9-11 killing of Sikh man mistaken for a Muslim, both of which he attributes to religious illiteracy. He follows up these anecdotes stating “The moral of this story is not just that we need more tolerance. It is that we need better education.”

²⁵¹ He states, “Religious illiteracy makes it difficult for Americans to make sense of a world in which people kill and make peace in the name of Christ or Allah.”²⁵² Yet it is worth asking whether religious literacy really enables one to understand religiously motivated violence. Prothero’s statement assumes that religious difference is a source of conflict without addressing the complex political dynamics involved in conflicts. Religious literacy, as described by Prothero, refers to a basic, elementary knowledge of religions that supports a particular view of the common good. It is not meant to be a rigorous academic exercise, nor does it aim to produce scholars of religion. Does knowing the basic tenets and practices of a few religions equip one to understand the function of religion in society, including the complexities of its sociohistorical construction? I argue that, instead, religious literacy works to reproduce pluralist

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 4, 18, 146.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

²⁵² Ibid., 9.

norms and becomes a prescriptive, normative tool for shaping how religions ought to function in a religiously diverse society.

Education and the social construction of power relations

With any discourse, education plays an important role in its construction, reproduction, and transmission. There is a relationship between the construction of knowledge and power in which the construction of knowledge is used as a regulatory and disciplinary tactic. Ania Loomba contends that “the growth of modern Western knowledge systems and the histories of most ‘disciplines’ can be seen to be embedded within and shaped by colonial discourses.” Moreover, pointing to the historical relationship between scholarship, academic fields, such as anthropology, and colonialism, Loomba argues that “all discourses are colonial discourses.”²⁵³ Historically, studying, examining, and classifying the ‘other’ have served to establish dominance. Similarly, Tracey Leavelle argues that “the power to collect and classify information and to impose clear structures of knowledge and meaning” has always been crucial for effective colonization.²⁵⁴ In *Orientalism*, Edward Said maintains that “to have knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it,” particularly when “such a thing” is objectified and viewed as fundamentally stable.²⁵⁵ Said describes the colonial discourse(s) of Orientalism, continually produced from the eighteenth century through contemporary times, as a complex network of discursive practices that involve “a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative or novel)

²⁵³ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Second (New York: Routledge, 2005), 59.

²⁵⁴ Tracy Leavelle, “The Perils of Pluralism: Colonization and Decolonization in American Indian Religious History,” in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, ed. Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 156–77.

²⁵⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 36.

world.”²⁵⁶ The architects of this Orientalist discourse claim to describe “other” realities, while they function to legitimate inequitable power dynamics, domination, and subjugation. As such, this discourse has “less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world.”²⁵⁷ In the social sciences today, while there exists a greater critical awareness of these hegemonic discourses, practices of identification and the management of difference have been shaped in manifold ways by the legacies of colonialism.

Leavelle writes that within the dynamics of pluralism, Native American religions have been expected to reveal and explain themselves in order to engage with other religions. Yet, as Leavelle points out, the assumption that those engaged in practices of pluralism have the right to know other religions is rooted in implicit colonial ideologies, including definitions of acceptable difference and the control of the production of knowledge and meaning. He argues that contrary to pluralist claims, dialogue and discussion are not always possible. Moreover, the pluralist quest for knowledge, so commonly assumed to be benevolent and progressive, can instead be exploitative and oppressive.²⁵⁸

Leavelle’s work highlights how pluralist arguments for the importance of education about religion for transmitting pluralist values and fostering social cohesion make certain epistemological assumptions, which are not neutral or universal, but historically and socio-politically constructed. Rooted in liberal norms, they work to reproduce those norms, presupposing an autonomous individual and a kind of depoliticized equality. They assume that each of us ought to know the other; that one has the right to know the other. They imagine that the pursuit of this knowledge,

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Leavelle, “The Perils of Pluralism: Colonization and Decolonization in American Indian Religious History.”

the construction of this knowledge, will be beneficial and benevolent. They take for granted that the construction of this knowledge will take place on a level playing field, on neutral ground. They tend not to acknowledge the power and politics involved in the construction of knowledge, that the acquisition of knowledge for one person may mean the exploitation and violation of another person or group. Thus, in the dynamics of pluralism, the promotion of education about religion in the name of understanding and engagement may function to reproduce liberal norms and lay out how difference ought to be acknowledged and negotiated, while perpetuating neo-colonial tendencies of classification and otherness, especially if that education does not include a critical lens.

3.4.2 Pluralist values as American values: shaping civic identities

As it works to regulate the role of religion in civil society, pluralism equates pluralist values with American civic values—that is to say, liberal values— and prescribes a particular view of American civic identities, primarily a form of liberal multicultural citizenship. The narrative of religious pluralism imagines America as a uniquely diverse, multicultural nation. A good American citizen is a pluralist, one who appreciates and affirms this diversity, believes that this diversity makes America great and views this diversity as deeply intertwined with the foundational American value of religious freedom. Within the pluralist narrative, a good citizen not only accepts the existence of religious difference, but also actively engages it-- tries to learn about religious difference and create relationships across differences. In this vein, Eck writes, “Pluralism is much more than the simple fact of diversity. Pluralism not a given, but an achievement. It is engaging that diversity in the creation of a common society.”²⁵⁹ This engagement involves allowing for difference while finding common ground. This

²⁵⁹ Eck, “Foreword,” xiv.

common ground creates the social cohesion for a unified American society. As an example, in *On Common Ground*, a digital format classroom resource on pluralism and world religions, Eck advocates for the creation of a “civic we” and argues that:

pluralism in America is clearly based on the common ground rules of the First Amendment to the Constitution: “no establishment” of religion and the “free exercise” of religion... *E Pluribus Unum*, “out of many, one,” envisions one people, a common sense of a civic “we,” but not one religion, one faith, one conscience. *Unum* does not mean uniformity. Perhaps the most valuable thing people of many faiths have in common is their commitment to a society based on the give and take of the civil dialogue at a common table.²⁶⁰

However, pluralist values, many argue, negotiate a hegemonic power dynamic.

Advocates of pluralism, such as Eck, argue that pluralism presents a progressive alternative to the older assimilationist “melting pot” model of tolerance. While that may be true, the dominant discourse on pluralism raises its own questions. What does a “civic we” entail? If it requires coming together to the proverbial table, then it must exclude those with exclusivist worldviews who are not interested in dialogue and common ground with others of different religions. If it does not require giving up differences, then what serves as a unifying bond? Who determines what should unite “us?” What does the participation in this “civic we” mean if the terms of participation have already been defined by someone else? These questions illuminate the regulatory nature of the liberal discourse of religious pluralism.

I have attempted here to distinguish and situate the discourse of religious pluralism within the larger social practice of regulating religion as a practice of liberal governance. I have worked to show the dominant discourse of religious pluralism as an ideological practice that sustains particular relations of power and domination. I have argued here that the discourse of religious pluralism works to define acceptable and normative religion, essentially that which is private, voluntary, and individually

²⁶⁰ Eck, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*.

oriented or which affirms liberal norms. Normative religions may find an acceptable public position in so far as they generally promote social cohesion within a liberal democracy. From the pluralist perspective, this requires affirmation and respect for diversity and difference. For religions or religious individuals that do not share the pluralist ethos, but instead express an exclusivist ethos or epistemology, pluralism extends tolerance, so long as the exclusivist religion is positioned as primarily private and individually-oriented. The act of toleration necessarily entails defining these religions as deviant from dominant liberal norms.

Thus, the discourse of religious pluralism is not neutral or universal. It is particular, situated, and embedded with politics, specifically the politics of liberalism. Yet, its discursive practices work to mask its politics and dissociate it from its historical contingency along with the powers that have produced and shaped it. It is seldom identified as a political discourse, giving it a depoliticized quality. This also reinforces its hegemonic tendencies. Hegemonic discourses are most effective when they are so naturalized that few see the underlying dynamics of power. Pluralism is a pervasive discourse that promotes a political framework through a process that is largely unseen and often takes the form of common sense. From here I will focus my attention on one genre of the discourse of religious pluralism, the world religion textbook. By using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, I will look at the ways in which the discursive practices found within these textbooks construct pluralism as an essential element and ethos for a liberal American public sphere.

Chapter 4: The World Religions Textbook: Genre and Discourse

In this chapter, I turn my task to crafting my method from the theoretical questions I have raised. Before I discuss method, I want to detail how I have centered on world religions textbooks as a discursive site, examining the textured relationship between the world religions textbook as genre and discourse. I will look at the textbook as a discursive genre, followed by a brief look at the construction of the category of world religions and its intertextual relationship with religious pluralism.

In chapter two, I discussed a social theory of critical discourse analysis that illumines how texts and talk—discourse— shape social and material realities, especially the modes by which discourse processes negotiate normativity, or latently construct and support certain systems of dominance. To this theory, I added the concept of governmentality to fashion a conceptual framework that elucidates the ways in which discourses not seen as political are enmeshed in the enactment of governance, or the regulation of society, especially by legitimating liberal norms. From this conceptual framework, I have argued that the discourse of religious pluralism is a depoliticized discourse that implicitly reproduces liberal norms and operates as a mode of governmentality. This discourse dominates the academic study of religion and functions to prescribe a regulated role for religion in civil society. In the previous chapter, I looked at ways in which this discourse is produced by scholars within the academic study of religion. Now in this and subsequent chapters, as I center my focus on world religions textbooks, I look at how the discourse of religious pluralism is transmitted through these textbooks.

4.1 The Textbook as a Genre

Fairclough defines a genre as a means by which discourses become enacted. Genres are “diverse ways of acting, of producing social life, in the semiotic mode.”²⁶¹ Thus, among its many functions, the textbook is a discursive genre. Before I detail the method by which I approach my textbook analysis, I want to look at the significance of the textbook as a genre and the ways in which the textbook enacts discourses and operates as a mode of representation.

The social theory of critical discourse analysis and the social constructionist framework I have elaborated are centrally concerned with what constitutes knowledge; and education is a process through which knowledge is produced and transmitted. Schools not only prepare individuals with skills for eventual jobs and their entries into the labor market, but also serve as sites for social, political, and cultural formation.²⁶² Education has played a pivotal role in the forging of collective meaning and identity, the creation of nations and the production of citizens:

Historically subjects were transformed into citizens through the teaching of history, geography and the language of the nation. People were anchored in illustrious pasts, in particular territories, and in the grammar of (national) self-recognition and the logic of collective reassurance. Thus, peasants were turned into Frenchmen; Bavarians, Hessians or Westphalians were turned into Germans; English, Scots, and Welsh into British; and Irish, Germans, Mexicans, and Chinese into Americans.²⁶³

Schools and universities are sites in which questions of identity and what it means to be a modern citizen are negotiated. They function “to reproduce the national culture

²⁶¹ Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 214.

²⁶² James Davison Hunter and David Franz, “Religious Pluralism and Civil Society,” in *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America*, ed. Stephen Prothero (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 269.

²⁶³ Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal and Hanna Schissler, “Introduction: Teaching beyond the National Narrative,” in *The Nation, Europe and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition*, ed. Hanna Schissler and Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 1.

across generations” and to do “the work of boundary maintenance.”²⁶⁴ I contend that not only do history and geography classes involve themselves in the formation of citizens, but also introductory religious studies classes-- especially the world religions course and its textbooks-- engage in this practice of cultural production.

The textbook is a tool and a symbol in education and the construction of knowledge. The textbook represents a source of authority and legitimate knowledge. Its purpose is both to elaborate and condense standard information in a field, or discipline. Illustratively, the term is also used as an adjective to denote that something is typical, characteristic or conforming to norms; a person exhibiting common, typical symptoms of an illness can be said to have a “textbook case” of such illness. Thus, to label a book as a textbook is to give that book authority in the production of knowledge.

Textbooks are commonly found throughout classrooms from primary to secondary to post secondary education. They can serve as a useful teaching tool in an introductory classroom. There are a number of features common to the genre, which makes the textbook distinct from other kinds of academic texts. A textbook is often structured as “a ready-made package for instruction and learning” that can frame an entire course and serve as the sole text if needed.²⁶⁵ As such, it is often more pedagogically oriented than most academic texts, including didactic tools such as discussion and review questions, illustrations, charts, figures, glossaries, and lists of additional resources. Many textbooks also include accompanying instructor’s manuals and supplemental websites. Stylistically, a textbook aims for clarity and accessibility in order to engage readers with no or little prior exposure to the discipline. Strausberg

²⁶⁴ Hunter and Franz, “Religious Pluralism and Civil Society,” 269.

²⁶⁵ Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler, “Textbooks in the Study of Religion/s: Introducing a New Feature Series,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 132.

and Engler point out that textbooks are “the one specimen of academic literature where lack of originality in content seems permissible. At the same time, they have to be sufficiently distinctive from each other to compete on the market – and a good textbook is more difficult to write than many would think.”²⁶⁶

Though textbooks may offer benefits and convenience, they also have their critics, many who brand textbooks as dry, bland, boring, lacking in creativity and reductionist. As evidence of the disdain textbooks often receive from scholars, John Issitt, an educational theorist studying textbooks, begins an essay in which he reflects on this study by first explaining why one would want to study textbooks at all. He acknowledges that “as teaching vehicles textbooks are scorned by many in the teaching profession as poor and insufficient and as assuming a basically passive learning style.”²⁶⁷ This passive learning style often results in a poor learning experience, in which textbooks can “represent a painful continuity, a form of certified ‘official’ knowledge to be referred to when the need arises, to be regurgitated at examination time and to be negotiated in learning exercises.”²⁶⁸ Yet they remain a ubiquitous presence in the classroom.

Issitt discusses the textbook as a genre that carries typically hidden power dynamics. He argues that textbooks are embedded with the epistemological assumption that they “lay a definitional claim to the knowledge they contain” and, subsequently, they have a “status, a bona fide status with a potential for universal application.”²⁶⁹ By their very character, textbooks engage in processes of depoliticization. As Issitt points out, they tend to mask the situated perspective of the author or authors and instead aim for an “authorial monotone of expository

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 684.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 685.

clarity,” which further maintains their claims to “objectivity and political neutrality.”²⁷⁰ Moreover, textbooks tend to present their disciplines as discrete and coherent domains of study, forgoing discussions of theoretical issues on the margins, and thereby functioning “to create, trace and maintain the boundaries of a discipline by inclusion or exclusion of subjects and by expressing a disciplinary discourse that lays claim to a particular terrain of ideas.”²⁷¹ Thus the politics of textbooks are also camouflaged by its rhetorical practices and subsequently, with little to no acknowledgement, “discourses are produced, experts are canonized, histories are written and learning is subject to the ideological impulses of the time.”²⁷²

Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith argue that education is never neutral and always situated, forming an “indissoluble couplet” with power. Textbooks function to reproduce hegemonic power dynamics, in which “what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender/sex, and religious groups.”²⁷³ They are an important site for the transmission of ideologies and the production of power as knowledge:

They signify—through their content *and* form—particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organizing that vast universe of possible knowledge... they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful.²⁷⁴

Yet, the politics of textbooks are complex. Even with the hegemonic power dynamics embedded within textbooks, Apple warns against viewing textbooks as monoliths of oppression, “as totally carrying its politics around with it,” but instead as dependent

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 688.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 689.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, “The Politics of the Textbook,” in *The Politics of the Textbook*, ed. Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

on the “network of social and ideological relations it participates in.”²⁷⁵ Textbooks can “depower and empower at different moments.”²⁷⁶ Apple points out that while historically education has been used as a tool for the production of citizens and regulation of society, the denial of education has also been a regulatory tool. Thus, “textbooks can be fought against because they are part of a system of moral regulation. They can be fought for both as providing essential assistance in the labor of teaching and as part of a larger strategy of democratization.”²⁷⁷ This portrayal of contradiction and complexity in textbook analysis is apt for my project here. The world religions textbooks I analyze do not appear oppressive or ideological to most readers. In fact, many claim an empowering objective and progressive purpose. My aim is to investigate how this progressive, democratizing agenda moves in tension with the depoliticized, regulatory activities in which these texts engage.

4.2 The World Religions Paradigm and Its Critics

“World religions,” much like pluralism, is an ostensibly descriptive category embedded with prescriptive norms. It is a term used in the study of religion to order a plurality of religions, often on a global scale. Some further distinguish the term “world religions” as referring to “major” or statistically significant religions of the world. At times, it indicates a comparative or phenomenological approach to the study of religion.

I have previously discussed the problem and limitations of the essentialist, *sui generis* definition of “religion.” Predictably, the category of “world religions,” which relies on a *sui generis* notion of religion, is plagued with many of the same problems and limitations. Much like “religion,” “world religions” is frequently left undefined, let

²⁷⁵ Michael W. Apple, “The Text and Cultural Politics,” *Educational Researcher*, October 1992, 8.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

alone viewed in light of the social, cultural, and political currents that have created and shaped it. As a modifier, world religions assume hierarchies of dominance or even superiority. It is a designation of comparison that posits an obscured norm. Not only does it assume well-defined and easily identified boundaries of religions, but it also serves to mark those boundaries. Thus, as I will go on to elaborate, the category of world religions functions to define and order difference and establish “the other.” In this sense, it performs many of the regulatory discursive practices of religious pluralism and serves as an extension of this discourse.

Tomoko Masuzawa writes about the hegemonic power dynamics deeply embedded in the category of world religions and its processes of classification and categorization. She relates the category as foundational to the discourse and practices of the study of religion. Moreover, she identifies world religions discourse as ancillary to the ideology of religious pluralism. She names the discourse of religious pluralism, or “the pluralist doctrine,” as now “the ruling ethos of our discourse on religion, scholarly and nonscholarly.”²⁷⁸ She argues that the pluralist doctrine is exemplified in world religions discourse. As Masuzawa points out, the genealogy of world religions is embedded within the development of the modern discipline of religious studies. It is a conceptual framework that operates as a process of ordering difference, “an effective means of differentiating, variegating, consolidating, and totalizing a large portion of the social, cultural, and political practices observable among the inhabitants of regions elsewhere in the world.”²⁷⁹

The concept “world religion” has roots in the European study of religion. It originally referred to Christianity as a singular universal religion or religion of the

²⁷⁸ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 13.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

world (*Weltreligionen*), to be distinguished from indigenous religions particular to one ethnicity, place or land (*Landesreligionen*).²⁸⁰ “World religion” in this sense could be distinguished from “religions of the world,” that is, other religions.²⁸¹ At the turn of the nineteenth century, other religions began to be recognized as also having universal significance— first Buddhism, followed by Islam (or Mohammedanism), and later, Judaism. Thus “world religion” became plural. However, the category was selectively applied; everything else was pejoratively labeled paganism, heathenism, idolatry or polytheism.

Masuzawa argues that “world religions,” with roots in the notion of Christian universality and supremacy, never moved far from that heritage. Instead, it became the foundation of a discourse that asserted the existence of the phenomenon of religion, which was defined and measured by the norms of Christianity. In this sense, the discourse of world religions only succeeded in masking notions of Christian supremacy within the modern study of religion and never succeeded in transcending them. As Masuzawa explains, “certain ideological underpinnings of the older hierarchical discourse did not so much diminish and disappear as become unrecognizable under the new outlook of the pluralist ideology—or supposed democracy—of world religions.”²⁸² Masuzawa deconstructs and dismisses the implicit assumption that the discourse of world religions marks a “turn away from the Eurocentric and Eurohegemonic conception of the world, toward a more egalitarian and lateral delineation.”²⁸³ Rather it functions as a discourse of secularization and othering.²⁸⁴ Embedded with the veiled legacies of imperialism and colonialism, the

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 109.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 119.

²⁸² Ibid., 33.

²⁸³ Ibid., 13.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

study of religion has historical roots in the study of colonized societies and in the legitimation of European dominance. Timothy Fitzgerald also argues this point, that religion, an “ideological product,”

was assumed to have its analogue in colonial cultures, and if religions could not be found then they were invented, along with western individuals, law courts, free markets, and educational systems. 'Religion' was part of the complex process of establishing the naturalness and ideological transparency of capitalist and individualist values.²⁸⁵

The world religions discourse-- and the study of religion with which it is associated— has functioned to naturalize and reproduce Orientalist, neo-colonial classifications of sameness and otherness.

Masuzawa acknowledges the ubiquity of the world’s religions course in the academic study of religion, as “a standard designation for an introductory survey course commonly found in the religious studies curricula of many North American and British universities, colleges, and increasingly, secondary schools.”²⁸⁶ While world religions courses might lack the scholarly rigor found in upper level or graduate courses, they remain among the most popular course offerings in religious studies departments, the “bread-and-butter” courses of many departments that provide large numbers of enrollees, which then translate to funding. These courses are not only discursive sites or cultural products, but also economic commodities, which adds layers of complexity to an analysis of the norms they reproduce, one which I will not examine in detail here. An American Academy of Religion survey of the 1999-2000 academic year showed that world religions courses make up 5.5 percent of the total number of course offered by religious studies departments, making them the sixth

²⁸⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 9.

²⁸⁶ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 8.

most frequently taught course in the discipline.²⁸⁷ A follow up survey of the 2004-2005 academic year showed that world religions courses had increased by 14% and risen in ranks to the fifth most frequently taught course.²⁸⁸ Moreover, both surveys include numbers for an introduction to religions course as distinct from the world religions course.²⁸⁹ Given that many introduction to religions courses are essentially structured as world religions courses and use world religions textbooks, the number of courses that use the world religions paradigm, as well as world religions textbooks, is likely greater than the initial survey results suggest.²⁹⁰

Criticisms of the world religions course, and world religions textbooks, abound. Many scholars approach the course with ambivalence. Many chide the broad, expansive nature of the introduction to world religions course or textbook, which covers such a range that no scholar of religions could ever be an expert in all its subject matter, and subsequently leads to omissions, distortions, and imprecisions. As Mark Juergensmeyer writes:

The one course that we have all learned to hate is the World Religions Survey. Its seemingly endless parade of introductions to now this religion, now that one, has become a caricature of the worse of liberal arts education: a superficial overview that routinely and mindlessly imposes a Western model of human culture on the rest of the world.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ "New Information on the Undergraduate Study of Religion," *American Academy of Religion*, accessed May 6, 2013, https://www.aarweb.org/Programs/Department_Services/Survey_Data/Undergraduate/default.asp.

²⁸⁸ "Undergraduate Department Survey Shows Increases in Religious Studies," *Religious Studies News*, accessed May 6, 2013, https://www.aarweb.org/Programs/Department_Services/Survey_Data/default.asp.

²⁸⁹ The 'Introduction to Religion' course was reported to be the seventh most frequently taught course in the 2004-2005 academic year.

²⁹⁰ Notably, the 2004-2005 report that highlights the rise in religious studies courses since the previous 1999-2000 report attributes this increase to the influence of the attacks of September 11, 2001.

²⁹¹ Mark Juergensmeyer, "A Brief Argument in Favor of an Endangered Species: The World Religion Survey Course," in *Teaching the Introductory Course in Religion*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 227.

When asked to review the accuracy and rigor of world religions textbooks, scholars of religion tend to find their own area of specialization woefully misrepresented or inadequately developed. Weaknesses and shortcomings include “the exclusion of women, of ‘minority religion’ in favor of the ‘big five’ or ‘big six,’ and the usually poor or nonexistent treatment” of indigenous religions as well as “the absence of historical context and a surprisingly naïve—often implied—definition of religion.”²⁹²

Joanne Punzo Waghorne, a scholar of Chinese religions argues that many world religions texts lack a sufficient grasp of historiographical issues in the construction of Chinese religions, such as “Confucianism” and “Daoism,” and in the process distort rather than elucidate the traditions they seek to present.²⁹³ Selva Raj, a scholar of South Asian religions points to the problem of labeling Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism as Indian religions, while ignoring the long presence of other religions, such as Christianity and Islam, in the region. Raj argues for a region-centered approach to world religions rather than one centered on traditions.²⁹⁴ Robert Baum, a scholar of African religions highlights the problematic ways in which world religions textbooks treat African religions, typically throwing them together with Native American and Australasian religions under the umbrella term of primal, indigenous or tribal religions. These religions are then described as prehistoric, “suggesting the viewpoint of an earlier generation of anthropologists, namely, that contemporary indigenous peoples are a kind of living laboratory in which we can witness the ways of the West’s

²⁹² Joanne Punzo Waghorne, “Revisiting the Question of Religion in the World Religions Textbook,” *Religious Studies Reviews* 31, no. 1 & 2 (April 2005): 3.

²⁹³ Deborah Sommer, “Chinese Religions in World Religions Textbooks,” *Religious Studies Reviews* 31, no. 1 & 2 (April 2005): 4 - 7.

²⁹⁴ Selva J. Raj, “The Quest for a Balanced Representation of South Asian Religions in World Religions Textbooks,” *Religious Studies Reviews* 31, no. 1 & 2 (April 2005): 14 - 16.

prehistoric ancestors.”²⁹⁵ Baum goes on to conclude that in the world religions textbooks that do address African religions (many completely exclude them), “many of these scholars make factual errors, almost always in the direction of minimizing the complexity of African cultures or the subtlety of African religious systems.”²⁹⁶ Kay A. Read, an ethno-historian of Mesoamerican religions, discusses the implications of creating “miscellaneous” religions, which are left out of “the hierarchy of important traditions.” Plagued with inaccurate stereotypes of so-called primitive peoples, the “miscellaneous category”, Read argues, reproduces norms and assumptions of colonialism, essentially defining two-thirds of the world as “The Not-West” and turning them into “a people without history.”²⁹⁷ Read contends that these textbooks reflect the ongoing struggle of the West:

On the one side, there is a desire to hide an ongoing history of violence—the primary purpose of modernist, progressive histories. On the other side, there is a longing for harmonious social relationships in an often fragmented and frightening world and a deep concern about serious environmental problems—the romantic critique of hierarchies and technologies.²⁹⁸

Read points to the complex issues of identity and “interlocking histories” that easy and discrete categorizations of religions gloss over or hide. She advocates for world religions textbooks and courses that problematize the category of world religions, as well as comparison itself, and work to illuminate both the historical contexts of the religions under examination and the study of religion itself.

Masuzawa describes the world religions course as a largely unmanageable survey without the aid of “the scholastically untenable assumption that all religions are everywhere the same in essence, divergent and particular only in their ethnic,

²⁹⁵ Robert M. Baum, “The Forgotten South: African Religions in World Religions Textbooks,” *Religious Studies Reviews* 31, no. 1 & 2 (April 2005): 28.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁹⁷ Kay A. Read, “World Religions and the Miscellaneous Category,” *Religious Studies Reviews* 31, no. 1 & 2 (April 2005): 12.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

national, or racial expressions.”²⁹⁹ Russell McCutcheon shares Masuzawa’s critical concerns and he applies this critique to the world religions textbook. He laments the “discursive dominance” of *sui generis* religion manifest in the ways in which most world religions textbooks assume that the most pressing issue to be addressed within religious studies is the problem of religious plurality, rather than problematizing the category of religion itself.³⁰⁰ The textbooks instead assert that the existence of many religions can create problems for social cohesion. The objective of the textbook then is to help students understand these religions in order to generate respect and contribute to social harmony. These textbooks do not begin by scrutinizing the construction of their subject, as McCutcheon advocates, but rather assume religion as an ahistorical, universal aspect of human experience. They prioritize and promote intuitivism and insider’s perspectives based on the assumption that religion is not only ahistorical but also a fundamentally shared or essentially human characteristic.

Drawing from Fitzgerald, McCutcheon concludes that many world religions textbooks exhibit characteristics tantamount to “an ecumenical theology of religious pluralism:”

the use of vaguely defined and subjective comparative categories (e.g. the ultimate, the sacred, feelings, mystery); a methodology that can be characterized as sympathetic, or descriptive, hermeneutical intuitivism; an emphasis on the study of the personalistic and nonfalsifiable contents of religious experiences, a prioritized insider’s perspective³⁰¹

McCutcheon argues that this “ecumenical project... can also be described in political terms as but one specific instance of the liberal effort to domesticate and homogenize

²⁹⁹ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 9.

³⁰⁰ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, 101.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

diversity.”³⁰² Masuzawa makes a similar argument as she elaborates a historical continuity between world religions discourse and the discipline of comparative theology. She argues that religious pluralism and world religions discourse assume that “any broadly value-orienting, ethically inflected view point must derive from a religious heritage. One of the most important effects of this discourse is that it spiritualizes what are material practices and turns them into expressions of something timeless and suprahistorical, which is to say, it depoliticizes them.”³⁰³ Essentially, McCutcheon and Masuzawa argue that the discourses of religious pluralism and world religions reorder diverse social practices in latently Protestant terms.

McCutcheon explains the significance of the world religions course as a primary site for the construction of dominant, *sui generis* discourses:

the modern discourse on religion, articulated within an institutional locale, is continually reconstituted in such courses. In other words, the odds are rather high that if a student ever takes a course in the study of religion—whether the student majors in the field or not—it will be introduction to world religions³⁰⁴

McCutcheon then laments the weaknesses of such courses: “Although the health of the institutionalized study of religion may in large part depend on the number of students in its courses, the theoretical approach to religion that will attract such enrollments is not necessarily the most productive, contemporary, critical or sophisticated.”³⁰⁵ While this sympathetic approach, characterized by a facile and manufactured coherence, may not serve to produce the critical rigor McCutcheon would prefer to see, it does function successfully in the construction of another narrative—that of an America unified in its properly regulated diversity. By focusing on pluralism as a mode of governmentality, I

³⁰² Ibid., 125.

³⁰³ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 20.

³⁰⁴ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, 103.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 104.

offer a new perspective on the analysis of world religions textbooks, building from previous studies along the way.

I have argued that the academic study of religions is dominated by pluralist discourse, especially when the study of religion is distilled into its most ostensibly accessible package-- the introductory religions course and the world religions textbook. I have also argued that the discourse of religious pluralism is infused with veiled liberal norms, that it functions to legitimate and reproduce liberal governance and the liberal regulation of religion in the public sphere. Thus, I argue, world religions textbooks may reproduce these liberal norms. Yet, these textbooks typically do not include explicit discussions of liberalism. They do not explain liberal theory and discuss its basic principles of moral autonomy, individual liberty, and equal rights. They do not explain how these liberal principles frame the study of religion. Rather, the discourse of religious pluralism frequently present in these textbooks is depoliticized; it is presented as universal, ahistorical, and naturalized. Its politics and its historical emergence are hidden from view. Thus my aim here in this textbook analysis is to render the hidden visible. Moreover, I consider whether these unseen liberal assumptions, which position and prescribe religions as discrete, private, and voluntary, may serve more to regulate the role of religion in civil society and affirm well-regulated diversity than to actually illuminate the lived realities they seek to describe. The world religions textbook, while presented as a neat package of information about a variety of systems and ways of life called religion, is also a tool for ordering society.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis: From Theory to Method

My method is informed by the social theory of critical discourse analysis, primarily the work of Norman Fairclough, which entails a theoretical perspective that

“gives rise to ways of analyzing language or semiosis within a broader analysis of the social process.”³⁰⁶ Fairclough points out that critical discourse analysis has no well-defined and dominant method. As much a theory as a method, it is not a set of tools or techniques that can be interchangeably transferred from one analysis to the next, but rather an approach to theorizing and framing an analysis. In my analysis, I have used a qualitative, interpretive approach, rather than the quantitative content analysis employed by many textbook analyses. This qualitative approach allows for greater sensitivity to the nuances and dynamics of the texts.

My approach begins with identifying and describing the social order or practice I am problematizing and its semiotic aspect, or the ways in which it produces meaning through signs and symbols. This involves looking at the textured relationship between discourse, or ways of representing, and genre, ways of enacting. My analysis entails exploring the network of practices within which the discourse is located as well as a structural analysis that includes parsing interdiscursive and intertextual relationships and ideological practices, such as the reification of social norms.

The central social order or practice that I problematize here is the hegemonic regulation of religion in American society as a means of legitimating liberal norms and securing the dominance of liberal governance. I am interested in the ways in which the rhetoric of liberalism touts individual freedoms as a foundational value, while it simultaneously works in other ways to implicitly manage, regulate, and limit many of those freedoms. I argue that this social practice is represented through the discourse of religious pluralism; thus this discourse is a semiotic aspect of this social practice. And, more specifically, I look at world religion textbooks as a genre of this social

³⁰⁶ Norman Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method in Social Scientific Research,” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 121.

practice, or a particular way of “(inter)acting discursively.”³⁰⁷ By parsing the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, as well as the ideological practices, that shape these texts, I aim to better understand how the regulation of religion in civil society is enacted and naturalized. I look at how these textbooks mediate and transmit other domains for learners, especially the liberal public sphere. As I problematize these practices, I want to think about approaches to engaging these texts and reconceptualizing this discourse in ways that illuminate the ambivalence and complexity involved in religious diversity in the U.S.

In the previous chapter, I theorized and described the dimensions of the discourse of religious pluralism, including its historical development and its contemporary production within the academic study of religion. Methodologically, I aimed to elaborate the social processes and structures that “give rise to the production” of the texts and situate the context in which “which individuals or groups as social historical subjects, create meaning in their interactions with texts.”³⁰⁸ I also identified discursive practices that perform a regulatory function, with attentiveness to the ways in which the governmental practices of the discourse of religious pluralism are unseen and taken for granted, thus highlighting the ideological effects of these practices in the construction of meaning, which stabilize and naturalize conventions.

As I direct my analysis to world religions textbooks, I am not focused on the immediate or apparent meaning of a textual passage. Rather, I look to understand the discursive practices that have produced the text. Texts work to construct and reproduce the order of things, which can involve describing, classifying, and

³⁰⁷ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Second Edition (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2010), 75.

³⁰⁸ Ruth Wodak, “What CDA Is about-- a Summary of Its History, Important Concepts and Its Development,” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 3.

representing the world around us in ways that reinforce a dominant social order. A text “instructs us how to see the world, how to differentiate parts within it, and thereby provides the means by which we can engage with the world.”³⁰⁹ Accordingly, as I analyze these world religions textbooks, I look at what the text says, as well as what it does not say. Better understanding the content of the textbooks is not the primary aim of my analysis. My focus is not so much on all the information a textbook elaborates about, for instance, religious realities in South Asia and the factual accuracy or scholarly rigor of this information. Rather, I am interested in the power dynamics involved in the ways in which this information is presented-- how it constructs its subject, how it reproduces ideologies, as well as the larger social order in which it is produced. I am looking for patterns and recurring key elements and asking how they function in the production of meaning.

My analysis involves looking at the ways in which these texts address the reader, the kind of social realities they describe and the ways in which they prescribe that the reader should respond to these realities. I look at the wider discourses reflected in these descriptions, especially the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between discourses of pluralism, world religions, liberalism, and tolerance, and consider how they have come to be seen as natural accounts of the world.

I approach my analysis by looking at two interrelated dimensions: 1. meaning-making and 2. discursive strategies. I ask some broader conceptual questions about ways in which these textbooks produce meanings that reproduce or transform a social order and involve the discursive construction of the discourse of religious pluralism,

³⁰⁹ Lindsay Prior, “Following in Foucault’s Footsteps: Text and Context in Qualitative Research,” in *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 321.

the legitimation of liberal norms, and the regulation of the role religion in liberal society. I simultaneously investigate the discursive strategies these texts use in these processes. Here, I also draw from the critical discourse analysis work of Theo Van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak, especially their methods for analyzing discursive strategies of recontextualization and legitimation.

I approach my data with a series questions for each of these textbooks:

1. How does the text construct normativity?

Ultimately, I aim to explore how the discursive practices of the text shape a normative social order—a liberal social order—including a normative liberal conception of religion. I ask how religion is defined. Is the definition explicit or implicit? Is it essentialist or critical/historical? Does the book use a traditional world religions approach? Does it make assumptions about human nature and the nature of religion based on liberal ideas and values, such as individualism, liberty, rationality, egalitarianism, voluntarism, and secularism? Does it assume that religion is separate and differentiated from other elements of social life, such as the political and the economic? Does it make assumptions or claims about legitimate or authentic religion and religious authority? Does the book make assumptions about who has the authority to best understand or speak for a religion? How is difference defined?

2. How does the text legitimate a particular role for religion within a liberal social order?

How does the text define the relationship between religion and society? How does it describe the purpose of the book and the rationale for the study of religions? Does the book discuss methodology and theoretical issues in the study of religion? How are assumptions about the nature of religion and its role in society revealed in

these methods? Does the text designate certain ways of thinking about religions as legitimate and authoritative and others as problematic? What are the politics at work in the ways these texts represent religions?

As I navigate these questions, I examine strategies involved in the discursive construction of liberal norms for religion. I draw from an approach developed by Van Leeuwen and Wodak, which Fairclough incorporates into his work, and focus on the discursive practice of recontextualization. Fairclough defines recontextualization as a “relationship between different (networks of) social practices—a matter of how elements of one social practice are appropriated by, relocated in, the context of another.”³¹⁰ Discursive practices involve representation—the re-presenting of some social practice. This always takes place outside the original context of the social practice being represented. Thus, representation involves recontextualization. Moreover, this recontextualization always entails a process of transformation. The process of representation and recontextualization changes the original practice in some way and “what exactly gets transformed depends on the interests, goals and values of the context into which the practice is recontextualized.”³¹¹ I use this concept of recontextualization to think through the ways in which the category of religion takes a range of social practices and re-presents them according to liberal and latently Protestant norms, such as defining the religious experience or personal belief of individuals as the core of all religions.

I draw from several theorists of critical discourse analysis to identify types of discursive strategies. I look for some of the strategies described by Wodak, De Cillia, and Reisigl including constructive strategies and perpetuation and justification

³¹⁰ Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 222.

³¹¹ Van Leeuwen and Wodak, “Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse Historical Analysis,” 96.

strategies.³¹² Constructive strategies serve to build a particular role for religion. For example, one constructive strategy I examine is the construction of the “we” group in these textbooks. The “we” group posits commonality in religious experience and in the study of religion. It often uses emotive language to invite identification in the pluralist ethos. Perpetuation and justification strategies engage in legitimation, a discursive practice that aims to explain and solidify why social practices must be the way they are.³¹³ Practices of legitimation function to maintain, support, and reproduce the social and institutional order and serve as a continual reinforcement of what is viewed as constituting objective knowledge, as well as objective social reality and one’s place in it.

Van Leeuwen elaborates several types of strategies of legitimation.³¹⁴ The three types that I use for my analysis include: 1. authorization, 2. moral evaluation, and 3. rationalization. Authorization involves legitimation “by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested.”³¹⁵ Moral evaluation legitimates through references to value systems, often “linked to specific discourses of moral value.”³¹⁶ Finally, rationalization entails legitimation by “reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity.”³¹⁷ Van Leeuwen explains that, in practice, these types of legitimation strategies often work in combination to naturalize practices and power arrangements within a social

³¹² Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities,” *Discourse and Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 160–163.

³¹³ As Van Leeuwen and Wodak point out, “This ‘why’ again is never intrinsic to the practice, but has to be construed in discourse.” Van Leeuwen and Wodak, “Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse Historical Analysis,” 98.

³¹⁴ Van Leeuwen, “Legitimation in Discourse and Communication,” 92.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

order. I use his discussion of these strategies to scrutinize the ways in which the discursive practices of these textbooks legitimate a particular role for religion within a liberal social order.

As I engage in this textbook analysis, moving between broader questions of context and discursive strategies, I begin by looking at the ways these textbooks broadly situate religion. In chapter 5, I give considerable attention to prefaces and introductions as spaces in which authors set out to explain to their readers their task and their purpose, as well as concluding chapters as spaces in which authors aim to shore up the coherence of their narratives. In chapter 6, I focus on textbook chapters on Buddhism and Islam, two traditions that reveal the discursive strategies that legitimate liberal governance most clearly. I focus on the most poignant and illuminating examples and discussions from these six textbooks.

4.4 Compiling My Body of Data

Having briefly situated the world religions textbook as a genre and discursive site, as well as having described my method, I now want to apply this theoretical framework to a discursive analysis of the regulatory and disciplinary practices found within currently circulating world religions textbooks. The field of textbook studies is largely focused on textbooks used in public schools, often examining the relationship between the content of textbooks, schooling, and public discourse.³¹⁸ The world religions textbooks I examine do not fit so easily within this scope of inquiry, largely because they are not commonly used in American public schools. Unlike countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, religious studies courses are not often

³¹⁸ For an overview of the field of textbook analysis, including dominant methods of the field, see Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, 2nd ed. (Braunschweig: Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, 2010).

offered in public high schools in the U.S.³¹⁹ When the topic of religion is addressed in public schools, it typically arises in the study of other disciplines, such as social studies, geography, world history, or literature. To be clear, my study is not an examination of how religion is taught in American public education. My study examines textbooks used in introductory religious studies courses. These courses are found in private high schools, colleges, and universities. For this study, I do not engage in a corpus analysis, that is a quantitative analysis of a large sample of textual data to determine widespread frequency of linguistic or content patterns. Rather, my study aims at depth and richness.

My data set involves six widely used world religions textbooks, which I assert are typical or representative of this genre. Rather than arbitrarily choosing textbooks, I have selected these six textbooks by conducting a short survey of members of Religious Studies in Secondary Schools (RSiSS), an American professional organization for secondary school teachers of religion. The organization's mission statement reads:

RSiSS is a coalition of public and private secondary school teachers working in conjunction with the Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education. We are committed to the idea that education is not complete without the academic study of the world's religious traditions and the ethical values, literatures, and cultures so inextricably linked to them.³²⁰

RSiSS holds an annual teacher training institute on teaching world religions, among other activities. The annual summer institutes, convened each year since 1997, focus on a particular area, such as Buddhism, Islam or religion and ecology. They are facilitated by a well-established scholar in that area of study. Members of RSiSS primarily teach religion through introductory courses at the secondary school, or high school level. Some also teach introductory college courses. Given that textbooks

³¹⁹ As one exceptional case, since 2000, a world religions course has been offered in public high schools in Modesto, CA. See Emile Lester, *Teaching about Religions: A Democratic Approach for Public Schools* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

³²⁰ <http://www.rsiss.net/index.html>

occupy a prominent position in introductory courses, I chose to conduct my survey with this organization because its members are focused on teaching religion at this introductory level.

This survey asked secondary school teachers of religion to list up to five world religions textbooks that they have used in their classrooms and how many times (semesters, terms or years) they have used them. They were also asked: 1. if they have a favorite and why; 2. if they particularly dislike one and why; 3. if they use other texts, such as primary texts or articles; 4. the title and grade/level of the course in which they use these texts; and 5. whether their institutional setting is best described as a public school or a private school, and if the latter, secular or faith-based.³²¹ There were 57 participants who responded to the survey; however, only 37 completed the questions about their preferred textbooks.³²²

In response to the first question, 24 different textbooks were listed, most only listed once. Additionally, several participants also listed books that are not textbooks that they use in their classes. Seven textbooks were listed by multiple respondents. In order of popularity, they include: 1. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* 3. Jeffrey Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 4. T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 5. William Young, *The World's Religions*, 6. Phillip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's*

³²¹ In June 2012, members of RSiSS were contacted by the executive director of the organization via email and provided with the information letter and a link to Survey Monkey, where the survey was hosted. I anticipated minimal risks. The survey was anonymous. Participants were asked to list textbooks used in their classrooms. They were also asked for minimal descriptive information about the context in which they use the textbooks-- name of course, grade or age group in the course, type of school. All of this information was merely descriptive and likely publicly available through their institutions. Participants also had the option to name a textbook as their favorite and describe reasons, as well as name a textbook as their least favorite and describe why. In these questions, though participants had the option to express opinions that could have included criticisms, as an anonymous survey, these opinions could not be traced back to any one individual. Moreover, even critical remarks would likely have had no more risks than those encountered in expressing opinions in everyday professional life.

³²² See appendix for detailed results.

Religions, and 7. Jacob Neusner, ed, *World Religions in America*. While I aimed to identify five most frequently used textbooks, the Burke, Young, Novak, and Neusner texts were all listed at the same frequency. I have excluded the Novak text from my data because it is not traditional textbook, but rather a compendium of primary sources meant to accompany Huston Smith's *The World's Religions*. Thus, my data set now includes six textbooks.

In response to the question "Do you have a favorite 'World Religions' textbook? If so, which one and why?," many respondents either answered no or reiterated the text they had previously listed. Among the more detailed responses, some were actually criticisms rather than descriptions of preference, such as "Smith, World Religions - addresses big concepts without too much detail. Not found any general text useful for high school level course--text still to be written" and "I don't teach the 'World Religions' model because I think it skims and essentializes. If I had to use a textbook, I would use Fisher's *Living Religions*. Instead, I give my classes a more narrow focus and use monographs written by Religious Studies scholars (see above)." One respondent stated, "No. None are great for high school kids. They are either too difficult or too simplistic." Another respondent shared dissatisfaction with world religions textbooks:

Not yet. I've been teaching World Religions now for four years, and have used three different textbooks! Like the Fisher due to it being comprehensive but it's too much for my one-semester format. Prothero is pretty cool because it's more "edgy" and goes against the "perennial philosophy" idea and it's also readable in just a few weeks but it's also not "textbook" enough for some students. Looking forward to trying the Partridge because it's written by a variety of scholars.

Several expressed satisfaction with Mary Pat Fisher's *Living Religions*. One described the text as having the "best scholarship, helpful features." Others called it "broad based, accessible, interesting" and said it "acknowledges complexity and diversity

within traditions, covers the positives and negatives, gives examples of individuals living their faiths.” Another stated:

Mary Pat Fisher's is fabulous because she provides enough info about each religion that you can grasp the basic ideas but she also explicitly is committed to religious pluralism and mutual understanding which is where I am coming from. I like that she includes New Age movements and her intro on why religions and the issues in contemporary America and the world set the context for why we are doing this study. Huston Smith is my hero (along with Karen Armstrong) but their work either assumes more knowledge than my students have or are difficult to read at that age.

A couple of respondents expressed gravitating between the Fisher text and the Huston Smith text, stating “I like to use Smith a lot as a supplement for the Eastern Religion sections of other textbooks. This will be my first year using Fisher because I found the other three lacking” and “Every year our teachers are split between the Illustrated World Religions (Smith) and Living Religions and we continually go back and forth.”

Respondents who listed the Brodd textbook as their favorite said “I've been happy with Brodd's. The amount of detail is about right, and my students like it” and “it provides a basic objective overview of the world's major religions and it is easy for high school students to grasp.” One respondent explained a preference for the Burke textbook: “The Burke text is my favorite because (1) it is generally accurate and fair, (2) it has primary texts bound in the same text, (3) it is not idiosyncratic the way Smith is, and (4) it is reasonably priced.”

There were very few responses to the question “Do you have a least favorite 'World Religions' textbooks? If so, which one and why?.” One respondent stated: “I think that they all essentialize traditions and minimize the relationship between religion and other parts of human experience (politics, language, literature, culture, gender, race, etc.)” Another said, “Huston Smith because it is too narrow in its perspective, not showing enough of the diversity within traditions.” A third respondent stated:

At this point: no. Each text I have looked at (and I have looked at around 7-8 texts!) has its own strengths and weaknesses. I think, for a comprehensive textbook, my least favorites are ones that are just so expensive! Mary Pat Fisher's text is almost 100.00. I also need to say that I think her text is the weaker of the major texts.

Notably, all respondents said that they use other texts in addition to the textbooks.

In response to the question about the title of the course and grade level, respondents indicated that the textbooks were used in courses titled: "World Religions" (19), "Comparative Religions" (3), "Global Religions" (2), "Humanities" (2), "Introduction to Religion" (1) and "Catholic Studies" (1). Grade levels included 10th – 12th grades (24), 9th grade (6), middle school (3), and college (3). While membership in RSiSS is open to both private and public secondary school teachers, all respondents listed their institutional setting as private, described as parochial/faith-based (15), secular (13), and other (7).

From the results of this survey, my textbook analysis includes 1. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* 3. Jeffrey Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 4. T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 5. William Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, and 6. Jacob Neusner, ed, *World Religions in America*. In the following chapter, I explore these six textbooks.

Chapter 5: Six World Religions Textbooks

In this chapter, I examine these six textbooks through the tools of critical discourse analysis. As I detailed in the previous chapter, Tomoko Masuzawa has deconstructed the taken-for-granted category of world religions. She argues that the category of world religions seemingly epitomizes pluralism and tolerance, yet it originated as a means of solidifying the superiority and dominance of the West, as embodied by Christianity, and continues to carry this legacy. In this textbook analysis, I look for the ways in which these texts reproduce this pluralist discourse as well as these historical politics of domination. I argue that, while overt messages of Christian superiority may have faded, these textbooks exemplify and universalize a liberal worldview, upon which Protestant norms neatly map.

As I investigate how these texts reproduce discourses of religious pluralism and liberalism and how these function as regulatory discourses, I explore both elements of content and discursive strategies in these texts; that is, I look at both what the texts say and how they say it, and then I consider the implications of these practices. I evaluate how the texts construct normativity and formulate a particular role for religion in society. I consider discursive strategies of recontextualization, construction, and legitimation. I also examine interdiscursive relationships between discourses of world religions, pluralism, and liberalism. In this chapter, I focus on highlighting relevant textual sections that discuss religion and why we should focus on it. In the next chapter, I look specifically at those sections dealing with Buddhism and Islam to illustrate my points.

5.1 A Brief Description of Six Textbooks

First, I want to begin with a brief description of each of the six textbooks in my analysis, including brief biographical information about each textbook's author. I also

recognize that each text is the result of a collaborative process; it does not reflect only the singular perspective of its associated author. Each includes acknowledgments of a number of scholars who served as advisors. Moreover, the Neusner text includes essays by multiple authors. Thus, each text is the product of intertextuality; each is composed of layers of texts. Moreover, the extent of the collaborators, editors, and advisors' influence and representation in the texts is largely unseen.

Additionally, beyond these textured contributions, each text is also constrained by the parameters of its medium. While there is considerable diversity among the six authors of these texts— ranging from an author who established a libertarian organization to another author who has spent decades communally living and working on an ashram in India— the spectrum of perspectives presented in these texts does not reflect such diversity. As textbooks, these texts are bound by the standards of publishers that seek a broad, introductory audience. Textbooks are commodities, products designed to appeal to consumers. They are among the more profitable of academic publications. Thus, the authors' presentation of information must meet this criterion of broad, introductory appeal. Notably, as my text analysis reveals, liberal norms and ideology also characterize the genre of the world religions textbook. This supports my argument that they fit rather seamlessly into a liberal world order, i.e., the one supported by mainline American culture.

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991.

The World's Religions was written by Huston Smith, a scholar of religions who received a PhD in philosophy from University of Chicago in 1945 and taught at MIT, Syracuse University, and University of California Berkeley. In 1958, Smith wrote *The Religions of Man*, which was published in a new edition with the new title, *The World's Religions*, in 1991. His biographical statement calls it “a seminal textbook in the field of

comparative religions,” an apt statement given its continuous publication over 55 years.³²³ Smith’s influence extends beyond academia. For example, he was the subject of a 1996 Bill Moyer’s documentary, “The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith,” a five-part overview of his life and work shown on PBS. Among other awards and honors, Smith received the AAR Martin E. Marty Award in the Public Understanding of Religion in 2004. The current edition of *The World’s Religions* boasts more than two million copies sold. It ranks first among Amazon.com’s Best Sellers in Comparative Religions.³²⁴ *The World’s Religions* is the oldest among the textbooks I analyze and easily the most widely read and influential of these texts. Its popularity has led it to be labeled “*the book*” by a deputy publisher at HarperOne who was quoted in a 2007 Publisher’s Weekly article on popular religion textbooks.³²⁵ The current edition of the book, published by HarperOne, is xvi +399 pages in length, not including a supplemental section at the end that accompanies the 50th anniversary edition.

Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 8th Edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011.

The first edition of *Living Religions* was published in 1991, the same year Smith released *The World’s Religions* (the revised edition of *The Religions of Man*). Published by large textbook publisher Pearson, a ninth edition will be released in 2014. It ranks #3 among Amazon.com’s bestsellers in Comparative Religions.³²⁶ The current edition is xvi +558 pages in length, divided into thirteen chapters. Unlike the other textbook, *Living Religions* does not have an author’s academic biography, complete with degrees

³²³ “Syracuse University Archives: Collections and Personal Papers - Faculty Papers: Huston Cummings Smith,” accessed May 11, 2013, http://archives.syr.edu/collections/faculty/smith_bio.html.

³²⁴ This ranking was accurate as of August 12, 2013; however, bestseller lists change regularly. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/12783/ref=pd_zg_hrsr_b_1_4_last>

³²⁵ Donna Freitas, “In Search of the Perfect Textbook (and Those Who Use Them),” *Publishers Weekly*, October 29, 2007, 11.

³²⁶ This ranking was accurate as of August 12, 2013; however, bestseller lists change regularly. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/12783/ref=pd_zg_hrsr_b_1_4_last>

and university positions held. In her published works, Fisher lists her affiliation as the Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religions.³²⁷ Located in New Delhi India, Gobind Sadan is an “international interfaith community” rooted in the Sikh tradition, founded by Baba Virsa Singh. The Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religions was started in 1990 and its mission is “the diffusion of knowledge of various religions with particular reference to common principles underlying different faiths as they promote universal brotherhood, peace, amity, and respect for human rights.” The institute’s website also describes its work as “focused on critical areas of theology and religious history often neglected by the mainstream” and “a clear mandate to recognize the presence of the ‘spiritual’ or the ‘mystery’ in shaping our traditions, rather than simply reducing religion to a social science.”³²⁸ Fisher’s personal biography, included in the textbook and listed on the Pearson website, states that she “writes about all religions, not only from academic research, but also from her experiences with religions around the world” and that her perspective has been influenced by her experience living in the interfaith community of Gobind Sadan. While Fisher does not offer her own academic credentials, she includes in the preface an extensive list of established scholars of specific religions who she has consulted for the book as well as a significant list of professors teaching world religions courses who have reviewed the text.

Jacob Neusner, editor, *World Religions in America*, 4th Edition, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

This book is notable among the other books in my analysis in that it is an edited collection of essays, each on a different religion, each by a different author who is a

³²⁷ The Pearson website also includes this biographical information.

<http://www.pearsonhighered.com/livingreligionsforum/speakers.html#mary_pat_fisher>

³²⁸ “Who We Are,” *Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religions*, accessed April 4, 2013, <http://gobindsadan.org/institute.html>.

scholar of that religion. The book is also distinct among the six texts in that it centers on each “world religion” in the context of the United States. The first edition was published in 1994. The book has expanded considerably through its subsequent editions. Originally 271 pages in length with fourteen chapters, the current fourth edition is 462 pages in length, divided into six parts and twenty-two chapters, plus a preface and introduction by the editor, Jacob Neusner.³²⁹ The book ranked #6 among Amazon.com’s bestsellers in Comparative Religion.

The book’s editor, Jacob Neusner, is Distinguished Service Professor of the History and Theology of Judaism, Bard Center Fellow, and Senior Fellow, Institute of Advanced Theology at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. Perhaps the best-known scholar of Judaism in the world, his biographical statement states that he has written or edited hundreds of books, and received numerous awards including ten honorary degrees and fourteen academic medals and prizes.³³⁰

Jeffrey Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 3rd Edition, Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2009.

All other books in my analysis are geared toward an introductory college or university audience and often used in secondary classrooms as well. This book, however, is published by Catholic publisher Saint Mary’s Press and marketed as a high school textbook aimed at 11th and 12th grade secondary students. It ranks in Amazon.com’s Top 100 Bestsellers in Comparative Religions.³³¹ The book is 310 pages in length, divided into fifteen chapters, after a foreword. The author, Jeffrey Brodd, is a professor in the Department of Humanities and Religious Studies at Sacramento State

³³⁰ “Bard Faculty: Jacob Neusner, Bard College” accessed September 15, 2013, <http://www.bard.edu/academics/faculty/faculty.php?action=details&id=648>.

³³¹ This ranking was current as of August 12, 2013; however, ranking data changes regularly. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/12783/ref=pd_zg_hrsr_b_3_4_last#5>

University. He received a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he studied with Ninian Smart.

T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 2nd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts by T. Patrick Burke was published first in 1996 and in a 2004 second edition by Blackwell Publishing. While the textbook does not currently rank within the Amazon Bestsellers in Comparative Religions, it was important enough to be included in a 2005 special double issue of *Religious Studies Review* devoted to world religions textbooks.³³² It also received an endorsement, though qualified, in Judith Berling's *Understanding Other Religious Worlds: A Guide for Interreligious Education*.³³³ The book, xix +380 pages in length, is organized into an introduction and three subsequent sections, with three chapters in each section.

Burke's biographical statement in the textbook and on the publisher's website states only that he was "for many years Professor of Religion at Temple University." He holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a doctorate in theology from the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich. Among the authors surveyed, Burke is most explicit about his commitment to liberalism. Before his world religions textbook published in 1996, he published *No Harm: Ethical Principles for a Free Market* (Paragon House 1994). In 2002, he founded the Wynnewood Institute, an independent, academic non-profit organization that "seeks to promote the understanding of Western civilization, the free society and the free market" and takes an approach rooted in "classical liberalism combined with

³³² Mark MacWilliams, "Religion/s between Covers: Dilemmas of the World Religions Textbook, Introduction," *Religious Studies Reviews* 31, no. 1 & 2 (April 2005): 1-3.

³³³ Judith A. Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds: A Guide for Interreligious Education* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 132.

conservatism.”³³⁴ Burke’s biographical statement on the Wynnewood Institute website includes the statement: “In 2002, in response to the events of 9/11, he conceived of establishing a research institute concerned with the encounter between Western civilization with its concept of the free society and the traditional Muslim world. This has become the Wynnewood Institute.”³³⁵ Burke also contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Libertarianism* in 2008.³³⁶

William A. Young, *The World’s Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 3rd Edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010.

Published by Pearson, *The World’s Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues* ranks in Amazon’s Top 100 Bestsellers in Comparative Religions.³³⁷ The book is xiv + 433 pages in length, divided into four sections and nineteen chapters. The author, William A. Young, is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Westminster College in Fulton, MO, where he also served as university chaplain for twenty years. He holds a PhD in Religious Studies from University of Iowa and a Master of Divinity from McCormick Theological Seminary. His other publications include introductory textbooks *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds* (in its 6th edition), and *Quest for Harmony: Native American Spiritual Traditions*.³³⁸

Henceforth, I will refer to each book by the last name of the author, or author/editor in the case the Neusner text.

³³⁴ “About the Institute,” *The Wynnewood Institute*, accessed June 15, 2013, <http://www.wynnewood.org/Home/About-the-Institute.aspx>.

³³⁵ “About Thomas Patrick Burke,” *The Wynnewood Institute*, accessed June 15, 2013, <http://www.wynnewood.org/Home/Officers-and-Board/About-Thomas-Patrick-Burke.aspx>.

³³⁶ Ronald Hamowy, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Libertarianism* (London: Sage Publications, 2008).

³³⁷ This ranking was current as of August 12, 2013; however, ranking data changes regularly. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/12783/ref=pd_zg_hrsr_b_3_4_last#5>

³³⁸ “Faculty and Staff,” *Westminster College*, accessed June 15, 2013, <http://www.westminster-mo.edu/facstaff/Pages/directorydetails.aspx?ListID=558B06FC-8047-4578-B40E-C113A449E520&XID=89>

Table 1: Textbooks chapters, listed by appearance³³⁹ (Section headings are underlined.)

Brodd	Burke	Fisher	Neusner³⁴⁰	Smith	Young
1. Studying the World's Religions 2. Primal Religious Traditions <u>South Asia:</u> 3. Hinduism 4. Buddhism 5. Jainism 6. Sikhism <u>East Asia:</u> 7. Confucianism 8. Taoism 9. Zen Buddhism 10. Shinto <u>The Ancient West:</u> 11. Ancestors of the West 12. Judaism 13. Christianity 14. Islam 15. Religion in the Modern World	Introduction <u>I. The Religions of Indian Origin:</u> 1. Hinduism 2. Buddhism 3. Sikhism <u>II. The Religions of Chinese Origin:</u> 4. Traditional Chinese Religion and Confucianism 5. Taoism 6. Chinese Buddhism <u>III. The Religions of Semitic Origins:</u> 7. Judaism 8. Islam 9. Christianity	1. Religious Responses 2. Indigenous Sacred Ways 3. Hinduism 4. Jainism 5. Buddhism 6. Daoism and Confucianism 7. Shinto and Zoroastrianism 8. Judaism 9. Christianity 10. Islam 11. Sikhism 12. New Religious Movements 13. Religion in the Twenty-First Century	Introduction <u>I: In the Beginning</u> 1. Native Americans and Their Religions <u>II: Christian Foundations of American Religions</u> 2. Protestant Christianity* 3. The Religious World of African Americans 4. Catholics* 5. The Religious World of Latino/a and Hispanic Americans 6. Orthodox Christianity* <u>III: Other Monotheistic Traditions in America</u> 7. Judaism* 8. Islam* 9. The Baha'i Faith* <u>IV: More Recent Arrivals</u> 10. Hinduism* 11. Buddhism* 12. East Asian Religions in Today's America <u>V: Made (or Re-made) in the USA:</u> 13. Apocalyptic Communities: Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses** 14. Metaphysical Communities: Christian Science and Theosophy** 15. New Thought 16. The Church of Scientology 17. Nature Religions: Neopaganism and Witchcraft 18. The Latter Day Saint (Mormon) Religion* 19. The Unification Church <u>VI: Issues in American Religion</u> 20. Religion & Women 21. Religion & Politics 22. Religion & Society	1. Points of Departure 2. Hinduism 3. Buddhism 4. Confucianism 5. Taoism 6. Islam 7. Judaism 8. Christianity 9. The Primal Religions 10. A Final Examination ³⁴¹	<u>I. Introduction</u> 1. An Introduction to Religion and the Study of Religion <u>II. The World's Religions: Histories and Worldviews</u> 2. Indigenous Religions 3. Hinduism 4. Theravada Buddhism 5. Jainism 6. Confucianism 7. Daoism 8. Mahayana Buddhism (The Great Vehicle) and Vajrayana Buddhism (The Thunderbolt Vehicle) 9. Shinto 10. Judaism 11. Christianity 12. Islam 13. Sikhism 14. New Religious Movements: Renewal and Innovation <u>III. The World's Religions and Contemporary Ethical Issues:</u> 15. The Ecological and Economic Crises: Humans and Resources 16. War and Capital Punishment: Society and Violence 17. Abortion and Euthanasia: Life and Death 18. Gender and Sexual Orientation: Roles and Identity <u>IV. Conclusion</u> 19. The Future of the World's Religions

³³⁹ I have listed and numbered each chapter as it appears in its respective text. I have also included larger categorical headings when used.

³⁴⁰ * The full title of these chapters ends with "in the World and in America;" ** The full title of these chapters begins with "World Religions Made in the USA"

³⁴¹ The "50th Anniversary Edition" (HarperOne 2009) includes a supplementary "Plus" section with a Theosophical Society-sponsored lecture given by Smith in Chicago in 2002 and an interview of Smith published in the Buddhist magazine *Shambhala Sun* in July 1997.

Table 2: Comparison of religions covered by each text

	Burke	Brodd	Fisher	Neusner	Smith	Young
Indigenous Religions	No	“Primal Religious Traditions”	“Indigenous Sacred Ways”	“Native Americans and their Religions”	“The Primal Religions”	“Indigenous Religions—Quest for Harmony”
Christianity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Protestant; African American; Catholic; Latino/a & Hispanic	Yes	Yes
Judaism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Islam	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hinduism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes; also contains “Appendix on Sikhism”	Yes
Buddhism	Buddhism; Chinese Buddhism	Buddhism; Zen Buddhism	Yes	Buddhism; East Asian religions	Yes	Theravada Buddhism; Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism
Jainism	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sikhism	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No; “Appendix on Sikhism” included in Hinduism chapter	Yes
Confucianism	Yes	Yes	Yes, with Daoism	Yes, with East Asian religions	Yes	Yes
Daoism	Yes	Yes	Yes, included with Confucianism	Yes, with East Asian religions	Yes	Yes
Additional Religions	None	Shinto; “Ancestors of the West”	Shinto and Zoroastrianism; New Religious Movements	7 chapters on New Religious Movements	None	Shinto; New Religious Movements
Topical chapters	None	“Religion in the Modern World”	“Religion in the Twenty-First Century”	Religion & Women; Religion & Politics; Religion & Society	“A Final Examination”	“The Ecological & Economic Crisis;” “War & Capital Punishment;” “Abortion & Euthanasia;” “Gender & Sexual Orientation;” “The Future of the World’s Religions”

5.2 Analyzing the Texts: the Construction of Normativity

While these texts are different from one another in many ways, each constructs normativity, the complex and typically unseen process of establishing norms, or certain discursive and social practices, as standard, dominant, and natural. As I look for patterns in the texts that reveal discursive strategies of recontextualization, construction, and legitimation, I also parse out interdiscursive relationships.

5.2.1 Interdiscursivity

Texts are historical. They absorb and are built out of previous texts. Any given text is a palimpsest; the encountered text sits at the forefront of a layered and often concealed interdependent relationship with other texts, discourses, social practices and structures. Interdiscursivity, a concept used in discourse analysis, refers to the ways in which discourses draw from and overlap with each other, such as how the discourse of pluralism draws from the discourse of liberalism. A related concept, intertextuality, concerns ways in which a given text enfolds other texts. For example, many world religions textbooks reveal lingering influences of pivotal texts in religious studies, such as the work of Eliade and Smart, even when they do not explicitly acknowledge this influence. Interdiscursivity and intertextuality speak to the fact that discursive practices have an interdependent relationship that constitutes, defines and transforms them. Thus, texts always take or render from other contemporary and historically prior texts and discourses.³⁴²

Interdiscursive relationships also involve processes of recontextualization through which texts from one discourse are reoriented and reinterpreted in the context of another discourse. Accordingly, interdiscursivity does not mean that one discourse is replicated in another, but rather reworked and rearticulated in the new context.

³⁴² Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 40.

Fairclough describes these processes of articulation, disarticulation, and rearticulation as leading to discursive change—“disarticulating existing orders of discourse and rearticulating new orders of discourse, new discursive hegemonies.”³⁴³ These discursive changes are always rooted in previous or existing orders. They do not reflect new language or conventions, but rather new combinations of existing conventions, codes or elements, often involving interdiscursivity.

While there may be several discourses at work in these textbooks, I focus on the interdiscursive relationship between pluralism and liberalism situated within the world religions framework of these texts. Liberal discourse contains many variants, yet retains a set of common features. The most prominent facet of liberal discourse permeating these texts is an individualistic anthropology. Liberalism, through varying arguments, asserts the primacy of an autonomous and rational individual, equal to all others, and endowed with natural rights to life and liberty. This anthropology is foundational to modern conceptions of religion and the public sphere.

The category of religion developed along with the European social transformation that is modernity, shaped by the processes of the Enlightenment, the Protestant Reformation, and the rise of liberalism and the nation-state. Modernization led then to “the construction of religion as a new historical object: anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one’s spare time.”³⁴⁴ Many scholars argue that the contemporary study of religion involves projecting this modern concept back in time so that “religion” now appears to be a necessary aspect of human experience that has

³⁴³ Ibid., 97.

³⁴⁴ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 207.

always existed.³⁴⁵ The interdiscursive relationship of pluralist and liberal discourses is rooted in this construction of religion that relies on liberal norms.

As I have argued, pluralism is an ideology that broadly entails a commitment to recognize, value, and attempt to understand perceived religious differences. While some scholars use pluralism interchangeably with plurality or diversity, I argue that the term carries prescriptive norms and thus should not be seen as synonymous with diversity. Rather pluralism works to define and order religious diversity. In this sense, pluralism is just one possible response to religious diversity. As I discussed in chapter four, Masuzawa situates the discourse of world religions within the larger discourse of religious pluralism. She argues that world religions discourse has been shaped by a pluralist ethos. While this discourse has at times purported to engage in a scientific study of religion, it has roots in comparative theology and its efforts to identify or construct a universal spiritual tendency, which was uncritically defined and measured by the norms of Christianity.³⁴⁶

The dominant practices of the discourse of pluralism posit a number of claims: religion is important; religion is a positive force in the world; religious plurality or diversity is good; and therefore religion and religious diversity ought to be respected—even celebrated and nourished. Finally, pluralism claims that, in order to appreciate the goodness in religion and religious diversity as well as cultivate respect for them, religion ought to be understood. As I will go on to show, these discursive practices, evident throughout the textbooks in my study, work to normatively position and

³⁴⁵ See, among others, Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*; Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*.

³⁴⁶ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*; Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*.

regulate the role of religion in the public sphere and naturalize a social order organized by liberal norms.

5.2.2 Defining religion

In the case of the texts in my study, the construction of normativity starts with each book's position as a textbook. The genre of the textbook is not neutral; it is embedded with its own particular discursive practices, rules and conventions. Thus, it follows that the discourse of pluralism may follow different rhetorical and discursive practices in a textbook than it will in another genre, such as a scholarly or newspaper article or in a political speech. As characteristic of the textbook genre, world religions textbooks present themselves as a source of authority and legitimate knowledge. These textbooks define not only the study of religion but also the subject of their study—religion itself. Either explicitly or implicitly, these textbooks normatively position their subjects.

As I have previously discussed, the process of defining the term religion is complex and burdened with typically veiled politics. Definitions perform normative functions; that is, they prescribe boundaries and engage in processes of determining inclusion and exclusion. As I analyze these textbooks, I look at how they define religion, whether these definitions are clearly labeled as definitions and how the process of defining takes place both implicitly and explicitly. I consider how the texts explain or identify the nature of religion, whether religion has an essence and what this essence entails. I also look at whether the text makes assumptions or claims about legitimate or authentic religion and religious authority, as well as how the text defines or constructs difference.

My intent here is not to argue that these texts should explicitly define religion or that there is an ideal definition of religion. Rather, my goal is to illuminate the politics

involved in defining religion, the ways in which definitions, always “the historical product of discursive processes,” both reflect social structures and simultaneously construct them.³⁴⁷ I look at how definitions involve recontextualization.³⁴⁸ Definitions are discursive practices and they entail a process of representation. They take an amalgam of social realities and practices and re-present them as religion. This representation always takes place outside the original context of the social practices being represented. Thus, representation requires recontextualization. Moreover, this recontextualization always entails a process of transformation. The process of representation and recontextualization changes the original practice in some way and “what exactly gets transformed depends on the interests, goals and values of the context into which the practice is recontextualized.”³⁴⁹ In my analysis, I argue that this context is the intertwined relationship of pluralism and liberal discourse, which I explore along with its “interests, goals, and values.”

All six textbooks are structured by a world religions framework. In each of these textbooks, the process of defining religion begins before any clear discussion or explanation of definitions. It begins with the world religions framework itself. Each textbook is organized into chapters by religion. This organizational framework is also a discursive strategy that positions each religion as an autonomous, established, and clearly demarcated tradition. It naturalizes the boundaries between each religion. This discourse assumes that there is such a phenomenon as religion, found throughout the world in many forms that are diverse, yet comparable. It is a practice of recontextualization into a liberal context. It also establishes a hierarchy, asserting

³⁴⁷ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 29.

³⁴⁸ Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, “Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse Historical Analysis.”

³⁴⁹ Van Leeuwen and Wodak, “Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse Historical Analysis,” 96.

positions of importance, privilege, and dominance for those religions included, while implicitly marginalizing religions that are excluded. The world religions framework places all religions in a dialogue. This assumes a certain comparability and equality among the traditions. It assumes, as Dubuisson proffers, that “Christianity, in its capacity as the religion of the West, is the homologue or equivalent of Chinese Taoism, Siberian shamanism, or Indian Buddhism.”³⁵⁰ World religions are framed as discrete, coherent, and autonomous traditions that lend themselves to commensurate comparison. The very structure of these textbooks communicates values of pluralism.³⁵¹

In these textbooks, I argue, the discursive practices of defining and positioning religion are constructive strategies. They build and emphasize sameness, inclusion, and unity under the category of religion. They attempt to persuade and invite identification. At the same time, these strategies establish difference and exclusion. They make claims for what counts as legitimate religion and what is deviant.

The six textbooks in my study give little attention to the definition of religion and the complex theoretical issues involved in this process. Remarkably, most do not address the issue of definitions at all. Only Fisher and Young include a paragraph or two discussing the definition of religion and the construction of the category of religion; and only the latter text attempts to give an explicitly identifiable definition of religion.

Young problematizes “religion,” although briefly. He asks, “If such diverse phenomena are ‘religious,’ is there any common denominator that enables us to

³⁵⁰ Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 9.

³⁵¹ I discussed the world religions model in the previous chapter. This critical description here draws from Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

distinguish religion from other human endeavors?”³⁵² He also acknowledges scholarly arguments that “it is impossible to define religion in general,” that such efforts are always subject to “the bias of a particular religious or nonreligious point of view” and that “religion” may be a Western category “imposed on other cultures.”³⁵³ However, he stakes his position in favor of defining religion, albeit with a recognition of its limitations. Citing Jonathan Z. Smith, he asserts that “a definition of religion in general is not only possible but essential to the study of religion. A definition may reflect the bias of its author, but readers have a right to know the basic perspective taken in a presentation on a subject, especially one as controversial as religion.”³⁵⁴ Young then sets about to establish a working definition, noting that “such definitions are not intended to capture the *true* essence of religion but rather intend only a framework for distinguishing and understanding religion.”³⁵⁵ He settles on the definition: “Religion is human transformation in response to perceived ultimacy.”³⁵⁶ While Young goes on to unpack this definition, what he means by “human,” “transformation,” and “ultimacy,” he does not situate his definition within a socio-historical trajectory.

Fisher also acknowledges the complex theoretical issues involved in defining religion. She points to the constructed nature of categories such as Christianity and Buddhism, stating that each is “an abstraction that is used in the attempt to bring some kind of order to the study of religious patterns that are in fact complex, diverse, ever-changing, and overlapping.”³⁵⁷ She states: “Religion is such a complex and elusive topic that some contemporary scholars of religion are seriously questioning whether

³⁵² William A. Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 3rd Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2010), 3.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵⁷ Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 8th Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011), 1.

'religion' or 'religions' can be studied at all. They have determined that no matter where and at what point they try to define the concept, other parts will get away."³⁵⁸

Fisher introduces the reader to a certain amount of ambiguity and complexity regarding the definition of religion and does not attempt to propose a precise definition. Nonetheless, as she goes on to describe the qualities and nature of religion in the introductory chapter and throughout the text, she establishes a tacit definition that positions religion as primarily about the individual, spirituality, and goodness—points to which I will return later.

As they address definitions of religion, the Young and Fisher texts take similar approaches. They essentially argue that religion is difficult to define because it is so complex. Subsequently they subtly assert the actuality of the phenomenon contained by the category of religion—we may not know how to name it, but we know that it exists. In doing so, they reify the category of religion. Moreover, definitions involve establishing boundaries and delimiting meaning. As Young and Fisher present their readers with a pluralistic picture of religion as diverse, intricate, and vast, they ignore the ways in which the act of defining establishes certain norms and positions certain perspectives and practices as dominant and others as marginal. They advise the reader to beware of easy definitions, but they do not advise the reader to look for the ways in which certain definitions establish and mark certain interests.

Regardless of whether a textbook clearly and explicitly defines religion, it still engages in a process of normatively positioning its subject, which in effect presumes a definition. All six textbooks in my study assume that the term 'religion' is familiar to the reader, that it requires scant or no definition. They generally assume their study should begin with descriptions of each religion and its various components, such as its

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

history, myths, symbols, scriptures, and rituals, rather than a discussion of how these various social practices came to be identified as religions. They assume the existence of religion as a discrete phenomenon and begin by asserting its universality and importance. All six texts share common discursive practices that work to define and construct the category of religion. As I will go on to elaborate, these practices position religion as an essential part of the human experience involving transcendence and spirituality. The prominence of spirituality, in turn, emphasizes the individual and the individual's relationship to the transcendent, which subsequently functions to situate religion as primarily private and voluntary.

Religion as universal and ubiquitous

Many texts make clear claims that religion is an autonomous, universal aspect of human experience for which individuals have the capacity, regardless of their cultural contexts. Under the section heading "Why Are People Religious?," Young asserts the ubiquity of religion. He states:

Most people in the world *are* religious. Given our definition, one could easily argue that *all* people and groups are religious, for everyone seems to engage at some level in transformation in response to some perceived secular or spiritual ultimacy. Indeed, one scholar has coined the phrase *homo religiosus* as a way of expressing his contention that we are the species that is by nature religious (Eliade 1969:8). Readers may wish to reflect on or discuss the question of the universality of religion, now or later in their study. Another, equally interesting question, is 'Why are people religious?'³⁵⁹

Here, Young seems to construct a definition of religion so broad that it will encompass all people, thus supporting the claim that all humans are religious. While he acknowledges that one might question the universality of religion, he offers no discussion of this question. Rather, he moves on to the question of why people are religious, to which he gives considerable attention. He sums up the universal significance of religion stating, "Religion is pervasive, and, from what we are able to

³⁵⁹ Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 6.

gather about the earliest evidence of human life, it always has been. Anyone seeking to understand the world in which he or she lives must confront religion seriously.”³⁶⁰ The Neusner text also maintains the universality of religion, specifically in the American context, stating:

Most Americans are religious. They believe in God. They pray. They practice a religion. They explain what happens in their lives by appeal to God’s will and word and work, and they form their ideal for the American nation by reference to the teachings of religion: ‘one nation, under God.’ This statement, from the Pledge of Allegiance, describes how most Americans view our country. Americans act on their religious beliefs. Nearly all Americans (92.5 percent) profess belief in God... Religiosity is a fundamental trait of the American people and has been from the beginning.³⁶¹

Multiple texts, including Smith, Fisher, Young, and Brodd, convey the pervasiveness of religion by employing a common rhetorical practice and begin with illustrative descriptions of a number of individuals engaging in different ritual, prayer or devotional practices deemed “religious.” Smith describes the religious activities of many people he has known around the world and tries to synthesize this multiplicity, stating:

What a strange fellowship this is, the God-seekers in every land, lifting their voices in the most disparate ways imaginable to the God of all life. How does it sound from above? Like bedlam, or do the strains blend in strange, ethereal harmony? Does one faith carry the lead, or do the parts share in counterpoint and antiphony where not in full-throated chorus?³⁶²

He concludes: “We cannot know. All we can do is try to listen carefully and with full attention to each voice in turn as it addresses the divine.”³⁶³ Smith claims that these disparate practices hold commonalities and share in the universal quest that is religion, emphasizing the ubiquity of this phenomenon. At the same time, he frames this introduction to diverse religions in implicitly Christian terms of “fellowship” and

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

³⁶¹ Jacob Neusner, “Introduction,” in *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, ed. Neusner, Jacob, 4th Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 1.

³⁶² Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 2.

³⁶³ Ibid.

“God-seeking” and emphasizes historically Christian values of universalism and transcendence.

The introductory chapter of the Fisher text also begins with a phenomenological description of individuals around the world engaging in various sorts of ritual or devotional practice. Fisher then states “These and countless other moments in the lives of people around the world are threads of the tapestry we call ‘religion.’”³⁶⁴ By placing the term *religion* in quotation marks, she alludes to the constructed nature of the category. Still, the metaphor of the tapestry functions much like the Smith example, building commonality, connecting diverse and even disparate social practices under the category of religion, and stressing that this phenomenon is ever-present.

At the same time, the Fisher text, the most recently updated of all six texts in this study, seems to simultaneously deemphasize the notion of the universality of religion in its current edition. Under the section titled, “Why are there religions?,” the text states, “In many cultures and times, religion has been the basic foundation of life, permeating all aspects of human existence. But from the time of the European Enlightenment, religion has become in the West an object to be studied, rather than an unquestioned basic fact of life.”³⁶⁵ Notably, in an earlier edition of the text, an abridged version based on the fourth edition, the section titled “Why are there religions?” began with the question “Why is religion such a universal aspect of human life?” Thus, it seems that a process of revision has led to a more nuanced treatment of the category of religion that recognizes it as one possible feature of human life rather than a universal way of being human.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 1.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶⁶ Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions: A Brief Introduction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002).

The Brodd text also uses a descriptive rhetorical device. Rather than describing a number of individuals engaged in diverse religious practices, he gives quotations from four different articles in the June 22, 2007 issue of the *New York Times*. In response to these articles (on Muslim practices of veiling in Britain, yoga in Times Square, biblical stories in a film, and sectarian conflict in Iraq), Brodd declares they are “compelling evidence that the world’s religions are part of people’s everyday world. We cannot call ourselves informed citizens without having at least a basic knowledge of them.”³⁶⁷

Not only do these textual examples position religion as universal, they also work to justify and legitimate the task of the textbooks. As they work to construct their subject, religion, they underscore its importance. They argue that religion is universal, essential, and an irreducible piece of the human experience, so much so that the human experience cannot be fully understood without an understanding of religion. This also justifies the significance of its study for the student and legitimizes the field of religious studies as an important and necessary project.

The essence of religion: transcendence and spirituality

Another common discursive practice among these texts entails the assertion of an essence of religion, an irreducible, fundamental nature or core of religion that cannot be reduced to any other factor or explained by nonreligious means. For many texts, this essence relates to transcendence and spirituality. This discursive practice often involves first making a claim that religion is an essential part of the human experience, followed by a description of some primary qualities of this essence. While these texts name various dimensions of religion, they frequently stress that at the core of religion lies spirituality, which tends not to be clearly defined but generally seems to

³⁶⁷ Jeffrey Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 3rd Edition (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2009), 12.

concern an individual's relationship with the transcendent. Older texts such as Smith tend to describe the transcendent in terms of God. More recently published or updated texts such as Young and Fisher, in effort to be more inclusive, shy away from the use of the term God, noting its Christian history and connotation. Instead they opt for terms such as "transcendent" and "ultimate." Yet, the theological valence remains.

The Brodd text offers an example of positioning religion as a universal phenomenon through an emphasis on spirituality. He contends that "religion begins with mystery," an essential part of the human experience involves questioning that mystery and the meaning of existence and ultimate reality, and "by responding to the questions, religion provides a way of living and dying meaningfully amid the mystery."³⁶⁸ He states:

We are self-conscious beings. Along with being physical, rational, and emotional, we have the capacity for self-reflection; we have a conscience; we can ponder our own nature. We are spiritual (although the term *spiritual* is open to interpretation). And by virtue of our spirituality, we ask—and answer—life's most basic questions. Because these questions are more or less pertinent to each religious tradition, they can be organized into a kind of framework for studying the world's religions.³⁶⁹

For Brodd, religions speak to the inherently spiritual nature of humanity. This establishes a common ground for comparison. It also tells readers that this study is personal as well as useful and salient to their lives.

Burke also locates spirituality at the core of religion and characterizes this essence in terms of transcendence.

Some people find religion puzzling. They do not see any grounds to believe that it is true, they do not observe that it fulfills any very useful function, and they do not understand why it should arouse the ardent passion that it often does...To gain an understanding of religion and its role in human life, perhaps one place to start might be with what we may call the spiritual dimension of life. Although it is not easy to describe this in words, it is the aspect of life that rises

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

above our usual preoccupation with our individual selves, transcending our personal needs and desires.³⁷⁰

Burke's explanation of spirituality, "the spiritual dimension of life," is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive as well. It is a constructive discursive strategy that advocates for the value of spirituality. Another example states:

Our outlook on life is spiritual when we look at things from a broader, a less self-centered, a more impartial or universal perspective, where we become detached from our ego and are no longer concerned with our own personal fate, at least in this life. The spiritual dimension of life is sometimes described as having the perspective of eternity, because when we are inclined to get wrapped up in some urgent present concern, such as achieving a promotion or obtaining possession of some material object, it asks us to disengage ourselves from the present moment and consider how important this particular thing will be in a hundred years, or perhaps a thousand. Even those most skeptical about religion often see the nobility of such a state of detachment from the narrow confines of the self. For a mature person the spiritual side of life is more important than the material.³⁷¹

Burke links this "spiritual side of life" with transcendence. He explains:

The diagnoses which the major religions provide, and the remedies toward which they point, do not lie within the field of ordinary human experience, but are transcendent, that is, they point to a realm of being beyond our ordinary experience, a realm which can often be described as supernatural. However closely they may pay attention to the details of human living, it is the realm of the transcendent which ultimately concerns them. This marks them off from diagnoses of the human condition made solely in terms of this life and this world, such as Marxism, which are therefore not included here, even though there may be some superficial resemblances.³⁷²

For Burke, this weight given to transcendence as a common factor among religions also works to define and exclude what does not count as religion, in this case, Marxism and other worldviews focused "solely in terms of this life and this world."

Fisher continually indicates ways in which all religions touch on or point to something ultimate and transcendent. In the text's introduction, she states: "All of religion shares the goal of tying people back to something behind the surface of life—a

³⁷⁰ T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 2nd Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid., 2-3.

greater reality, which lies beyond, or invisibly infuses, the world that we can perceive with our five senses.”³⁷³ She contends that this essence of religion is situated outside empirical evidence: “Because religions involve the unseen, the mysterious, these leaders’ teachings are not verifiable by everyday physical experience.”³⁷⁴

Subsequently, in her sympathetic approach to religion, she situates this core of religion as inherently good and positive. Again she argues that it is universal among religions, with such statements as: “Many people of broad vision have noted that many of the same principles reappear in all traditions. All religions teach the importance of setting one’s own selfish interests aside, loving others, harkening to the divine, and exercising control over the mind.”³⁷⁵ Thus, negative manifestations of religion represent a distortion or a veering away from the essence of the religion. As she explains her sympathetic approach to the study of religion in the preface, she states: “Distinctions are made between the basic teachings of religions, none of which condones wanton violence, and the ways in which religions have been politicized.”³⁷⁶

Smith also describes an ahistorical essence of religions that transcends the distinctions of cultures and histories. He states, “Every religion mixes universal principles with local peculiarities.”³⁷⁷ The word “peculiarity” can mean particularity. However, it can also mean oddity or idiosyncrasy; thus, by using this term, Smith suggests that the particularities of religion are partial or secondary expressions-- or even distortions-- of their essence. He then continues to explain this tension between universal principles and local peculiarities:

The former, when lifted out and made clear, speak to what is generically human in us all. The latter, rich compounds of rites and legends, are not easy for

³⁷³ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 1.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 511.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

³⁷⁷ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 3.

outsiders to comprehend. It is one of the illusions of rationalism that the universal principles of religion are more important than the rites and rituals that feed them; to make that claim is like contending that the branches and leaves of a tree are more important than the roots from which they grow. But for this book, principles are more important than contexts, if for no other reason than that they are what the author has spent his years working on.³⁷⁸

Despite his defense of the value of the peculiarities of religion, he suggests that its essence, which he has privileged over particularity, is of greater value to the reader.

The chief reason I find myself returning to the world's great wisdom traditions is for help on issues I have not myself been able to circumvent. Given the essential similarity in human nature—we are all more human than otherwise—I assume that the issues engage the readers of this book as well.³⁷⁹

He also acknowledges tensions, ambiguity and ambivalence in religions, as he explains:

The full story of religion is not rose-colored; often it is crude. Wisdom and charity are intermittent, and the net result is profoundly ambiguous. A balanced view of religion would include human sacrifice and scapegoating, fanaticism and persecution, the Christian Crusades and the holy wars of Islam. It would include witch hunts in Massachusetts, monkey trials in Tennessee, and snake worship in the Ozarks.³⁸⁰

He then, however, goes on to justify why these aspects of religions are not important for his study. He argues that his book does not address these tensions because the book is about “values” and “the empowering theological and metaphysical truths of the world's religions,” which he argues are “inspired.”³⁸¹ The reader can assume here that Smith is suggesting these values are inspired by God or ultimate reality. He then juxtaposes the inspired truth of religions with religious institutions, which Smith calls, “another story.” He states: “Constituted as they are of people with their inbuilt frailties, institutions are built of vices as well as virtues.”³⁸² With this statement, Smith suggests that religious institutions are flawed human constructions that do not always adequately represent the truth, or essence, of religions, nor do they capture Smith's

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 3–4.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 4–5.

³⁸² Ibid., 5.

attention. Rather, Smith is interested identifying a universal wisdom expressed by these religions. He argues that “when religions are sifted for those truths, a different, cleaner side appears. They become the world’s wisdom traditions.”³⁸³ This raises the question of what constitutes wisdom for Smith. Here, liberalism provides the foundation for Smith’s notion of wisdom. The liberal anthropology asserts a universal human nature rooted in reason. Individuals differ only in so far as they are socialized differently. Hence, culture becomes secondary. This parallels Smith’s approach to what is universal in religions (wisdom) and what is peripheral or arbitrary (peculiarities.)

Religion as individual and private

These discursive practices that maintain an essence of religion also tend to orient this common human experience around the individual. They position religion as, first and foremost, an individual pursuit. The Burke text offers one example of framing religion in terms of the individual. Burke states that religion “has to do with the soul” and he explains the soul as “that deep dimension of each person’s identity and character” and “the most important aspect of us, what makes us uniquely ourselves.”³⁸⁴ Thus, religion has to do with individual identities. Smith claims that his book is “about religion alive” and goes on to describe religion alive as something intangible, universal, and beyond empirical evidence, as an essentially personal and private experience:

Religion alive confronts the individual with the most momentous option life can present. It calls the soul to the highest adventure it can undertake, a proposed journey across the jungles, peaks, and deserts of the human spirit. The call is to confront reality, to master the self... authentic religion is the clearest opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos to enter human life. What then can rival its power to inspire life’s deepest creative centers?³⁸⁵

Religion is about the self; religion is about the individual and her or his experience with the transcendent. Fisher also emphasizes the individual. She explains in her

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 1-2.

³⁸⁵ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 9.

preface that she does not want to present religions as monoliths, stating “Religion is not a museum piece.”³⁸⁶ Rather, she aims to situate religion as living, dynamic, and diverse by giving prominence to individual experiences. She states:

This approach follows real people into the depths of their search for meaning, order, and inner peace in a world that may otherwise seem chaotic and sometimes violent. Therefore, in addition to exploring various scholarly perspectives, we will try to listen carefully to individuals of all faiths as they tell their own stories.³⁸⁷

This discursive practice also functions to privilege religion as an individual experience. It highlights the subjective, individualistic side of religion and presents religion as a quest for authenticity, a key liberal ideal “that each of us has an original way of being human.”³⁸⁸

The notion of religion as private experience is infused with liberal assumptions. Fitzgerald argues this has implications “for philosophical concepts of individual autonomy, for economic activity, for ideas about rationality, civil society and human rights, and for the development of the institutions of representative government.”³⁸⁹ As Fitzgerald argues, defining religion in this way rests on theological assumptions of a universalized “natural religion,” in which private spiritual experience gives rise to “the religions;” these assumptions “valorize the primacy of individuals over institutions.”³⁹⁰ Moreover, framing religion as an individual pursuit then asserts that: “the truly religious consciousness is private, that religion is defined in terms of some special kind of experience had by individuals, and that the institutional forms of ritual, liturgy, and church are merely secondary social phenomena that are either not in themselves

³⁸⁶ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, ix.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸⁸ Charles Taylor attributes the early articulation of this ideal of authenticity to Johann Gottlob Herder. Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 30.

³⁸⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 28.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

religious or are religious in a secondary, derivative sense.”³⁹¹ This works to solidify liberal norms.

5.2.3 Constructing the reader

Not only do these texts construct religion, they also assert a notion of a normative student of religion. They assert ideals of how the reader ought to think and respond. World religions textbook authors assume their readers are students new to the study of religion, the most likely audience for an introductory textbook. Yet, why the student is drawn to the subject in the first place may not be so clear. Huston Smith assumes his reader is a neophyte, unfamiliar with the field, and with the potential to be confused by jargon and too much emphasis on theory and method. He seems to assume that his reader is seeking truth, wisdom, and understanding rather than methods and tools for the academic study of religion. Or perhaps his concern is not with the reader’s interest, but rather his own insistence that ahistorical, timeless wisdom and values are the most significant and beneficial by-products of a study of religion.

Smith makes other assumptions about his reader that function to establish normativity. By asserting who the likely student of religion is, describing this student’s normative position, Smith simultaneously establishes who and what are “other.” He begins to delineate lines of difference. Smith assumes that his reader is at least Western and likely American. He acknowledges this assumption and clearly states: “the book is incorrigibly Western in being targeted for the contemporary Western mind.”³⁹² Specific references to “witch hunts in Massachusetts, monkey trials in Tennessee, and snake worship in the Ozarks”, as well as cities such as Montgomery, Alabama, and personages such as President Eisenhower suggest that he imagines “Westerners” as

³⁹¹ Ibid., 28.

³⁹² Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 6.

Americans. His mention of the “contemporary Western mind” implies that there is some common thread running through the Western experience. While he does not explain or name this common thread, assuming that the reader already knows and understands it, he clearly imagines that this common culture is liberalism, with its basic principles of moral autonomy, individual liberty, equal rights, and secularism.

Smith also assumes that his reader is at least Christian, and likely Protestant, as evidenced in his explanation of why he has chosen not to highlight too much diversity in each religion:

Put the matter this way: If you were trying to describe Christianity to an intelligent and interested but busy Thailander, how many denominations would you include? It would be difficult to ignore the differences between Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant, but you would probably not get into what separates Baptists from Presbyterians.³⁹³

Later in his introduction as he explains the importance of understanding “other” religious perspectives and worldviews, he lists religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism as examples of “other,” further buttressing his implicit assumptions that Christianity, the most widespread religion in the U.S., is the normative starting point for his readers.

This normative perspective is further evident through his chapters on these “other” religions in which he frequently attempts to explain their “universal” wisdom through references to Western culture. In the chapter on Hinduism, Smith opens with a number of examples of how Hinduism is relevant to “Westerners”— a quote from Max Müller explaining the importance of intellectual histories from India, an anecdote about how Robert Oppenheimer, an American scientist involved in developing the first nuclear bomb, found wisdom in the Bhagavad Gita, and brief description of how Mahatma Gandhi influenced Martin Luther King, Jr. Clearly, Smith understood his

³⁹³ Ibid., 3.

audience to be Americans who needed persuading of Hinduism's salience to the Western world. Finally, in the chapter on Buddhism, he tells the story of Gautama Siddhartha's enlightenment and includes a comparison to Jesus, though Christianity has not yet been introduced in the text: "The records offer as the first event of the night a temptation scene reminiscent of Jesus' on the eve of his ministry."³⁹⁴ Ostensibly, Smith assumes his reader is already familiar with Christianity.

The Smith text was initially written in 1958, a time when it was not so improbable to assume that most Americans were familiar with Christian ideas. The Brodd text at times also suggests a normative reader, with statements such as "Learning about Hinduism depends first on understanding a perspective of reality—the universe, human beings, and the divine—that is fundamentally different from common Western perspectives."³⁹⁵ Given that the text is published by a Catholic publisher, it is likely that Brodd imagines his reader as Catholic. Notably, the Neusner text, which begins by emphasizing the diversity of American religions, contains statements in multiple essays that suggest a normative "Judeo-Christian" reader. The essay on Buddhism, written by Malcolm David Eckel, begins with the suggestive statement that "If you have never thought of religion without thinking of God, or if you think that a religion has to have clear boundaries that separate insiders from outsiders, then you will be intrigued and challenged by your encounter with Buddhism."³⁹⁶ The essay on Islam, written by John Esposito, continually compares Islam to Judaism and Christianity, with statements such as "Muslims worship the same God who is revered

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 86.

³⁹⁵ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 42.

³⁹⁶ Malcolm David Eckel, "Buddhism in the World and in America," in *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, ed. Neusner, Jacob, 4th edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 200.

by Christians and Jews”³⁹⁷ and “Just as Moses in Judaism and Jesus in Christianity hold a special place as messengers and models for their communities, Muslims believe that Muhammad is the revealer of God’s will for two reasons.”³⁹⁸ These comparisons are not merely functions of comparative rhetoric; they work to suggest a normative reader, one who will likely view and understand these religions from a Christian or Jewish perspective.

The normative “we”

All of the texts in this study also form their readers through constructive discursive strategies that function to create a “we” group. The first-person plural pronoun “we” is complex; its reference at times can be vague and unclear. It can include “I + you,” “I + he,” “I + she,” “I + they,” “I + you + they” and more variations. Linguists often make a distinction between “addressee-inclusive” and “addressee-exclusive” uses of “we.” At times, the references cannot be clearly identified.³⁹⁹

In these world religions textbooks, I have noted a pattern of use of the pronoun “we,” as well as the correlated first-person possessive pronoun “our(s),” as a persuasive device that invites identification with a normative group and simultaneously establishes the “other.” In these samples, “we,” or “our,” is both addressee and speaker inclusive. It is used frequently in descriptions of “religion” that position the category as essential and universal. It prompts the reader to personally relate to the experience of religion. At times, this identification is then used to compel the reader to experience a sense of empathetic understanding for the “other,” i.e., adherents of other religions. Often it is employed along with prescriptive, moralizing claims. The discursive building

³⁹⁷ John L. Esposito, “Islam in the World and in America,” in *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, ed. Neusner, Jacob, 4th edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 144.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁹⁹ Van Leeuwen and Wodak, “Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse Historical Analysis,” 165.

of the “we” group simultaneously produces and maintains the discourse of pluralism and the pluralist ethos. Numerous textual examples of this practice can be found in all six textbooks. Each in its way promotes cosmopolitanism, hinged upon the universal extension of liberal moral values of individualism and egalitarianism, and constructs a religious reader who is open-minded, welcoming of difference, globally committed, socially aware, and personally engaged.

In the Fisher text, several examples of this constructive discursive practice appear in the introductory chapter. A section titled “Why are there religions?” includes responses to this question in sub-sections. Under the sub-section, “Functional Perspective: Religion Is Useful,” Fisher writes about religions that “They [religions] are found everywhere because they are useful, both for society and for individuals. Religions ‘do things’ for us, such as helping us to define ourselves and making the world and life comprehensible to us.”⁴⁰⁰ Here, Fisher reinforces and legitimates her claims about the ubiquity of religion by persuading the reader to identify with the universal experience of meaning making that religion provides. At another point in this section, she states: “We may look to religions for understanding, for answers to our many questions about life.”⁴⁰¹ In these textual samples, the construction of this “we” group appeals to the reader to understand religion not only as a universal human experience, but also as a personal experience and part of a quest for authenticity, all of which reproduce liberal norms of individualism. Burke uses “we” and “us” in a similar way:

Each of the major religions has a message about the human condition; each points to something that it views as fundamentally wrong and unsatisfactory about our ordinary existence; each offers a diagnosis of the cause of that unsatisfactoriness and points to a possible remedy. By doing this religions provide a framework of meaning for human life. Every event in our lives and

⁴⁰⁰ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 4.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

every action that we take have some kind of relationship to that framework, which tells us what its ultimate significance is for us.⁴⁰²

Smith's use of "we" simultaneously establishes the religious outsider, while promoting empathetic identification with that outsider:

We shall never quite understand the religions that are not our own. But if we take those religions seriously, we need not fail miserably. And to take them seriously we need do only two things. First, we need to see their adherents as men and women who faced problems much like our own. And second, we must rid our minds of all preconceptions that could dull our sensitivity or alertness to fresh insights. If we lay aside our preconceptions about these religions, seeing each as forged by people who were struggling to see something that would give help and meaning to their lives; and if we then try without prejudice to see ourselves what they saw—if we do these things, the veil that separates us from them can turn to gauze.⁴⁰³

Here, Smith reinforces the notion of religion as a universal human experience, shared by "men and women who face problems much like our own." This passage also suggests that there is a common essence of religion, which provides an entry point for understanding. It encourages tolerance and promotes a pluralist ethos.

Brodd also constructs a normative "we" group to promote understanding religious diversity as a civic project. He writes:

What can we hope to gain from a broad study of the world's religions? For one thing we can strive to become more knowledgeable about their responses to the most fundamental religious questions asked by human beings all over the world... That, in turn, can enrich us in our roles as citizens of the global village.⁴⁰⁴

Similarly, Young uses "we" to highlight the globalized context of today's world:

If the human species is to survive, we must learn to live together and cooperate in solving the environmental and political problems we face. The key to cooperation is understanding the 'other.' How can we hope to understand other peoples unless we are willing to study their religions, their responses to perceived ultimacy? It may sound melodramatic, but it is arguably true that our future depends on peoples' willingness to understand sympathetically other peoples' religions.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 2.

⁴⁰³ Smith, *The World's Religions*, 11.

⁴⁰⁴ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 18.

⁴⁰⁵ Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 8.

Here, Young asserts pluralism—the “willingness to understand sympathetically other peoples’ religions”—as a norm. He does not offer it as one of multiple approaches to understanding and managing religious diversity. Rather, he entreats his reader to view the task of pluralism as urgent and incumbent upon the global citizen. Moreover, he implicitly constructs his normative reader against conservative, exclusivist members of religious communities who do not share sympathy or respect for other religions and secularists who think that religion has waning social significance or ought to fade away.

Neusner’s use of “we” also makes claims for civic norms. Yet where Brodd and Young frame their arguments in more global terms, Neusner is distinctly nationalistic:

America is a huge and diverse country, and the secret of its national unity lies in its power to teach people to respect one another, not despite difference but in full regard for difference. We like one another as we are, or, at least, we try to. And when we do not succeed, we know we have failed our country.⁴⁰⁶

Here, Neusner does not use “we” to refer to a broad human condition. In this case, “we” specifically references Americans. It also works to persuade the reader to identify with a particular conception of an American citizen, one who is tolerant and pluralist. In a coercive turn similar to Young’s, Neusner does not offer pluralism as one possibility among many. Rather, Neusner makes clear that if the reader does not share this view of tolerance and pluralism as the foundation of good American citizenship, then the reader has “failed our country.” This passage also provides an excellent example of the limitations of liberalism, the illiberal tendencies that pluralism, as a liberal discourse, cannot avoid. Pluralism, which advocates for the respect for difference, simultaneously discredits and disparages political conceptions of difference

⁴⁰⁶ Neusner, “Introduction,” 6.

that diverge from liberal norms of tolerance and pluralism. Despite its rhetoric, pluralism cannot accommodate all differences.

5.2.4 Delineating difference

The aforementioned discursive practices work to normatively construct subjects, recontextualize and connect diverse social practices under the category of religion, and build commonality and identification with a sympathetic approach to the study of religion. As they work to identify sameness, they simultaneously delineate difference. They mark the boundaries of religions and establish the “other.” Otherness, Jonathan Z. Smith argues, “is an ambiguous category. This is so because it is necessarily a term of interrelation. ‘Otherness’ is not so much a matter of separation as it is a description of interaction.”⁴⁰⁷ This interaction is a political exercise and, more precisely I argue, an exercise of governmentality, of regulation. J.Z. Smith also points out “Difference is rarely something simply to be noted; it is, most often, something in which one has a stake. Above all, it is a political matter.”⁴⁰⁸ In the case of these textbooks, the delineation of difference serves varying purposes. At times, it reinforces the dominance of a particular group, primarily Christian and Western. At other times, it supports a normative construction of religion that relies on liberal values such as individualism, universalism, and tolerance. Always, it involves regulation.

Discursive practices of defining difference involve naming, classifying, and ordering. An overt example in the Smith textbook includes descriptions that exoticize and reveal Orientalist tendencies of classification. He explains to the reader, who he has normatively positioned as an Anglo American Christian,⁴⁰⁹ that the study of world religions will involve the strange and unfamiliar: “We are about to begin a voyage in

⁴⁰⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 256.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁰⁹ See the text examples discussed in the previous section on “Constructing the reader.”

space and time and eternity. The places will often be distant, the time remote, the themes beyond space and time altogether. We shall have to use words that are foreign—Sanskrit, Chinese, and Arabic.”⁴¹⁰ This passage is another example of the constructive discursive strategy of building the “we” group, which simultaneously establishes a shared identification, while marginalizing those who have been placed outside the norm. While plenty of people speak Chinese or Arabic as their native languages, this discursive strategy recontextualizes these languages as foreign. Those included in “we” clearly are not speakers of Chinese or Arabic. The latter group, is casually marked as “other.”

Other examples of defining difference do not involve such a palpable classification of the “other” as foreign. Rather, difference is established simultaneously with the process of identifying sameness. This is endemic to social processes of classification, which always involve various arrangements of dividing and combining. In order to identify equivalences, certain differences must be overlooked. And, conversely, to name differences, certain equivalences must be subverted. What is notable, then, is how these equivalences and differences represent certain interests and power dynamics.⁴¹¹ As one example, Burke sets up categories, based on geographic regions of origin, by which to classify religions and order the textbook.

Taking them overall, it might be said that within each family the resemblances between one religion and another are for the most part more striking than the differences, while between religions belonging to different families the differences typically stand out more strongly. These three families of religions can be viewed as offering three fundamentally different alternatives in the understanding of human life and the world.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Smith, *The World's Religions*, 10-11.

⁴¹¹ Fairclough discusses “logics of equivalences and differences,” which he adapts from the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 224.

⁴¹² Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 4.

This classification constructs fixed boundaries between religions. Accordingly, Burke contends that religions of Semitic origin share a common understanding of human life and the world that differs significantly from the understanding shared by religions of Indian origin, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. This suggests a kind of simplistic essentialization of religious differences. It assumes that religious beliefs are the primary determinant of one's worldview and ignores diversity of cultures. One might argue that Syrian Christians in India share a more similar view of the world with Sikhs in India than say, Presbyterians in the United States, or that American Zen Buddhists share more in common with American Reform Jews than they do with Theravadan Buddhists in Burma. Thus, Burke's ordering of his textbook serves to minimize this diversity and nuance while defining difference in a particular way. It also reinforces his essentialist definition of religion.

At another point in his introduction, Burke discusses the categorization of religions, with the caveat that categories "should not be understood too rigorously, since most religions are complex and present exceptions to almost every rule we try to impose on them, but simply as indications of the direction in which a religions or some portion of it tends."⁴¹³ He then goes on to discuss "universal and particular" religions, reproducing the nineteenth century world religions taxonomy described by Masuzawa, which distinguished universal, thus "world," religions from local religions and once named Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam as uniquely universal religions of the world.⁴¹⁴ Burke states:

Some religions understand themselves as addressed to the whole human race; their aim is to embrace all of mankind and they actively desire converts. These are sometimes called universal religions. This is not to imply that they actually do embrace all human beings, which is obviously not true, but that this is their

⁴¹³ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹⁴ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*.

ideal. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are universal religions in this sense. Other religions have no such universal aim, but understand themselves existing only for a particular people, tribe, or nation. They usually do not especially desire converts. These religions may be called communal, tribal, ethnic, or national religions. Judaism and Hinduism are examples. Not all religions fit easily into these distinctions: the Confucian and Taoist traditions, for example, neither aim explicitly to embrace the whole of mankind, nor consider themselves in principle restricted to the Chinese people.⁴¹⁵

Thus, here Burke defines differences and sameness in ways that reinscribe historical world religions discourse.

5.3 Analyzing the Texts: Methods, Rationales, and Strategies of Legitimation

The world religions textbooks analyzed here engage in practices that work to construct and perpetuate dynamics of authority, designating some ways of thinking about and describing religions as legitimate and authoritative, and others as deviant or problematic. At one level, these discursive practices draw upon the genre of the textbook. Endemic to the genre, textbooks represent sources of authority; thus the information and claims they present are conveyed as standard and definitive. In other words, many readers will assume that claims about religions or approaches to its study found within a textbook are authoritative by virtue of its genre.

At the same time, the world religions textbooks analyzed here make a number of claims that function as discursive strategies of legitimation. Each of these six textbooks makes a case for why one should study religion. They all argue that religion is important, which then makes its study important. Of course, it is a common convention for any text to include some explanation of why it is useful or meaningful and the contribution it makes to a broader field of knowledge or scholarship. However, I contend that, in these six textbooks, the arguments for the importance of religion are not mere literary convention, but function as discursive practices of legitimation. They work not only to justify the importance of their task, the study of religion, but also to

⁴¹⁵ Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 6–7.

establish the authority and legitimacy of pluralism and liberalism, which in turn supports a liberal social order. These discursive practices are mechanisms of liberal governance. I look at how these discursive practices overlap with the process of defining and normatively positioning religion as well as how these practices work to prescribe and delineate the role that religion should play in civil society.

Here, I draw from Van Leeuwen's framework for analyzing the way discourses construct legitimation. Among Van Leeuwen's multiple categories of legitimation, I look especially at rationalization legitimation, which Van Leeuwen further breaks down into instrumental rationalization, which references the utility of a social practice, and theoretical rationalization, which focuses on "some kind of truth, or 'the way things are.'"⁴¹⁶ I also examine instances of moral evaluation legitimation, in which discursive practices hint at particular moral values and discourses, but in an obscured way that works toward naturalization.⁴¹⁷ Through examining discursive practices of legitimation, I identify and assess the ways in which these textbooks aim to solidify and establish the authority and legitimacy of pluralism and liberalism.

5.3.1 Methodological positions

Each text explains in some way how it approaches the study of religion, how the book is organized, what is included, and what is left out. These accounts reveal fundamental assumptions about the nature of religion and its role in society. They contribute to the work of normatively positioning religion. They also often work to legitimate their task.

The Smith text is remarkable among the other texts in this study in the ways it very clearly outlines a *sui generis* conception of religion and a pluralist approach to its study. From early in the introduction, Smith makes clear that his textbook is not

⁴¹⁶ Van Leeuwen, "Legitimation in Discourse and Communication," 103.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 97-100.

comprehensive, but has a normative agenda. He states “This book is not a balanced account of its subject.”⁴¹⁸ Rather, he tells the reader, he organized the text and chose the most important aspects of religion that the reader should know based on “relevance to the interests of the intended reader.”⁴¹⁹ These imagined interests include salience to “the modern mind,” “religions’ contemporary expressions,” and “universality,” all of which support his rationale that “the ultimate benefit that may accrue from a book such as this is help in the ordering of the reader’s own life.”⁴²⁰ While he describes this “benefit” in terms of the individual, it is fair to assume that Smith believes the “ordering” of the individual—the individual’s moral formation—will contribute to a greater social good. Thus, the normative agenda of his text involves shaping a particular social order. Given that the text was written in 1958, a time when pluralism and multiculturalism were less widespread social values, Smith had transformative aims. His text should be seen as an effort to naturalize a new (for its time) cosmopolitan view of religious diversity.

As Smith explains the structure of the textbook, he constructs an essentialist definition of religion, which positions religion as having an immutable essence that is universal, transcendent and exists outside history. He states:

This is not a textbook in the history of religions... Historical facts are limited here to the minimum that is needed to locate in space and time the ideas the book focuses on. Every attempt has been made to keep scholarship out of sight - in foundations that must be sturdy, but not as scaffolding that would obscure the structures being examined.⁴²¹

He argues that “history” and “scholarship” could obscure the aspect of religion he wants to illuminate—this universal essence. Rather, he wants the book to be accessible: “The study of religion can be as technical and academic as any, but I have tried not to

⁴¹⁸ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 4.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

lose sight of the relevance this material has for the problems that human beings face today.”⁴²² He states:

I have deleted enormously, simplifying where historical details seemed to be slowing the pace and obscuring the essential... These liberties may lead some to feel that the book ‘sits loose in the facts,’ but historical accuracy is not the basic issue. Religion is not primarily a matter of facts; it is a matter of meanings⁴²³

This passage offers an example of theoretical rationalization legitimation. Smith asserts that religion is not about “facts,” but about “meanings.” He does not elaborate this claim, but rather implies that this is just the way things are. Moreover, he implies that this truth is a corrective to those who might be overly focused on historical details. This statement works to legitimate his pluralist approach as the ideal way to truly know and understand religions. For Smith, this emphasis on meaning reflects his universalist assumptions. Facts involve particularities, which Smith deems to be of secondary importance. Meaning involves universal wisdom, which, ideally, the reader will engage and allow to shape his or her moral formation.

Smith essentially argues that religion—having a universal and transcendent essence—can be understood as existing outside social, historical and political structures, and is perhaps even better understood in this way. Smith is not concerned that the scholarship he wants to keep out of sight and its discursive processes form their subject, religion. Smith makes clear that one can learn about religion with no knowledge of theory and method. Moreover, he suggests that theory and method actually get in the way of truly understanding religion. Positioning religion in this essentialist way detaches religion from history. It obscures the social, political, and cultural contexts of religion and the discursive processes involved in its construction.

⁴²² Ibid., 10.

⁴²³ Ibid.

Yet, Smith aligns his approach with honoring the essence of religion: “Even the subtlest way to patronize religion will be avoided, the way that honors it not for itself but for its yields—its contributions to art, or to peace of mind, or to group cohesion.”⁴²⁴ Smith freely admits that he offers only a positive account of religions, not a “balanced account”. He calls his concern “the world’s religions at their best.”⁴²⁵ He claims that he does not use a comparative approach:

Finally, this is not a book on comparative religions in the sense of seeking to compare their worth. Comparisons always tend to be odious, those among religions the most odious of all. So there is no assumption here that one religion is, or for that matter, is not, superior to others. ‘There is no one alive today,’ Arnold Toynbee observed, ‘who knows enough to say with confidence whether one religion has been greater than all others.’ I have tried to let the best in each faith shine through by presenting it in the way I have found its most impressive adherents envisioning it. Readers may press on with comparisons if they wish to do so.⁴²⁶

This paragraph involves moral evaluation legitimation. Terms such as “odious” and “best” assert moral value. Yet, the criteria and means for making these moral claims are not made explicit, nor are they debatable. As Van Leeuwen describes these types of claims, “They trigger a moral concept, but are detached from the system of interpretation from which they derive, at least on a conscious level.”⁴²⁷ The ambiguity of these claims raises questions. Smith has just told the reader that comparisons are problematic, not merely questionable, but “odious,” hateful, reprehensible—terms that suggest immorality. Surely, the neophyte reader does not want to engage in immoral activities. Yet, the word “best” is a term of comparison. Smith wants to claim that he does not engage in comparison, that he has situated all religions as equally valuable and as sharing universal truth and wisdom. Again, Smith engages in a number of interpretive moves that necessarily involve evaluation, comparison, and processes of

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴²⁷ Van Leeuwen, “Legitimation in Discourse and Communication,” 97.

delineating differences and equivalences. The discursive practices in this paragraph work to legitimate his pluralist approach. Taken as a whole, the aim of the Smith text is not to instruct the reader in the academic study of religion, but to foster enhanced understanding and respect for religious diversity. Smith wants to create pluralists, firmly centered in liberal values of individualism (autonomy, authenticity, etc.), universalism, and cosmopolitanism.

The Young text claims its approach to be “*historical, comparative, and—above all—phenomenological.*”⁴²⁸ Young identifies this approach as “descriptive,” as distinct from an “evaluative” approach. He explains evaluative approaches, such as religious or philosophical methods, as “seeking to judge the truth of religion or religions. They want to know whether the claims of individual (or the religion in general) have merit, and seek to establish criteria for assessing them.”⁴²⁹ He then contrasts descriptive approaches as “designed not so much to make judgments about the truth of religion or religions as to understand religion and the role religions play in human life.”⁴³⁰ The use of the term “descriptive” implies a kind of neutrality and obscures the complex and situated dynamics involved in the interpretive process required for description. Young encourages the reader “to the maximum degree possible, to put aside their own assumptions about the truth of religion or religions, and seek to understand the variety of religions studied in this book on the religion’s own terms.”⁴³¹ Young’s instruction is rooted in the phenomenological concept of “bracketing,” which involves suspending one’s own judgment in order to understand a phenomenon. This approach, however, raises unresolved questions about how one identifies a religion’s “own terms”

⁴²⁸ Young, *The World’s Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 12.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

as well as how one approaches religion in a way that does not involve a process of interpretation filtered through a particular socio-historical lens.

The phenomenological method, popularized in the discipline of religious studies by scholars such as Mircea Eliade and Ninian Smart, is common in world religions textbooks. Along with Young, Brodd and Fisher also explicitly frame their textbooks with this approach. All reference either Eliade or Smart, appealing to this expertise for legitimation of their methods. Fisher lists a number of methodological approaches for the study of religion that the text employs and emphasizes phenomenology, which she describes as:

an appreciative investigation of religious phenomena from the perspective of practitioners and believers—an ‘insider’s’ rather than an ‘outsider’s’ point of view... This approach follows real people into the depths of their search for meaning, order, and inner peace in a world that may otherwise seem chaotic and sometimes violent. Therefore, in addition to exploring various scholarly perspectives, we will try to listen carefully to individuals of all faiths as they tell their own stories.⁴³²

This explanation of a phenomenological approach reveals and reinforces her tacit definition rooted in liberal norms and primarily about the individual, spirituality, and goodness. It frames religion as a personal quest for “inner peace” juxtaposed against a world that can be “chaotic” or “violent.” Throughout the textbook, Fisher continually positions religion as having an essence that is good; she dismisses incidences of religiously motivated violence or oppression as illegitimate distortions of religion. Thus, this description of the book’s methodological approach to the study of religion begins the work of supporting and legitimating this conception of religion.

Notably, the Burke text takes a different position. He describes the phenomenological approach and then proceeds to critique it. He states: “It seems to imply all beliefs are equally valid and all practices are equally good, which it would be

⁴³² Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 29.

folly to believe, and which arguably no one does believe.”⁴³³ While he does warn the reader that “it is wise to suspend judgment until we are certain we understand the matter sufficiently,” he also argues that “we do not think the question of evaluation should be swept entirely under the rug, as if everything taught and practiced by all religions was right and good.”⁴³⁴ At the end of each chapter, following between 15 - 30 pages describing a particular religion, Burke asks the reader to evaluate the validity of the religion through discussion questions such as “What considerations might lead you to believe that the worldview of the Upanishads is valid?” and “What considerations might lead you to reject it as mistaken?”⁴³⁵ Burke does not provide final answers to these questions, but this practice serves to reinforce a particular model of religion. It positions religion as ahistorical, essentially belief-based, and a matter of individual choice based on “reasonableness.”

The Neusner text also claims neutrality: “This book does not advocate religion, or any particular religion. Its purpose is only to describe and explain religion as an important factor in American society.”⁴³⁶ Yet, explaining religion as “an important factor in American society” is situated within a larger liberal pluralist discourse. Moreover, his descriptive approach is consistent with a phenomenological method. In a section titled “How to Study about Other Religions,” Neusner lists four different approaches: 1. exclusivist, 2. inclusivist, 3. pluralist, and 4. “empathetic interest in other people.” Neusner claims the book uses the fourth approach, which he explains as about:

not whether religions are true (which in the end is for God to decide) but how all religions are interesting and important. We maintain here that every religion has

⁴³³ Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 8.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. Given Burke’s previous caution on withholding judgment, one wonders whether the author believes each chapter has allowed the reader to “understand the matter sufficiently.”

⁴³⁶ Neusner, “Introduction,” 1.

something to teach us about what it means to be a human being. Here we take a different path from the one that leads us to questions about religious truth. It is a path that carries us to a position of empathy for our fellow Americans, in all their rich diversity.⁴³⁷

Here Neusner seems to associate pluralism with pluralist theology. However, his description of “empathetic interest” evokes features of the discourse of pluralism—that all religions have value and deserve respect and that religious diversity is a social good to be celebrated. His use of the terms “interesting and important” serves a legitimating and persuasive function here. These terms are likely meaningful to the reader, who may encounter them without question and assume that he or she knows what is “interesting and important.” However, with closer inspection, the meaning of these terms is not clear. To whom are these religions interesting? And why are they important? Answering these questions involves establishing or identifying norms. Thus, without elaboration, these terms obscure as much as they reveal. They also function persuasively to encourage the reader to identify with Neusner’s claims without fully understanding their implications.

5.3.2 Liberal religion and insider authority

A related discursive strategy of legitimation found in several textbooks involves the privileging of the authority of religious experience and insider accounts of religion. This practice also relies on the phenomenological approach. I give it some focus here, because it engages in a particular kind of authorization legitimation that depends on personal authority while veiling the role of the author.

The phenomenological approach holds that the best way to understand a religion is to look to how its adherents describe it, as exemplified in the passage from the Smith text discussed in the previous section, in which Smith explains his method, “I have tried to let the best in each faith shine through by presenting it in the way I

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 5.

have found its most impressive adherents envisioning it.”⁴³⁸ Another example from Young states, “In the present study our basic approach is phenomenological. Our goal is to let each religion speak for itself, presenting it in a way that could be affirmed by the people who themselves perceive ultimacy in this matter.”⁴³⁹

The preface of the Fisher textbook provides yet another example of this methodological orientation. In this case, it is clear that Fisher offers this approach as a transformative strategy, as a means for shifting the discourse:

This book provides a clear and straightforward account of the development, doctrines, and practices of the major faiths followed today. The emphasis throughout is on the personal consciousness of the believers and their own accounts of their religion and its relevance in contemporary life... Old approaches to understanding and explaining religions are being increasingly challenged, so in this edition I have given special attention to sensitive issues raised by current scholarship and by voices from within the religions... Much more emphasis is being placed on cultural customs, popular spiritual practices, mixtures of religions, and varieties of religious ways, as opposed to distinct monolithic institutionalized religions, and this emphasis is reflected in new material woven through this edition. It is now more difficult to make sweeping generalizations about any religion, for they do not fit the facts that are coming to light.”⁴⁴⁰

For Fisher, this approach counters an older view of religions as monolithic and internally consistent and coherent. It recognizes greater diversity and religion at the margins. Yet, it does not recognize the socially, culturally, and politically situated positions of insiders and the ways in which individual experiences of religion are shaped by myriad social variables and may or may not correspond to the experiences of others. It also suggests that religion has an essence that can only be known and understood through the experience of an adherent. Moreover, this emphasis on the privileged authority of adherents’ perspectives hides the process of representation and interpretation involved in presenting insider accounts.

⁴³⁸ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 6.

⁴³⁹ Young, *The World’s Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 17.

⁴⁴⁰ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, xi.

Emphasizing insider accounts is not a neutral practice. It reflects interpretive decisions. Moreover, this practice further reinforces the notion of religion as primarily personal and individual, which perpetuates liberal norms and value. In this case, it also works as a strategy of legitimation. The adherent becomes the authority and whatever the adherent says must be true, because it reflects his or her own experience, which has been situated as the essence of religion. The insider account becomes insulated from critique, as does the obscured interpretive work of the author. This phenomenological approach works to legitimate its own authority.

5.3.3 Taking religion seriously

Another prominent discursive strategy of legitimation found throughout all six textbooks involves elaborating the significance of religion in the modern world. The textbooks make arguments for why religion itself is important, which in turn support claims for why the reader ought to better understand religions, legitimating the importance of the study of religion. Many texts proclaim that there is a particular urgency for understanding religion in the modern world. Calls to “take religion seriously” suggest that somehow religion has been disregarded, likely referring to the lingering effects of the secularization narrative, in which religion was positioned as waning and increasingly irrelevant. The authors of these texts argue that religion is salient because it is ubiquitous, affecting many areas of life. At the same time, it is often distorted or not well understood, which then leads to conflict. Thus, as the common argument goes, social cohesion is incumbent upon better studying and better understanding religion. These claims involve both rationalization and moral evaluation legitimation. They make a utilitarian case that the study of religion has an instrumental purpose; it meets a social need. These claims also contain an element of moralization. They suggest that the reader ought to better understand and respect

religious diversity in order to contribute to this greater social good, a liberal social order.

In fact, the introductions of these six textbooks all make use of some form of this argument to legitimate their task. Brodd and Fisher emphasize religion's pervasiveness and subsequent social significance as justifications for its study. Fisher states: "Nonetheless, this difficult-to-grasp subject is central to many people's lives and has assumed great political significance in today's world so it is important to try to understand it."⁴⁴¹ Brodd declares that "the world's religions are part of people's everyday world. We cannot call ourselves informed citizens without having at least a basic knowledge of them."⁴⁴² Young calls the study of religion "critical":

The study of religion is critical today because of its role in a variety of the arenas of human life: political, artistic, economic, to mention but a few. One need only look at a daily newspaper to see the influence of religion in politics. The events of September 11, 2001, brought home the role of religion in horrendous acts calculated to have profound political effects. However, religion has also been at the center of political movements that have improved the lives of people, such as the nineteenth-century campaign to end slavery in the United States.⁴⁴³

Text samples from Neusner and Smith assert the importance of understanding religion for social cohesion. The Neusner text frames this argument in a specifically American context:

We are trying to understand others and to explain ourselves in terms others can understand. That is the American way: to learn to live happily with difference, and not only to respect but to value the other. We teach the lesson that religion is a powerful force in shaping society, making history, and defining the life purpose of individuals and entire groups. That is why we want to understand religion—and, among the many true and valuable things about religion that there are to comprehend, that is what we in particular want in these pages.⁴⁴⁴

The Smith text makes this argument in more global, cosmopolitan terms:

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁴² Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 12.

⁴⁴³ Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 7-8.

⁴⁴⁴ Neusner, "Introduction," 5.

Those who listen work for peace, a peace built not on ecclesiastical or political hegemonies but on understanding and mutual concern. For understanding, at least in realm as inherently noble as the great faiths of humankind, brings respect; and respect prepares the way for a higher power, love—the only power that can quench the flames of fear, suspicion, and prejudice, and provide the means by which the people of this small but precious Earth can become one to one another... So we must listen to understand, but we must also listen to put into play the compassion that the wisdom traditions all enjoy, for it is impossible to love another without hearing that other. If we are to be true to these religions, we must attend to others as deeply and as alertly as we hope that they will attend to us.⁴⁴⁵

These discursive practices legitimate the task of these textbooks, the study of religion, and not just any study of religion, but one specifically shaped by the framework of pluralism. Moreover, as these strategies of legitimation naturalize the tools and tactics of pluralist discourse, they support its regulatory role and naturalize a conception of religion rooted in liberal norms.

5.3.4 Legitimate religion: separating the good from the bad

A variation of this legitimating discursive practice involves an argument that not only is religion everywhere, but that it is frequently involved in conflicts. Often, as these arguments claim, these conflicts are the result of religion that has been distorted (i.e. violent extremists) or misunderstood (i.e. Islamophobia), and the study of religion is important to counter these tendencies. The process of determining what counts as authentic religion on one hand or distortions on the other results in the legitimation of certain norms.

Several passages from the Fisher text exemplify this argument. Fisher asserts that authentic religion is inherently good; conflict involving religion is the result of religion being tainted or corrupted. A section in the introduction titled “Negative aspects of organized religions” states: “Tragically, religions have often split rather than unified humanity, have oppressed rather than freed, have terrified rather than

⁴⁴⁵ Smith, *The World's Religions*, 390.

inspired.”⁴⁴⁶ Here Fisher juxtaposes negative manifestations with an implied ideal, presumably stemming from an asserted true essence. She states: “No religion has ever sanctioned violence against innocent people... Sadism, terrorism, wars over land and resources, political oppression, and environmental destruction can all be given a thin veneer of religious sanctification, thus obscuring their evil aspects.”⁴⁴⁷

Fisher creates a dichotomy between good or authentic religion versus bad or corrupted religion. She argues that social structures and institutions are the source of the perversion of religion. She states: “Institutionalization of religion is part of the problem. As institutionalized religions spread the teachings of their founders, there is the danger that more energy will go into preserving the outer form of the tradition than into maintaining its inner spirit.”⁴⁴⁸ She implies that true and good religion is not institutional but personal and spiritual.

Fisher’s arguments evoke the liberal idea of social differentiation, in which religion is relegated to its own sphere separate from the political and economic. Good religion is privatized religion. She repeatedly distinguishes the religious from the political. She argues for the importance of the separation of church and state to protect true religion and diversity: “When church and state are one, the belief that the dominant national religion is the only true religion may be used to oppress those of other beliefs within the country.”⁴⁴⁹ She asserts that where religious groups have become associated with politics, “such politicians then frequently legitimate their agendas by claiming they are defending religion. When religious groups are mobilized for political purposes, people oriented toward power rather than toward spirituality thus tend to be propelled into leadership roles, while still justifying their actions in

⁴⁴⁶ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 28.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

religious terms.”⁴⁵⁰ Reinforcing her essentialist notion of religion, Fisher implies that acts deemed “religious” must have some “spiritual” nature.

While Fisher criticizes the institutional forms of religion for their distorting effects, she simultaneously presents a social movement, the interfaith movement, as the solution to religious conflict. Under a section titled, “The interfaith movement,” she asks “What can religions do to end the increasing political deadlock and hatreds between followers of various religions?” and answers:

There is already an existing countercurrent growing in the world. At the same time that boundaries between religions are hardening in many areas, there has been an acceleration of interfaith dialogue—the willingness of people of all religions to meet, explore their differences, and appreciate and find enrichment in each other’s way to the divine.⁴⁵¹

Fisher sees the interfaith movement as a movement to help others understand the essence, thus goodness, of religion, which, it appears, she does not see as political.

Fisher presents understanding as a tool for social harmony and cohesion. Moreover, she indicates that conflict in the world should motivate the reader with a sense of urgency for taking on this task of understanding.

This is not the time to think of the world in terms of superficial, rigid distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ It is the time when we must try to understand each other’s beliefs and feelings clearly, carefully, and compassionately, and bring truly religious responses into play. To take such a journey does not mean forsaking our own religious beliefs or our skepticism. But the journey is likely to broaden our perspective and thus bring us closer to understanding other members of our human family.⁴⁵²

In the text sample above, Fisher uses a constructive discursive strategy to emphasize sameness. The addressee and speaker inclusive possessive pronoun “our” works to build a “we” group (a strategy discussed in the previous chapter). Here, Fisher advises the reader to “try to understand each other’s beliefs and feelings” and in doing so, she

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 507.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 510.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 29.

discourages the reader from focusing on difference, “us” and “them.” Thus, this passage implies that the proper study of religion—one motivated by compassion and “truly religious responses”—will lead the reader to see sameness and feel a kinship to “other members of our human family.” Yet, throughout the text, Fisher does not always focus on sameness. At many points, she delineates differences between legitimate, true religion on one hand and distorted, false religion on the other. For Fisher, the latter involves religious extremists, those with exclusivists worldviews that advocate or engage in violence, as well as those who use religion for political gain. Thus, I argue, the constructive discursive strategy used here functions as a mode of regulation. It invites the reader identify with a particular approach to the study of religion and positions this approach as one that will lead to a greater social good.

5.3.5 The September 11 motif

Multiple texts also discuss religion and conflict through the motif of the attacks in America on September 11, 2001. These texts tend to position this event not just as a point in history, but as a symbolic event that encapsulates all that is dangerous about the distortion of religion—from the violent act attributed to religion to the religious and ethnic discrimination that followed this act. A view of these discursive patterns also shows work to establish and reinforce the parameters of good, legitimate religion. These texts tend to position authentic, legitimate religion as not just good but also peace-loving, nonviolent, spiritual and individualistic. They maintain that good religion supports the personal quest for authenticity and freedom. Moreover, they suggest that good religion belongs in the private sphere, outside the realm of politics, where it otherwise can be distorted. Some argue that violent acts that take place in the name of religion are distortions of that religion. So-called Muslim extremists are not authentically Muslim; they have allowed political beliefs to distort the essence of Islam,

which is inherently good. At the same time, those outside Islam who assume it is an inherently political and violent religion also have a distorted view. All assert that better education about religion—a properly ordered understanding of religion—provides a remedy to these distortions and the conflict they cause.

At one point, Young states: “The events of September 11, 2001, brought home the role of religion in horrendous acts calculated to have profound political effects.”⁴⁵³

For Young, this supports and justifies the need for the critical study of religion.

Similarly, in a section titled “Religion After 11 September,” Fisher states: “The stunning attacks by terrorists on United States targets in 2001 brought instant polarization along religious and ethnic lines.”⁴⁵⁴ She goes on to write:

Given the plurality of religions in the world and the extremism that some of their adherents are espousing, is a global ‘clash of civilizations’ inevitable in the future? As noted in Chapter 1, some observers are now saying that the real problem is not conflict among religions but rather a ‘clash of ignorance.’ Rigid exclusivist positions do not represent the heart of religious teachings. Whether state-sponsored or incited by militant extremists, violence finds no support in any religion. Thus there has been a strong outcry against fundamentalist violence by the mainstream religions from which militants have drawn their faith.⁴⁵⁵

As previously discussed, the Fisher text presents conflict as the result of distorted religion, “a clash of ignorance,” which can be remedied by education and a better understanding of the essence of religion.

The Burke text, however, takes a different approach. The preface of the second edition (published in 2004, eight years after the first edition) begins with the statement:

The terrorist attacks carried out on the United States by radical Muslims on September 11, 2001, and the response of the United States and its allies against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and against that of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, have raised urgent new questions about the ethical teachings of the major

⁴⁵³ Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 7-8.

⁴⁵⁴ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 505.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 506-507.

religions, especially their attitude towards war and the use of violence, as well as about their relationship to the modern world.⁴⁵⁶

Burke goes on to explain that, consequently, new sections have been added to most chapters on ethics and modern developments. At first glance, this passage seems similar to samples from other texts that point to the events of September 11 as justification for a better understanding of religion. Yet, in Burke's chapter on Islam, he does not try to make a distinction between a distorted political Islam and an authentic peace-loving Islam. Rather, he simply claims that Islam sits in conflict with modern liberal society. He states: "Islam is not only a private or individual religion. Many of its laws can be carried out only in a Muslim society, where the civil law follows Islamic principles" and "Muslims of the most traditional sort cannot be content to live in a secular society in the Western sense, which provides freedom of religion to all."⁴⁵⁷ He goes on to add that "At the present time, however, the general question of the relationship of Islam to society is the subject of much debate, and a growing number of Muslims, especially those living in the Western democracies, have adopted a more liberal viewpoint."⁴⁵⁸ For Burke, unlike Fisher and Young, education about religion reveals a clash of civilizations that can only be remedied by the adoption of liberal norms.

In this chapter, I have analyzed how these six textbooks normatively construct their subject—religion—in ways that reproduce liberal norms. Using a pluralist framework, these discursive practices position religion as essentially private and voluntary, oriented around the individual pursuit of authenticity and the experience of a kind of universal, transcendent ultimate reality. In doing so, these practices reinforce liberal norms of secularism and situate the private sphere as the proper place for the

⁴⁵⁶ Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, xiii.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 278–279.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

enactment of religion. I have also examined discursive strategies of legitimation that work to rationalize, authorize, and justify this prescriptive study of religion and naturalize its normative claims. Many texts present phenomenological methods that purport to be neutral and descriptive while obscuring interpretive decisions and prescriptive claims. Moreover, several texts legitimate the tools and tactics of pluralist discourse through claims about religion's critical social importance and subsequent danger of distortion if not properly regulated and understood. The attacks of September 11 and the violent responses to them are very frequently used as examples of this danger. In all of these elements we see the legitimation of a liberal order, in which religion is defined as individualistic, non-political, essentially peaceful, tolerant, and privatized. In the following chapter, I continue my analysis of the interdiscursive relationships of pluralism and liberalism with regards to religion, focusing especially on the examples of Buddhism and Islam. I examine how these discursive practices function as a mode of governmentality and work to regulate the role of religion in civil society.

Chapter 6: Textbooks, liberal governance and the regulation of religion

Analyzing how these texts advance an essentialist definition of religion as a universal and private phenomenon reveals a relationship between the discourses of world religions, pluralism, and liberalism. It uncovers assumptions about the nature of religion derived from liberal ideas and values, such as individualism, rationality, freedom, egalitarianism, authenticity, cosmopolitanism, and universalism. It brings to light discursive practices—of constructing a normative reader and delineating difference and equivalence—that naturalize these assumptions. Since the construction of normativity is a regulatory process, this analysis gives a glimpse of ways in which seemingly non-political discourses work to regulate and reinforce a liberal social order.

In this chapter, I return to the concepts of interdiscursivity and intertextuality. I begin by considering the dynamics of depoliticization, or the obscuration of politics, at work in the discourse of pluralism. In the previous chapter, I looked at the ways in which these textbooks broadly situate religion. Here, I explore some of these discursive practices as they are applied to specific religions and found within chapters on these religions. For the sake of brevity, I do not elaborate an analysis of each chapter of every textbook in this study. Rather, I focus on the chapters on Buddhism and Islam. These religions, according to Tomoko Masuzawa, were the first to be granted “world religion” status, after Christianity.⁴⁵⁹ Examining the discursive practices operating in chapters on Buddhism and Islam offers a glimpse into the historical intertextual relationships that continue to shape the study of religions. I then move on to examine the ways in which the discursive practices of pluralism construct liberal subjects, aim to shape civic identities, and regulate religion in civil society.

⁴⁵⁹ I discussed this in greater detail in Chapter 4. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*.

6.1 Pluralism, textured discourses and veiled politics

Liberalism is a political theory and movement that works to manage difference and competing values. As John Gray writes, “The *liberal* problem—which is that of specifying terms of peaceful coexistence among exponents of rival, and perhaps rationally incommensurable, world-views—is no less pressing than in early modern times, when it appeared in Hobbes’s thought with a clarity and starkness that was never to be surpassed.”⁴⁶⁰ Generally, liberalism aims to address this problem by relegating these differences to the private sphere where diversity is most easily accommodated. At the same time, the public sphere requires a common culture, which must be that of liberalism. The liberal public sphere is frequently positioned as a neutral ground, while it is in fact situated, contextual, and—ironically—coercive. As Charles Taylor writes, “Liberalism is not a possible meeting ground for all cultures, but is the political expression of one range of cultures, and quite incompatible with other ranges.”⁴⁶¹ The situated nature of liberalism, however, stands in contradiction with its claims to universalism. Talal Asad points out, “Liberal politics is based on cultural consensus and aims at human progress. It is the product of rational discourse as well as its precondition. It must dominate the unredeemed world—if not by reason, then, alas, by force—in order to survive.”⁴⁶² Thus, the liberal desire to protect and respect difference exists in tension with its totalizing and coercive tendencies.

The dominant discourse of pluralism responds to diversity from within a liberal framework. It argues for the value and importance of a multiplicity of religions, as well as the protection of this multiplicity, so long as these religions can all respect a common public sphere and relegate their most meaningful differences to the private

⁴⁶⁰ Gray, *Liberalism*, 85–86.

⁴⁶¹ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 62.

⁴⁶² Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 60.

sphere. Yet, pluralism does not often engage liberal discourse overtly. For example, the textbooks in this study construct these pluralist arguments in line with liberal ideology, but liberalism is never directly discussed or analyzed. Rather, it appears through the ways in which the texts describe the phenomenon of religion and elaborate how it ought to function in civil society. Through pluralist discourse, liberal norms are posited as if they were neutral, objective, and commonsensical, and pluralism is presented as a neutral position from which to view the phenomenon of religion. The relationship of these interwoven discourses is such that the political bearing of pluralism is largely obscured. Hence, pluralism operates as a discourse of depoliticization that “involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from a recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it.”⁴⁶³ This depoliticizing tendency is endemic in the universalizing thrust of liberalism and reveals the largely invisible ways in which liberal norms permeate liberal societies, and function as an ideology. While liberalism may be a set of particular political theories, it also operates as a universalizing social order, maintained largely through discourses, forms of knowledge, and institutions that appear, on the surface at least, to be non-political. Liberalism achieves this all-encompassing hold so effectively by appearing to be natural and commonsensical.

Here, I examine the practices of interdiscursivity and intertextuality at work in these textbooks, looking specifically at chapters on Buddhism and Islam in the world religions textbooks in this study. Through their ostensibly neutral, purportedly descriptive presentations of these two religions, these textbooks make a number of obscured prescriptive political claims. They establish certain norms and define difference. The discursive relationships revealed in this analysis also illuminate

⁴⁶³ Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, 15.

historical continuities with hegemonic power dynamics of world religions discourse as well as the ways in which any given text always draws from prior texts and discourses.

6.1.1 Buddhism: universal, rational, and spiritual

In Masuzawa's genealogy of world religions discourse, she sketches the evolution of the category of "world religion," which was initially applied only to Christianity as a singular universal religion, and gradually expanded in scope to include other religions with purportedly universal significance. Buddhism was the first beyond Christianity to receive "world religion" status, followed later by Islam.⁴⁶⁴ Yet, this designation was contingent upon a European construction of Buddhism that ignored local practices and histories, while extrapolating a universal and transcendent essence and emphasizing "the singular intention of its founder toward something like a spirit of individual freedom and universal humanity soaring above the particularism of national tradition."⁴⁶⁵ Essentially, this construction of Buddhism was shaped to reflect liberal norms. Donald Lopez reiterates these assertions and argues that the study of Buddhism was constructed as an object of Western knowledge in the era of European colonialism. As such, it represented the interests and perspectives of those involved in its creation. He writes:

the Buddhism that largely concerned European scholars was an historical projection derived exclusively from manuscripts and blockprints, texts devoted largely to a 'philosophy,' which had been produced and had circulated among a small circle of monastic elites. With rare exception, there was little interest in the ways in which such texts were understood by the Buddhists of Asia, less interest in the ways in which such texts were put to use in the service of various ritual functions.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 23-24. I also discussed this genealogy in more detail in chapter 4.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁶⁶ Donald S. Lopez, "Introduction," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

Consequently, leading into the twentieth century, the Buddhism that dominated Buddhist Studies and joined the ranks of world religions was construed around universalist values, emphasizing the “dharma as a transcendent truth” and Buddhism as a “complete philosophical and psychological system, based on reason and restraint, opposed to ritual, superstition, and sacerdotalism.”⁴⁶⁷ This “putatively unitary object called ‘Buddhism’” was situated as transhistorical, transcultural, and “unchanged through the vicissitudes of time.”⁴⁶⁸

Samples about Buddhism in these textbooks reveal these universalist themes and the legacies of colonial modes of classification that linger in the world religions model. As products of the twenty-first century, many of these textbooks depart in some ways from these older practices by making some effort to emphasize diversity within Buddhism and avoid presenting it as monolithic. For instance, the Fisher text goes into great detail describing diverse Buddhist practices. The Brodd, Burke, Neusner and Young texts include multiple chapters on Buddhism, emphasizing regional and cultural differences. Yet, many texts still introduce Buddhism using terms that resonate with liberal norms of rationality, authenticity, and universalism, and consequently, traces of these older discursive practices of world religions discourse appear, revealing some historical continuities with nineteenth and twentieth century Buddhist studies.

These texts describe Buddhism through comparisons to “Western” culture and religions, frequently emphasizing universalism and referencing liberal norms and values. For example, Smith’s chapter on Buddhism gives considerable attention to basic Buddhist beliefs or teachings as well as the life of the Buddha, whom he compares to

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 8.

Jesus. It gives very little attention to particularities of Buddhist practices and cultures (in keeping with his earlier warning in the introduction that he is not terribly interested in the particularities of religions). He portrays the historical Buddha as “undoubtedly one of the greatest rationalists of all times, resembling undoubtedly in this respect no one as much as Socrates.”⁴⁶⁹ He elaborates a long list of qualities that encapsulate Buddhism, describing it as “empirical,” “scientific,” “pragmatic,” “therapeutic,” “psychological,” “egalitarian,” and “directed at individuals,” essentially framing Buddhism in terms of liberal values.⁴⁷⁰

The Burke text applies similar discursive practices when it describes Buddhism in decidedly Western terms:

As we shall see, Buddhism is not a single unified religion, but exists in a variety of forms. All these forms, however, have at least one thing in common: an emphasis on the transitoriness of human life as we know it. Although in our hearts we may long for eternity, the unavoidable fact is that we are only temporary beings, and true spirituality begins with acknowledging that. All the varieties of Buddhism would agree with Shakespeare’s Prospero: ‘We are such stuff as dreams are made on, And our little life is rounded with a sleep.’ (The Tempest)⁴⁷¹

In another example of recontextualizing Buddhism in particularly Western and Christian terms, Burke states “How is the grace and mercy of the Buddha brought to bear on us individually? For devotional Mahayana it is not through our actions, but through our faith, our trust in the Buddha. Thus devotional Mahayana Buddhism developed a doctrine of salvation by faith alone.”⁴⁷² Notably, terms such as “grace” and “mercy” have particularly Christian significance and “salvation by faith alone” is a distinctively Protestant theological doctrine. In a section on “Modern Developments,” Burke suggests that at its essence Buddhism is characterized by a timeless and

⁴⁶⁹ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 88.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁷¹ Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 64.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 81.

universal rationality that has allowed it to weather what might otherwise be the challenging forces of modernity: “The Buddhist world has been as yet little affected by the rise and success of science, with its emphasis on empirical verification... Similarly, Buddhism has been little affected by the rise of democratic forms of government, since it is not tied to any particular governmental order.”⁴⁷³ This characterization also reveals an essentialist definition of religion as separate from social and political reality.

The Brodd text generally projects fewer explicit Western and Christian assumptions onto Buddhism. However, Brodd does introduce the chapter on Buddhism explaining: “In a manner very much like that of a physician, proceeding rationally and empirically, Gautama diagnosed the human condition and prescribed a cure. One way of understanding Buddhism, then, is as a therapy for living.”⁴⁷⁴ This concept of the Buddha as physician is not foreign to Buddhism. Within Mahayana Buddhism, for example, there is a tradition of a bodhisattva known as the Medicine Buddha. Yet, Brodd does not situate this notion within that specific context. Rather, the description of Buddhism as “therapy for the living” relies on modern assumptions about medicine as science and therapy as rooted in reason; it simultaneously evokes liberal norms and values of authenticity and self-actualization. It invites sympathetic understanding from the reader by framing Buddhism in universal—i.e. liberal—terms.

In the Neusner text, the chapter “Buddhism in the World and in America,” written by Malcolm David Eckel, offers notably little about the particularities of Buddhist practices and cultures in the U.S., despite its title. Like other textbooks in this study, it also broadly characterizes Buddhism as a religion of peace and harmony. In the first paragraph of the chapter, for instance, Eckel states that Buddhism “has found

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁷⁴ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 70.

ways to exist side by side with other religious traditions without many of the great conflicts that have plagued religious life in the West.”⁴⁷⁵

Early editions of the text offered only a few paragraphs to contextualize Buddhism. The most recent edition of the text (2009) now includes a timeline of events related to Buddhism in America, such as the establishment of the first Buddhist temple in San Francisco in 1853 and the founding of the magazine *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* in 1991.⁴⁷⁶ However, with no explanation of these events, the reader is unlikely to understand their significance. The 2009 edition also includes two brief text boxes that give a more nuanced view of the complexities of Buddhist cultures and practices in the United States. In “The Contrast Between ‘Ethnic’ Buddhism and ‘Convert’ Buddhism in America,” Eckel distinguishes between American Buddhists whose traditions and practices connect them with an immigrant ethnic identity and those who have converted to Buddhism from Christianity or Judaism. He argues, however, that “the state of American Buddhism is far more complex than this simple distinction [between ethnic and convert] is able to express.”⁴⁷⁷ In “Who and Where Are the Buddhists in the United States?” Eckel explains that as part of this complexity, “it is difficult to ascertain accurately just how many Buddhist exist in this country. Making this even more challenging is the fact that some Buddhists self-identify as Buddhist *and* something else.”⁴⁷⁸

These brief additions begin to represent a more multifaceted view of Buddhism, and Eckel makes a few other statements that aim to introduce complexity and

⁴⁷⁵ Eckel, “Buddhism in the World and in America,” 200.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

ambivalence into the study of Buddhism, such as his warning to the reader against essentializing Buddhism:

Buddhists have been uncomfortable with any language suggesting that things have ‘essences.’ They insist instead that everything changes and nothing has any permanent identity, least of all a movement as complex and as varied as the one we call ‘Buddhism.’ It is better not to look for a single essence, but rather for a center of gravity or for lines of force around which Buddhist people have oriented themselves as they struggle to give meaning, depth, and texture to their lives.⁴⁷⁹

However, Eckel’s chapter primarily elaborates broad Buddhist beliefs and doctrines, the “philosophy” of Buddhism, such as the Four Nobles Truths, the concept of impermanence and the doctrine of emptiness. Taken as a whole, it hones in on central tenets and common features. It is unclear how Eckel avoids essentializing Buddhism by focusing instead on a “center of gravity.”

Moreover, Eckel engages in a process of “translating” Buddhism into terms that will be palatable to an imagined reader. He frequently describes Buddhism in ways that make clear he anticipates a non-Buddhist, likely Christian or Jewish, reader. He gives careful attention to aspects of Buddhism that may appeal to individual spirituality, such as in his explanation of “the spirit of nirvana” where he states:

Is your job to do what God is pictured doing in the Jewish or Christian scriptures—to look into the primordial chaos of the day and make something new come into being?—Or is it to look closely at the fire of existence that has been burning from time without beginning and allow some of it to burn away? If you choose the second option you will find yourself become more meditative, more focused on the quiet moments of experience—the silent spaces between heartbeats—and you will feel some of the distractions of ordinary experience begin to slip away.⁴⁸⁰

Here Eckel suggests to the reader that Buddhism can offer her or him a personal transcendent spiritual experience, of “quiet moments” with fewer “distractions of

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 200.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 205.

ordinary experience.” He concludes the chapter with another appealing universalist image:

Behind all of the modern variations in the Buddhist tradition, behind the processions of monks that wind through the fields of Southeast Asia to beg their daily food, behind the parry and thrust of a Japanese swordsman, behind the lines of children in California temple who chant to invoke the compassion of Amida, sits the figure of the Buddha, a man whose serenity and quiet smile have for centuries symbolized the human aspiration for peace in the midst of suffering and the wisdom to see through the illusions of this world.⁴⁸¹

Thus, despite Eckel’s caution against essentializing Buddhism, he presents it as essentially a religion that represents peace and harmony.

While Eckel’s chapter on Buddhism predominantly emphasizes Buddhist philosophy and universalist themes, it is followed by a chapter on “East Asian Religions in Today’s America,” written by Robert S. Ellwood, that gives much more attention to diversity within Buddhism as well as its relationship with other religions, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto. Ellwood offers much more detail than the preceding chapter about the particularities of diverse Buddhist cultures. Notably, Ellwood closes the chapter with a nod toward its significance and utility. He states:

By familiarizing themselves with these outposts of East Asia, Americans of all backgrounds, whether or not they are personally drawn to these religions, can learn about East Asia on levels inaccessible by most other means, make East Asian friends, and prepare themselves and their country for the pluralistic world of the twenty-first century.⁴⁸²

Here Ellwood indicates that there is continuity between East Asian societies and their emigré populations in the United States. Thus, for example, to better understand Chinese Americans also leads to a better understanding of China. While aiming to promote pluralism, Ellwood, in effect, situates East Asian immigrant cultures outside American norms, suggesting that they will always in some ways remain “other.”

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁸² Robert S. Ellwood, “East Asian Religions in Today’s America,” in *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, ed. Neusner, Jacob, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 227-228.

The Fisher text presents a complex and nuanced treatment of Buddhism, in which she aims to transcend the traditional monolithic world religions paradigm. Yet, she is not able to escape its inherent universalism and essentialism, illustrating the tensions and ambiguities that often characterize intertextuality, or a text's relationship to prior texts. Fairclough refers to this tension as "the heterogeneity of texts," or "the diverse and often contradictory elements and threads which go to make up a text."⁴⁸³ The Fisher text reveals examples of articulation, disarticulation, and rearticulation—discursive processes by which previous texts and discourses are both reproduced and transformed. Fisher's lived religions approach intends to deemphasize timeless texts in favor of the particularities of lived religious experience—a departure from historic text/scripture-based approaches to world religions. Indeed, her chapter on Buddhism includes more description of particularities of Buddhist rituals and practices than any other textbook. The chapter shows attention to diversity within Buddhism and an effort to situate particular practices and beliefs within specific cultural contexts.

At the same time, Fisher frames this chapter on Buddhism with the same universalist and essentialist notion of religion that carries through the other texts. In her introduction to the chapter, she begins by describing Buddhism in universal and individualistic terms, using the speaker and addressee-inclusive pronoun "we," to persuade and invite identification from the reader. She states: "[Buddhism] held that liberation from suffering depends on our own efforts. The Buddha taught that by understanding how we create suffering for ourselves we can become free." She writes that Buddhism requires "us" to "take responsibility for our own happiness and our own liberation."⁴⁸⁴ This discursive practice works to universalize Buddhism in such a

⁴⁸³ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 104.

⁴⁸⁴ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 135.

way as to evoke a sympathetic response and suggest that Buddhism holds an essential wisdom available to all. It speaks to liberal values of autonomy, authenticity, and freedom.

Fisher's chapter on Buddhism includes three "feature boxes," which reflect personal interviews conducted by the author—one about the His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, one about "Life in a Western Monastery" featuring quotes from individuals at Zen Mountain Monastery in New York, and one about Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American Buddhist nun.⁴⁸⁵ While each of these narrative accounts offers some detailed insights into particular individual experiences of Buddhism, a closer look reveals certain themes that form Fisher's tacit definition of religion—universalism, individualism, and voluntarism.

In the feature box on the Dalai Lama, Fisher only includes quotations with universal significance, such as "By whatever name religion may be known, its understanding and practice are the essence of a peaceful mind and therefore a peaceful world" and "The best way to solve problems is through human understanding, mutual respect."⁴⁸⁶ Fisher concludes this narrative declaring "His quintessentially Buddhist message to people of all religions is that only through kindness and compassion toward each other and the cultivation of inner peace shall we survive as a species."⁴⁸⁷ This "insider account" offers some evidence of the mediating and interpretive position that an author plays in conveying these perspectives. Fisher does not include quotations from the Dalai Lama on a particularly Buddhist text or practice. Rather, she has seemingly chosen material that would have universal appeal for a

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., ix.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

broad audience. Moreover, this material supports Fisher's own concerns about the essential goodness of religion and the importance of interreligious understanding.

The feature box on "Life in a Western Zen Monastery" includes a narrative description of particular practices and daily life at Zen Mountain Monastery, such as "For thirty-five minute blocks, separated by periods of attentive walking, they [monks and laypeople] support each other by practicing zazen together in silence" and "They chant in Japanese and English, with frequent bowing to each other, to their meditation cushions, and to the Buddha on the altar, in solidarity with all beings and gratitude for the teachings."⁴⁸⁸ Fisher sums up the narrative stating: "From training in flower arranging to Aikido to explore the relevance of Buddhist principles in the workplace, Zen Mountain Monastery's programs are oriented toward one central goal: the personal experience of enlightenment and its application in the twenty-first-century world."⁴⁸⁹ Here, Fisher frames these collective practices in terms of individual and personal experience.

In the third and final feature box of the chapter, Fisher provides an interview with Karma Lekshe Tsomo about "the unusual pathways by which Westerners come to adopt Buddhism." This narrative describes a conversion experience: "When I was nineteen, I went to Japan to go surfing, then traveled to Thailand, India, and Nepal. One the way I had a clear and beautiful dream that I was a nun. I knew I wanted to a nun, but where?" She then describes her activism for the rights of women in Buddhism: "Today, having completed my studies and full ordination, I work with the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women to gain equal opportunities for women to study, equal facilities for meditation practice, and also opportunities for women to

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 172-173.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 173.

become ordained, if they wish.”⁴⁹⁰ Again, this feature box emphasizes broader themes that run throughout Fisher’s text, specifically individualism, voluntarism, and equal rights.

Notably, these are the only three feature boxes in the chapter on Buddhism. Within the wide range of social practices and experiences associated with Buddhism, Fisher has chosen only these three. Thus, these individual accounts are curated, reflecting hermeneutical decisions. For example, emphasizing insider accounts is not a neutral practice. It reinforces the notion of religion as primarily personal and individual, which perpetuates liberal norms and value. In this case, it also works as a strategy of legitimation. The adherent becomes the authority and whatever the adherent says must be true, because it reflects his or her own experience, which has been situated as the essence of religion. The insider account becomes insulated from critique, as does the obscured interpretive work of the author. In fact, this phenomenological approach works to legitimate its own authority.

Toward the end of the chapter, in a section on “Buddhism in the West,” Fisher begins by emphasizing diversity within Buddhism, while implicitly asserting Buddhism’s universal relevance: “Images of the Buddha are enshrined around the world. The path to enlightenment that first gained currency in India has gradually spread to Western countries as well as throughout Asia.”⁴⁹¹ She attributes this expansion to Asian immigration and then points out that Buddhism has also been adopted by “Westerners.” While Asian-Americans can certainly be classified as “Westerners,” the implication here is that “Westerners” refers to individuals who do not claim Asian ethnicity or ancestry. She seems to anticipate arguments that

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 173.

Buddhism is inherently an ethnic religion, inextricably tied to a particular culture and instead argues for Buddhism's universal relevance. She states: "Buddhism is often embraced by people in the West because they long for peace of mind in the midst of a chaotic materialistic life."⁴⁹² She then returns to this tension between Buddhism as culturally particular and Buddhism as universal, questioning whether there is such a thing as an authentic Buddhism. She writes:

Are Westerners able to achieve enlightenment by taking Buddhist workshops here and there? Particularly in the case of Tibetan Buddhist practices, Westerners often want to be initiated into the most highly advanced teachings without taking time for years of patient practice and being inwardly transformed by the step-by-step foundational teachings. Can teachings developed within a specific cultural context be directly transplanted into the soil of an entirely different culture? Most Westerners who are adopting Buddhist practices are living in highly materialistic societies with different priorities and values, rather than traditional Buddhist cultures or monastic settings. In their impatience to get results, many shop around from one teacher to the next and experiment with one practice after another, rather than persisting with one path over a long time.⁴⁹³

In this criticism of Western or consumerist approaches to Buddhism, Fisher subtly asserts a notion of an authentic Buddhism, which involves a kind of transcendent spirituality, centered around truth-seeking and enlightenment, as well as a focus on individual practice, which she argues ought to involve tenacity and devotion. She essentializes Buddhist cultures, suggesting that they are transhistorical, or even pre-modern, not acknowledging the presence of modern "materialism" in historically Buddhist cultures such as Japan and South Korea.

Fisher goes on to further grapple with notions of authenticity and universality in Buddhism:

Given the differences in culture, background, and motivation, are Western students and their teachers in the process of creating new forms of Buddhism adapted to Western ways? How authentic are these new forms? Some observers

⁴⁹² Ibid., 174.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 175.

feel that Western Buddhism, with its emphasis on inner practice rather than outer forms, is actually closer to what they construe as the core of early Buddhism than are later developments in the East. Contemporary Western Buddhists tend to be oriented to the goal of achieving enlightenment by their own efforts, which is reportedly what the Buddha prescribed for his followers, and are searching for ways to achieve that goal, though sometimes hoping to do with minimum effort.⁴⁹⁴

Fisher seems to resolve this question in favor of universality, suggesting that, while some may argue that Buddhism is essentially an ethnic religion specific to the cultural context of Asia, in fact, it has a universal and transcendent essence. This positioning of Western Buddhism as closer to “the core of early Buddhism than later developments in the East,” according to “some observers,” echoes sentiments prevalent in the nineteenth century construction of Buddhist studies described by Masuzawa. As Buddhism was positioned as a world religion and designated as having a universalistic character, which included Aryan origins, some nineteenth century continental scholars asserted that a “true Buddhism” “should be more readily recognized and far better understood by Europeans than by native Asian practitioners.”⁴⁹⁵

From Fisher’s perspective, Buddhism, separated from its cultural trappings, reveals an authentic core centered on the timeless pursuit of individual authenticity and self-actualization. At first glance, in this chapter, Fisher presents a narrative of Buddhism that is far more complex and nuanced than those described by Masuzawa and Lopez. Yet, a closer analysis uncovers an emphasis on what Masuzawa calls a “spirit of individual freedom and universal humanity soaring above the particularism of national tradition” that reproduces liberal norms and ideologies and brings to light

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Masuzawa attributes this notion of “true Buddhism” to Monier Monier-Williams, a scholar of Sanskrit at Oxford University who also held the title “Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire,” indicative of the intertwining of the study of religions and the European project of empire. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 187.

an intertextual relationship with the world religions discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁹⁶

6.1.2 Islam: particular and political

By the turn of the twentieth century, Islam was added to the rank of “world religions.” However as Masuzawa explains, for much of the nineteenth century, scholars vehemently argued that Islam was a very particular ethnic religion, not universal in scope, and decidedly not a world religion. It was “condescendingly viewed as narrow, rigid, and stunted, and its essential attributes were said to be defined by the national, racial, and ethnic character of Arabs, the most bellicose and adversarial of the Semites.”⁴⁹⁷ Masuzawa also adds in a footnote: “This outlook seems to be sustained to this day, even if the contrast is less explicitly racialized. On the whole, ‘typical’ Muslims are considered prone to militancy, while Buddhists are generally presumed pacific and meditative.”⁴⁹⁸

While each textbook varies in its presentation of Islam, there are a number of commonalities and patterns that appear. These textbooks tend to portray Islam as uniquely political among world religions. They work to generate sympathy for Islam, while simultaneously marking Islam as “other.” Some texts, in anticipation of a perceived negative “Islamophobic” discourse that defines Islam as inherently violent, backwards, or hostile to other religions and the West, recontextualize certain social practices. They engage in apologetics and look for ways in which they can attribute liberal norms and values to Islam, while clearly marking other social practices as problematic or inauthentic. In doing so, they exoticize and marginalize Islam.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 179, note 1.

The political positioning begins in the introductions to the chapters on Islam, which immediately situate Islam in juxtaposition to “the West.” Five of the six textbooks in this study were published after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Four texts—Brodd, Fisher, Neusner (in the chapter by John L. Esposito), and Young— refer to this event in the introductory paragraphs in their chapters on Islam. In the previous chapter, I discussed the use of September 11 motif as an example of a discursive strategy of legitimation, employed to justify the importance of the study of religion and the subsequent cultivation of a pluralist understanding and respect for religious diversity. The text samples I examined came from introductory chapters, along with concluding chapters on religion in the modern world. In the chapters on Islam I examine here, references to September 11 sometimes function in a similar way. The Brodd text states in passing: “In the United States and elsewhere, the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the subsequent warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq, gave rise to newfound interest in Islam.”⁴⁹⁹ Other texts make more explicit utilitarian arguments that link the September 11th event to a social need for better understanding Islam. The chapter on Islam in the Neusner text is written by John L. Esposito, a renowned scholar of Islamic Studies.⁵⁰⁰ Esposito begins by justifying a new civic requisite to study and better understand Islam:

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, a basic knowledge of Islam is becoming essential for every American today... it is no longer appropriate to think of Muslims as those people in the Middle East or Africa or Asia. Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is an American religion.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 247.

⁵⁰⁰ Esposito is also the founding director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding in the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He has co-authored a popular world religions textbook, *World Religions Today* (with D. Fasching and T. Lewis, 4th edition, 2011) not included in this study because it did not feature prominently in my survey of educators. Notably, Esposito’s work on Islam is cited and quoted in the chapters on Islam in the Young and Fisher texts.

⁵⁰¹ Esposito, “Islam in the World and in America,” 144.

Similarly, Young and Fisher rationalize the need to study Islam; they also suggest that current public perceptions about Islam are distorted and that better knowledge would remedy this problem. Young states:

Since September 11, 2001, interest in Islam outside the Muslim world, especially in the United States, has risen rapidly. Unfortunately, the exploitation of Islamic teachings by Osama bin Laden and those responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent people on that day has created confusion about Islam. Our task in this chapter is to look beyond distortions and stereotypes to try to understand what Islam actually is.⁵⁰²

Fisher calls this distortion “ignorance” and describes it as “dangerous” and threatening:

In fact, ignorance about Islam and perceived targeting of Muslims in general by the U.S.-led ‘war on terrorism’ have exacerbated a dangerous and growing divide between Muslims and non-Muslims in the contemporary world. Therefore it is extremely important to carefully study the origins, teachings, and modern history of this major world religion.⁵⁰³

While these textbooks name September 11, 2001 as a turning point for the relationship between Islam and the West, this political positioning did not arise at just that moment in time. It reflects historical patterns of world religions discourse identified by Masuzawa, which are also evident in the Smith text. Originally published in 1958 and updated in 1991, the Smith text-- like Brodd, Fisher, Esposito, and Young-- begins by emphasizing tension and misunderstanding between Islam and the West.

The text states:

Of all the non-Western religions, Islam stands closest to the West—closest geographically, and also closest ideologically; for religiously it stands in the Abrahamic family of religions, while philosophically it builds on the Greeks. Yet despite this mental and spatial proximity, Islam is the most difficult religion for the West to understand. ‘No part of the world,’ an American columnist has written, ‘is more hopelessly and systemically and stubbornly misunderstood by us than that complex of religion, culture and geography known as Islam.’⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Young, *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 225.

⁵⁰³ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 381.

⁵⁰⁴ Smith, *The World's Religions*, 221. Here Smith quotes Meg Greenfield from *Newsweek*, March 26, 1979.

Here, Smith moves back and forth between situating Islam outside Western norms—“the most difficult religion for the West to understand”—and trying to establish commonalities—“closest ideologically.” Notably, Smith’s attempts to highlight a relationship between Islam and the West involve reframing and recontextualizing Islam in distinctly ecumenical or interfaith terms—“for religiously it stands in the Abrahamic family.” The concept of “Abrahamic religions”—a discursive construction that takes a variety of historical and social phenomena and recontextualizes them under a common category aimed at emphasizing shared roots—is “a modern creation, largely a theological neologism.”⁵⁰⁵ This discursive practice also resonates with Masuzawa’s descriptions of lingering nineteenth century assumptions about world religions, including the notion that Islam’s “universalist intensions derive partly from the fact that its founder had drawn considerably from Jewish and Christian sources.”⁵⁰⁶ Smith’s explanation of some of the basic theological concepts of Islam reflects these assumptions. He calls Abraham “by far the most important figure in the Koran,” which again emphasizes this idea of a familial relationship with Christianity and Judaism.⁵⁰⁷ He defines the notion of the human self in terms of “the soul’s individuality and its freedom.”⁵⁰⁸ He goes on to compare the conception of the self within Islam to the more relational conceptions of self within Buddhism and Confucianism.

In India the all-pervading cosmic spirit comes close to swallowing the individual self, and in China the self is so ecological that where it begins and ends is hard to determine. Islam and its Semitic allies reverse this drift, regarding individuality as not only real but good in principle. Value, virtue, and spiritual fulfillment come through realizing the potentialities that are uniquely one’s

⁵⁰⁵ Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

⁵⁰⁶ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 250.

⁵⁰⁷ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 240.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

own; in ways that are not inconsequential, those possibilities differ from those of every other soul that has ever lived, or ever will live in the future.⁵⁰⁹

Here, Islam is described in terms that reveal liberal values— authenticity and spirituality as a path to the actualization of the autonomous individual.

Smith explains the tensions between Islam and the West as the result of a long history of conflict arising from close proximity.

Common borders have given rise to border disputes, which, beginning with raids and counterraids, have escalated into vendettas, blood feuds, and all-out war. There is a happier side; in times and places Christians, Muslims, and Jews have lived together harmoniously—one thinks of Moorish Spain. But for a good part of the last fourteen hundred years, Islam and Europe have been at war and people seldom have a fair picture of their enemies. Islam is going to be an interesting religion for this book to negotiate.⁵¹⁰

The use of the term “negotiate” is noteworthy here. Albeit subtly, Smith reveals his own normative position in the text. He essentially tells the reader that he is ordering and managing the religion of Islam. Smith is “negotiating” the terms of Islam to make it fit into his greater pluralist narrative. This process is also evident in his concluding paragraphs of the chapter, in which he explains that, due to brevity, this chapter has not included the great history of “the Muslim empire” and the story of how “Muslim philosophers and scientists kept the lamp of learning bright, ready to spark the Western mind when it roused from its long sleep.” He then sums up what he deems to be Islam’s challenges and potential:

Nor would the story have been entirely confined to the past, for there are indications that Islam is emerging from several centuries of stagnation, which colonization no doubt exacerbated. It faces enormous problems: how to distinguish industrial modernization (which on balance it welcomes), from Westernization (which on balance it doesn’t); how to realize the unity that is latent in Islam when the forces of nationalism work powerfully against it; how to hold on to Truth in a pluralistic, relativizing age.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 221.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 267.

Here, Smith once again looks for and emphasizes an underlying essence of religion—this “Truth” and “latent unity”—which is also at the foundation of his prescriptive agenda.

The Brodd text, while far more contemporary than the Smith text, also reveals the normative position from which the author approaches religion. In the brief introduction to the chapter on Islam, Brodd states: “Many have been surprised to learn that Islam is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition, and that it reveres the great prophets of Judaism and Jesus Christ. Islam has also played a crucial role in the shaping of Western culture, especially during the Middle Ages.”⁵¹² Thus, Brodd begins this chapter trying to generate some sense of identification and sympathy by arguing that “they” are, in some ways, like “us.” At the same time, he places Islam outside a Western and “Judeo-Christian” norm. By saying that “many have been surprised” by this commonality, Brodd suggests the reader likely views Islam as “other.” He also makes clear he assumes his reader is an American Christian. While Brodd may intend to report a prevalent perspective, he also reinforces the notion of Islam as “other” in the reader’s mind.

In another example that reinforces the notion of Islam as “other,” Brodd inaccurately attributes a cultural practice regarding marriage to the whole of Islam. He states: “Muslims are urged to marry as early in life as possible. Marriages are traditionally arranged by parents; couples generally do not date. This custom of course contrasts sharply with the Western perspective, which places romantic love as the foundation for marriage.”⁵¹³ This passage is included in a section titled “The Personal and Social Life of Islam.” Here, Brodd only addresses “care of the body, the status of

⁵¹² Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 247.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 256.

women, and struggle” or jihad, aspects of Islam that he likely perceives as misunderstood by or of concern to American, Christian readers, though he does not clearly label them as such. On the surface, this section seems to clarify points such as “the ideals of Islam regard men and women as equals, but with different roles,” that polygamy is actually rare within Islam and that “veiling” is no longer universal among Muslim women, but some educated women choose to wear the veil “as a means of embracing their own traditional heritage, not as a form of male domination.”⁵¹⁴ As it does so, it implicitly frames its description of Islam in such a way as to suggest it embraces the liberal value of egalitarianism. Implicitly, he is arguing that liberal egalitarianism should be the norm by which to interpret Islam’s social practices. Moreover, Brodd does not discuss the particular cultural or historical contexts of these practices. These sweeping generalizations do not acknowledge the diversity within Islam, further contributing to the positioning of Islam as “other.”

In a subsequent section, Brodd talks about Muslims around the world, including the approximately six million Muslims living in the U.S. He explains that many American Muslims have come to the U.S. through more recent immigration and he states that “today many of them are as typically American as they are Muslim.”⁵¹⁵ On one hand, this appears to be a statement of inclusion, i.e., Muslims can be Americans too. On the other hand, stating this suggests that somehow to be “typically American” would not include being Muslim. One does not hear Christians described as being “as typically American as they are Christian.” This type of statement appears to challenge the status quo but actually reinforces it.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 257.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 260.

In the conclusion of this chapter, Brodd suggests that Islam sits in tension with pluralism. He states:

Islam is distinctive among the great religions of the world for the extent to which it embraces the totality of life. There is simply no recognition of a division between what is religious and what is secular.... How does Islam see its place within our pluralistic world? Can a religion that understands itself as embracing the totality of life truly be tolerant of other religions?⁵¹⁶

He claims that the answer is twofold, that Muslims both believe that Islam is “the final revelation” and that “other religions include expressions of the divine will.” Once again, Brodd marks Islam as “other” as he suggests that Islam is uniquely and inherently illiberal— that it is not able to consign belief to the private, secular sphere and therefore inevitably clashes with liberal values of tolerance. However, then he concedes that Islam contains some universal values of harmony and unity: “Like the ideals of every religion, those of Islam are not always put into practice. Nevertheless, Islam’s overriding theme is the ideal of unity.”⁵¹⁷ This closing section underscores Brodd’s prescriptive pluralist agenda. Brodd, along with all the other texts aside from Burke, has declared he takes a descriptive, phenomenological approach to the study of these religions, one which does not entail evaluating truth claims. Yet, all of these religions are evaluated in terms of how they function in the world and the ways in which they “can truly be tolerant of other religions.”

Like Smith and Brodd’s texts, the Esposito chapter (in the Neusner textbook) follows discursive practices that situate Islam as at once familiar and foreign, both legitimating and de-legitimating it simultaneously. For Esposito, whose chapter appears in a textbook focused on the American context, this chapter negotiates a space for Islam in the American religious landscape, albeit a highly regulated space predicated

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 263.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

on the ability to engage with liberal norms and values. Introducing the chapter,

Esposito states:

Islam suffers from a number of misconceptions. Many are surprised to discover that it is not some strange, remote religion in the Middle East but the second largest religion in the world... Muslims worship the same God who is revered by Christians and Jews... Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam also spread through much of the world. Islam is truly a world religion that embraces people of many races and languages.⁵¹⁸

By stating that “many are surprised” to discover otherwise, Esposito suggests that “strange, remote” is the normative characterization of Islam. He then attempts to counter this perceived strangeness by positioning Islam in proximity to Judaism and Christianity, again reinforcing a Judeo-Christian norm. Throughout the chapter, Esposito continually compares Islam to Judaism and Christianity, with statements such as “Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam includes a number of communities or branches” and “Muslim, like Jews and Christians, believe that there is one God.”⁵¹⁹

While this kind of comparative language might seem reasonable within a textbook that engages in a comparative study of religion, chapters on Judaism and Christianity do not frame these religions in terms of their similarities to the others. Moreover, these comparisons function as a practice of legitimation that situates Islam as a sufficiently universal religion and begins to expand the American religion of Judeo-Christianity (the Protestant-Catholic-Jew triune promoted by Herberg) to incorporate an Abrahamic paradigm.⁵²⁰

In another normative discursive move, Esposito contrasts Islam with the American value of secularism: “Islam is considered a total way of life for the religious community. For many in America who are raised with the idea of the separation of

⁵¹⁸ Esposito, “Islam in the World and in America,” 144.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁵²⁰ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*.

church and state and the sense that religion is a private affair, Islam can seem confusing, especially since Islam does not have a ‘church’ to preserve and promote its beliefs.”⁵²¹ By stating that Islam “can seem confusing,” Esposito marginalizes Islam, suggesting that it sits outside American norms and likely does not make sense or fit within an American social order. Under a section on “Muslim Immigration,” he asserts that the political culture of the U.S.—a liberal social order rooted in values of freedom, tolerance, and pluralism—provides a space of freedom in which Muslims can engage with a wider range of Islamic thought than in their countries of origin:

Muslim students now can be found at universities across the country. America provides an environment in which these students can share their faith and ideas. The freedom in America enables them to explore political ideas that would be impossible in their own countries, as well as to come to know about the teachings of Muslim leaders from other parts of the Islamic world.⁵²²

He implies, first, that Muslim students are likely not Americans, that the U.S. is not “their own” country, and, second, that in the United States, they can have a freer experience of Islam than elsewhere, i.e., Muslim countries. Thus, while Islam sits outside American norms, the liberal social order offers Islam the potential to be a truer version of itself.

In contrast with this language that situates Islam as “other,” Esposito also continually works to include Islam within the boundaries of legitimate religion in America. He describes an American Islam that negotiates a place within a liberal social order:

In the face of adversity, Islam in America has proven to be a dynamic faith. As a result of their experience, Muslims are constantly demonstrating the flexibility of their faith. Incorporating American customs, Islamic centers often include not only the mosque but also a Sunday school where children study their religion, and a social hall for community events that range from bake sales to featured speakers... Most American Muslims have become integrated into American

⁵²¹ Esposito, “Islam in the World and in America,” 147.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 152.

society politically and socioeconomically. Muslims are present in the professions from local store owners to corporate leaders as well as teachers, professors, lawyers and physicians.⁵²³

While he starts off in the chapter telling the reader that Islam does not recognize a separation of church and state, he then goes on to say that American Muslims have become integrated into this political order.

As Esposito discusses Islam and politics, he attributes negative phenomena, such as violence, extremism and terrorism, to factors external to Islam itself. He acknowledges that many perceive Islam to be inherently political and illiberal, stating in a section on “Islam and September 11”: “Given the fact that Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda, and the 9/11 terrorists who crashed planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon all called themselves Muslims, questions about the relationship of Islam to politics, violence, and terror have arisen.”⁵²⁴ He addresses political events associated with Islam in countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia and concludes that “many Muslim countries face the same long term issues of authoritarianism, legitimacy, security, and terrorism” while also explaining that these countries include secularists and “Islamic reformers” who “call for greater democratization in the name of Islam.”⁵²⁵ He also explains that religious extremists and terrorists have hijacked “their religion using it to justify violence and terrorism.”⁵²⁶ He adds that extremism can be found in all religions: “Extremist Muslims, like Jewish, Christian, and Hindu extremists, are a minority, though a dangerous minority.”⁵²⁷ Again, Esposito subtly suggests that a liberal social order provides a superior environment in which Muslims can truly flourish:

⁵²³ Ibid., 154.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 155.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 156.

The vast majority of mainstream Muslims, like their non-Muslim counterparts, will continue to lead constructive and productive lives informed by their faith. However, the perpetuation of authoritarian regimes, lack of freedoms, and repression of human rights will foster the concomitant feelings of powerlessness. The inability to address deep-seated issues and grievances within the political process will create discontent and instability and serve as a breeding ground for extremist movements.⁵²⁸

He concludes with an affirmative comparison of Islam to the Judeo-Christian norm and a prescriptive appeal to pluralism as an American civic value:

Like Jews and Christians before them, and indeed all religious peoples, the vast majority of Muslims struggle to preserve their faith and religious identity within America's pluralistic society. The presence and participation of Muslims in America adds to the tapestry of nationalities and faiths that have come to constitute the richness and diversity of America.⁵²⁹

The use of the term "richness" here supports the pluralist notion of diversity as a resource and a social good.

Fisher also takes a prescriptive approach to Islam in which she aims to illuminate a universalistic essence of Islam that is good, authentic and peace-loving, separated from political and institutional distortions. She identifies a number of potential concerns held by some people, likely non-Muslim Americans, and then explains how they are misperceptions. Discussing women's rights in Islam, Fisher states:

Some customs thought to be Muslim are actually cultural practices not specified in the basic sources; they are the result of Islamic civilization's assimilation of many cultures in many places. Muhammad worked side by side with women, and the Qur'an encourages equal participation of women in religion and in society. Veiling and seclusion were practices absorbed from conquered Persian and Byzantine cultures, particularly their upper classes; peasant women could not carry out their physical work under encumbering veils or in seclusion from public view.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 423.

Here, Fisher separates Islam from culture, reinforcing liberal assumptions that frame religion as primarily about individual spiritual experience while situating institutional forms as secondary or peripheral.

In a section titled “Islam in Politics”, Fisher aims to separate authentic religion from violence. She writes, for example:

At present, the facet of Islam that is of greatest concern around the world to both Muslims and non-Muslims is its association with politics. Many governments are becoming Islamicized. Political leaders are referring more frequently to Islam and Qur’anic statements... Some charismatic leaders have used their own interpretations of Islam to ignite violent political expressions of frustration and hatred against Western global domination. These include suicidal terrorist attacks against civilian targets by those who have been assured that their self-sacrifice for the cause will earn them quick entry to paradise, contrary to Qur’anic passages refusing suicide and upholding the value and sanctity of each human life.⁵³¹

Thus, Fisher points to this theme of Islam as inherently political and even militant, but then suggests that frequently these politics betray the core values of Islam found in the Qur’an. She goes on to describe a number of political conflicts involving Muslims in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia, among others. Yet, she then emphasizes that, “As Islamophobia grows among non-Muslims, many leading Muslims are trying to explain to them that Islam does not equal violence.”⁵³² She references a Muslim scholar, stating that “Islamic values are not aimed at creating a political state but rather a harmoniously integrated world society”⁵³³

In an effort to depict a sympathetic portrayal of Islam, Fisher’s chapter reinforces the notion of Islam as inherently political. As an example, the chapter includes a photo of three women in black and a young boy weeping over a grave. The caption states: “Because they are involved in conflicts around the world, many Muslims

⁵³¹ Ibid., 428.

⁵³² Ibid., 433.

⁵³³ Ibid., 435.

are mourning the loss of their loved ones, becoming refugees, or being attacked or killed. This scene of grief occurred in Falluja, Iraq.”⁵³⁴ There is nothing particular to Islam in this photo. Rather, it depicts a universal scene of grief and sadness. This photo and its caption seem to work for a humanizing effect, suggesting that most Muslims, while victims of distorted politicization of their religion, share a common humanity with the rest of us. Yet, Fisher has chosen to include this photo and caption in the section on Islam and politics, reinforcing stereotypes that Islam is plagued by militancy and violence.⁵³⁵

In contrast, the chapter on Christianity in the Fisher text has no section labeled “Christianity in Politics.” It is structured to emphasize beliefs and personal practices. Fisher does not address Christian extremism or religiously motivated violence. This is indicative of Christianity’s normative position and subtly reinforces the notion that Islam is uniquely and inherently political. Of course, if every textbook’s chapter on Christianity included a section on “Christianity in Politics” that interrogated each and every instance in which some person or group engaged in violence in the name of Christianity, as well as biblical texts and theologies that support violence, it too might raise questions about whether it is an inherently violent religion. Notably, the Burke, Brodd, Neusner, and Smith texts, which all address politics and violence in some way in their chapters on Islam, do not include discussions of politics and violence in chapters on Christianity.

The Young text gives equal attention to Christianity and Islam in a section on contemporary ethical issues. In the chapter on “War and Capital Punishment,” Young describes ambivalence toward war and violence in both Christianity and Islam. In the

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 434.

⁵³⁵ Notably, the photos in the chapter reinforce stereotypes of Islam in other ways. All photos of Muslims show people of Middle Eastern ethnicities, despite the fact that most Muslims in the world are Asian or African.

section on Christianity, he writes “Within Christianity we find positions on the morality of war ranging from the pacifism of the ‘Peace Churches’ (like the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren) to the ideology of ‘holy war,’ which equates a particular war with the will of God.”⁵³⁶ While he does not completely reconcile these tensions, he clearly emphasizes teachings that promote peace and nonviolence. In the section on Islam, he asks:

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, interest in the Muslim teaching about war has taken on a sense of urgency. Were the actions of the nineteen Muslim men who hijacked commercial airliners that day, killing thousands of innocent people, sanctioned by the teachings of Islam? Or was theirs a distorted understanding of the Muslim teaching about when acts of war are justified?⁵³⁷

Note here that Young identifies a “sense of urgency” for better understanding Muslim positions on war and violence. He does not point to this same urgency when he discusses these issues within Christianity. Young goes on to suggest that the violent actions of September 11 represent a distortion. While he explains that “the Qur’an clearly says that Allah approves of Muslims engaging in war,” he qualifies this by noting that “there are strong affinities between Christian just war theory and Islamic teaching the use of armed force.”⁵³⁸ After briefly discussing groups that advocate for preemptive violence, he argues that:

The vast majority of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims strongly reject these groups’ [such as al-Qaeda] interpretation of Muslim teaching on war. To condemn Islam as a violent religion because of the actions of men like Osama bin Laden and his supporters would be comparable to condemning Christianity because of the Christian hate groups that label Jews and Muslims as enemies of God, and that have killed innocent people on the basis of their twisted interpretations of the Bible.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶ Young, *The World’s Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*, 335.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

He concludes the section by discussing “many alternatives to the extremist and violent interpretations of Islam dominating the news in the early twenty-first century.”⁵⁴⁰ He highlights the example of Uztaz Mahmoud Mohamed Tahah, who “known as the ‘African Gandhi,’ created an Islamic movement in Sudan to resist colonialism with the same strategy Gandhi used in India” and explains that “his message has been heard and is being promoted by other courageous Muslim scholars and leaders today.”⁵⁴¹ Thus, Young conveys to his reader that most Muslims, like most adherents of all the other religions in the textbook, do not condone extremism and violence.

The Burke text, however, takes a contrasting—and far less sympathetic—approach as it clearly situates Islam in juxtaposition with liberal norms, as noted in the previous chapter’s section on the September 11 motif. Burke characterizes the relationship between Islam and the West as a clash of civilizations, as he asserts:

Since the seventeenth century, with the rise of science, the emergence of democracy, and the development of the capitalist economy, Western society, which once lagged behind the Muslim world, has leaped dramatically ahead of it, becoming more knowledgeable, more technologically advanced, wealthier, more powerful, and, at least in its own view, more humane. The Islamic world, by contrast, sank into a general state of poverty and powerlessness during the period. As a result, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Muslim lands were colonized by Western nations. Although colonization brought benefits, such as modern methods of communication, transport, medicine, and economic and political organization, the superiority of the West has been experienced by many Muslims as an extreme humiliation.⁵⁴²

Here, Burke reproduces Orientalist sentiments as he equates the Islamic world with backwardness and the Western world with progress. He suggests that the most significant problem of Western colonization is that it merely threatens cultural pride; he ignores the illiberal foundations of colonialism and the ways in which it presents

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 282.

threats to sovereignty and autonomy. Burke goes on to explain that in response to the alleged “superiority of the West”:

some Muslims, especially those who have been educated or live in Western societies have argued that Islam can and should expand its intellectual horizons to include worthwhile features of the modern world such as science, democracy, capitalism, and the recognition of human rights. This would suggest a further development in the process of interpretation, *ijtihad*, which is sometimes referred to as ‘opening the door of *ijtihad*.’⁵⁴³

In this passage, Burke once again contrasts Islam and the West. He conflates science, democracy, and human rights with the “features of the modern world,” that is, with the West.

6.1.3 Pluralism, secularism, and the liberal social order

Analysis of these texts reveals the interdiscursive themes of world religions discourse that are perpetually reproduced throughout the modern academic study of religion. Masuzawa argues that the trajectory of world religions discourse classifies and orders religions in ways that continually recreate a Eurocentric imperialist view of the world. She identifies an underlying logic of this Eurocentric worldview that is rooted in notions of universalism, involving “a universalist notion of history as a singular civilizing process, of which modern Europe was the triumphant vanguard and all other civilizations and non-European societies merely markers of various interim phases already surpassed by people of European descent” coupled with a Christian theological universalism.⁵⁴⁴ Initially, Christianity alone was considered to be uniquely universal. Where other religions were viewed as particular to a place, region, culture, or ethnicity, Christianity singularly held universal significance, as truly “transhistorical and transnational in its import, hence universally valid and viable at any place

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 12.

anytime.”⁵⁴⁵ World religions discourse extended this notion of universal significance to religions beyond Christianity. However, as it did so, it simultaneously defined and ordered those religions in terms that reflected both Christocentric and Eurocentric assumptions.

Masuzawa’s study concentrates on European discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, she also points out that this European ethos eventually became a Euro-American universalism, as the U.S. was the “final destination of the migration” of world religions discourse, which then supported “the ascendancy of the discourse of religious pluralism and diversity, the discourse that has since been viewed as a signature attribute of a specifically American ethos.”⁵⁴⁶ The underlying logic of this world religions discourse, inextricably intertwined with pluralist discourse, is premised not only on Euro-American and Christocentric assumptions of universalism, but also on the universalism of liberal ideology.

Liberalism, with its notions of egalitarianism and the autonomous individual, as well as its appeals to universal reason, is a totalizing ideology. Its universal significance is fundamental to its logic. As the analysis here reveals, these world religions textbooks measure both Buddhism and Islam by norms of liberalism. As they do so, they also work to naturalize liberalism, to advance these norms as neutral, objective, and commonsensical. This liberal bias appears in these chapters on Buddhism where the authors filter out the “cultural” features of Buddhism, which might otherwise be used to argue that it is a particularly Asian religion, and instead focus on a presumptive core of Buddhism that has universal significance. As an example, Fisher explains that many believe that Western Buddhism “with its emphasis

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

on inner practice rather than outer forms, is actually closer to what they construe as the core of early Buddhism than are later developments in the East.”⁵⁴⁷ Of course, the aspects of Buddhism considered to be universally significant are those that represent liberal values—teachings and beliefs that evince notions of reason, authenticity, and individual spirituality. For example, Smith writes, “Yet in the end his [Buddha] appeal was to the individual, that each should proceed toward enlightenment through confronting his or her individual situation and predicaments.”⁵⁴⁸

Evaluated by these norms, Islam is framed as more culturally particular than Buddhism, as holding a kernel of universal wisdom at its core that is frequently buried by particular cultural and political trappings. Notably, the politics of Islam are not explicitly compared and contrasted with the politics of liberalism, because liberal norms are not presented as political. Rather, these texts construe Islam as singularly political and culturally specific, set against the universal logic of liberalism, which is rarely even identified as liberalism and more often presented as “the way things are.”

Much of Islam’s particular politics are attributed to a conflict with secularism. This line of reasoning can be found in textual samples such where Brodd argues that “Islam is distinctive among the great religions of the world for the extent to which it embraces the totality of life. There is simply no recognition of a division between what is religious and what is secular.”⁵⁴⁹ In another example, Burke claims “Muslims of the most traditional sort cannot be content to live in a secular society in the Western sense, which provides freedom of religion to all.”⁵⁵⁰ These texts argue that the politics of Islam are applicable only to Islam and thus not universal. Because they are so

⁵⁴⁷ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 175.

⁵⁴⁸ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 99.

⁵⁴⁹ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 263.

⁵⁵⁰ Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 278–279.

specific to Islam, they have limited capacity to accommodate other religions or worldviews and support pluralism. The Islamic world is then contrasted with the secular, the latter positioned as the ideal social configuration for the accommodation of difference and diversity.

These claims put forth a notion of the secular as a neutral public space free of religion, which then allows for diversity and the coexistence of differences. However, secularism is culturally particular and not neutral or universal. Saba Mahmood explains secularism as “not simply as the doctrinal separation of church and state but as the rearticulation of religion in a manner commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance.”⁵⁵¹ It is a core value of liberalism and it relies on, and simultaneously constructs, a liberal conception of religion, which situates religion as “an abstracted category of beliefs and doctrines from which the individual believer stands apart to examine, compare, and evaluate its various manifestations” and “an object of individual free choice whose abstract truths nonetheless have universal value—as long as they do not contradict the dictates of reason and science.”⁵⁵² Jose Casanova adds that secularism is plagued by particular liberal biases, including “bias for Protestant subjective forms of religion, its bias for ‘liberal’ conceptions of politics and of the ‘public sphere.’”⁵⁵³ Viewed in this light, secularism is not a neutral space, but a particular configuration of religion. It exists in dialectical relationship with religion and exudes particular religious sensibilities while privileging Protestant forms and asserting a liberal notion of religion that is individual, private, voluntary, and universalist. Tracey Fessenden describes the ways in which the purported neutrality of secularism masks the politics of liberalism:

⁵⁵¹ Saba Mahmood, “Is Critique Secular?,” *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 449.

⁵⁵² Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 341.

⁵⁵³ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 39.

When secularism in the United States is understood merely as the absence of religious faith, or neutrality in relation to religious faith, rather than as a variety of possible relationships to different religious traditions—for example, an avowedly secular United States is broadly accommodating of mainstream and evangelical Protestantism, minimally less so of Catholicism, unevenly so of Judaism, much less so of Islam, perhaps still less so of Native American religious practices that fall outside the bounds of the acceptably decorative or “spiritual”—then religion comes to be defined as “Christian” by default, and an implicit association between “American” and “Christian” is upheld even by those who have, one imagines, very little invested in its maintenance.”⁵⁵⁴

Thus secularism is a culturally specific, value-laden social formation.

The discursive practices of these textbooks construct a normative notion of religion that in turn supports a particular configuration of civil society. In this arrangement, religion occupies its own discrete sphere, which then, ostensibly, ensures its free exercise. Moreover, by denying a monopoly of one religion, this arrangement allows for the flourishing of religious diversity. According to the pluralist narrative, this is a great strength of American society. Yet, this widely held notion that religions operate freely in American society obscures the particular liberal politics that construct both civil society and this conception of religion. Religion is constrained by the boundaries of the liberal social order. As Mahmood writes “The political solution that secularism proffers... lies not so much in tolerating difference and diversity but in remaking certain kinds of religious subjectivities (even if this requires the use of violence) so as to render them compliant with liberal political rule.”⁵⁵⁵ Indeed, despite all of the assurances of religious liberty, religion is highly regulated in American society.

It is within these dynamics that pluralism operates. Pluralism is a regulatory discourse. Its discursive practices function as a form of governance that mediates the liberal sphere. The “deep understanding” that proponents such as Eck insist is central

⁵⁵⁴ Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3.

⁵⁵⁵ Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” 328.

to pluralism is constrained by pluralism's task of reproducing and legitimating a liberal social order, so much so that this understanding often becomes less about unbiased recognition and more about rearticulating and recontextualizing religions in terms that reflect liberal norms.

The textbooks in this study are prescriptive. They are concerned with questions of how we live together in the midst our differences. They grapple with seeking a basis for a common life-- a guiding framework for this basis, processes for acknowledging differences, and an ethos for these interactions. They prescribe pluralism and pluralist education as means for addressing these questions. They aim to advocate for more than just tolerance, for mutual respect for difference and diversity. Yet, as they set the terms of difference, they engage in a complex exercise of toleration, determining what counts as acceptable religion and what does not.

Pluralism and tolerance have an interdiscursive relationship, mediated by their interdiscursive dependence upon liberal discourse. Like pluralism, tolerance is often associated with respect, coexistence, magnanimity and positive democratic values. Yet tolerance is not just some extension of good will. It performs a regulatory function. To claim that a person, group, or practice deserves tolerance is to claim that he, she or it is outside the norm, deviant in some way. It subtly serves to reinforce dominance and the normative.⁵⁵⁶ Wendy Brown describes tolerance as “a mode of incorporating and regulating the presence of the threatening Other within” and “a middle road between rejection on the one side and assimilation on the other.”⁵⁵⁷ Brown also argues that

⁵⁵⁶ Lori G. Beaman, “Tolerance and Accommodation as Vestiges of the Empire,” in *Secular States and Religious Diversity*, ed. Bruce J. Berman, Rajeev Bhargava, and Andre Laliberte (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 120-35.

⁵⁵⁷ Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, 27.

these discursive practices often “soften or cloak the power, authority, and normativity in the act of tolerance.”⁵⁵⁸

Fisher provides a textual example of tolerance discourse in these textbooks when she describes conflicts between Hindu nationalists and Christians: “Such conflicts are not in keeping with the Hindu ideal of tolerance for many ways to the divine.”⁵⁵⁹ Here, Fisher simultaneously sets tolerance as an ideal, while marking Hindu nationalism as “other,” that is, as a distorted or illegitimate form of Hinduism. Notably, in a section about pluralism and tolerance toward the end of the textbook, Fisher acknowledges that tolerance can have negative connotations, involving disdain for or marginalization of the object of tolerance. She cites Wendy Brown’s work *Regulating Aversion* and subtly attempts to distinguish pluralism from tolerance.

Brown proposes that the kind of ‘religious tolerance’ she is referring to becomes possible when religion is already relegated to the background in a society as having no claim on public life, or else as a solution to insolvable conflicts among dueling absolutist approaches to religious belief. It maybe also stem from the superior and condescending attitude of a religion in power toward religious minorities whom it is in a position to regulate. It typically does not spring from conviction that religions have equal truth claims, or even that religions are dealing with truths.⁵⁶⁰

Yet, Fisher misses the crux of Brown’s argument, which is that tolerance discourse serves to establish dominance. Fisher’s “conviction that religions have equal truth claims” is a prominent position she asserts throughout her text. As the previous text sample from Fisher’s chapter on Hinduism reveals, maintaining this pluralist position requires delegitimizing conflicting exclusivist positions. Fisher, like many other proponents of pluralism, seems to be convinced of its neutrality or universal validity. Along similar lines, Diana Eck, a well-known champion of pluralism, argues that

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁵⁹ Fisher, *Living Religions*, 2011, 118.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 512.

pluralism must go “beyond mere tolerance to the active attempt to understand the other.”⁵⁶¹ However, even pluralism is not exempt from the regulatory practices of liberal tolerance.

6.2 The Imagined Citizen

To be sure, these textbooks do not merely describe religious diversity. They actively construct and prescribe means by which this diversity ought to be managed. Managing religious diversity involves a number of imaginative and creative processes. It simultaneously posits both difference and common ground that can provide a foundation for social cohesion and community. As these textbooks prescribe means for regulating diversity, they also construct notions of community and civil society. Benedict Anderson maintains that all community beyond those built on face-to-face encounters is imagined. Thus, Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁵⁶² He explains the imagined nature of the nation and the community as such “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁵⁶³ This imagined community must be carefully constructed. Linguists De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak maintain that the processes of communal identity formation, such as the national identity, “manifest themselves discursively.”⁵⁶⁴

Analysis of these world religions textbooks reveals that they engage in this work of imagining community and identity rooted in ideals of liberal citizenship. They equate pluralist values with liberal civic values, constructing norms of specifically

⁵⁶¹ Eck, *A New Religious America*, 71.

⁵⁶² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities,” 151.

American citizenship, or a broader global citizenship that nevertheless supports a kind of American-style cosmopolitanism or multicultural citizenship. They position their readers as citizens, engaging in the study of religion for the purposes of a greater common good. Many of the texts make a case for the importance of religion and its study through their relationship to the enactment of citizenship. These textbooks argue that learning about religions and developing an understanding of them will lead to respect for religions and religious diversity. This, in turn, will alleviate potential for social conflict. Some explicitly argue that this religious literacy is essential to good citizenship. Others argue that religious literacy will cultivate one's moral character. Both lines of argument represent forms of governance.

These arguments involve discursive strategies of perpetuation and justification. They involve legitimation. Not only do they legitimate a normative construction of religion as ubiquitous, they also legitimate a liberal social order in which good religion is that which affirms liberal norms of individualism (involving both voluntariness and the relegation of religion to the private sphere), freedom and equality.

6.2.1 Liberal subjectivities and pluralist morality

As these textbooks construct their readers, positing ideals of how the reader ought to think and respond, they engage in the production of liberal subjectivities. From the perspective of governmentality-- Foucault's conception of the modern enactment of power-- modern governance is accomplished through the regulation of individual actions and conduct, "a power *through* bodies rather than power *over* them."⁵⁶⁵ For Foucault, modern subject formation involves the construction of individuality, or individual identity, as a means of regulation. The reproduction and legitimation of liberalism requires continually constructing liberal subjects, creating

⁵⁶⁵ Jeff Garmany, "Religion and Governmentality: Understanding Governance in Urban Brazil," *Geoforum* 41 (2010): 909.

individuals whose lives are governed by liberal norms. This involves the construction of notions of morality and ethics, which, as Mitchell Dean writes, “generally rest on an idea of self-government. They presume, at least since the seventeenth century in Europe, a conception of an autonomous person capable of monitoring and regulating various aspects of his or her own conduct.”⁵⁶⁶ Liberal governance regularly designates “what constitutes good, virtuous, appropriate, responsible conduct of individuals and collectives.”⁵⁶⁷

For most of the textbooks in this study, as they explain why and how to study religions, they also posit norms for self-regulation. In the introduction to the Smith text, the author explains that “the ultimate benefit that may accrue from a book such as this is help in the ordering of the reader’s own life.”⁵⁶⁸ In other examples, both the Brodd and Neusner texts argue that cultivating a capacity for empathy is essential for successfully understanding religions. Brodd writes in his introductory chapter:

The study of religion should be approached with empathy, which is the capacity for seeing things from another’s perspective. We are familiar with the saying that we should never judge a person until we have walked a mile in his or her shoes. Empathy requires the use of the imagination and can be quite challenging. It is rewarding too, providing a needed tool for gaining insight into the ways of others. The study of religions would not advance far if it lacked such insight.⁵⁶⁹

Neusner writes about “empathetic interest in other people.” Under a section titled “How to Study about Other Religions,” he explains the method of the book:

The way taken in the pages of this book concerns not whether religions are true (which in the end is for God to decide) but how all religions are interesting and important. We maintain here that every religion has something to teach us about what it means to be a human being. Here we take a different path from the one

⁵⁶⁶ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 19.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 3.

⁵⁶⁹ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 18.

that leads us to questions about religious truth. It is a path that carries us to a position of empathy for our fellow Americans, in all their rich diversity.⁵⁷⁰

To be sure, empathy is frequently promoted as a social virtue. Cultivating empathy is often associated with kindness, compassion, and consideration. How can one truly recognize and understand another person without imagining that person's perspective? The notion of empathy is predicated on the assumption that there are universals of human experience. It also assumes a deep, fundamental egalitarianism. Thus, one can imagine how another person feels because there are commonalities in human experience.

Taking into account the general patterns of discursive practices in these texts, the notions of empathy put forth by Neusner and Brodd rely on a liberal anthropology or conception of what it means to be human. By asking the reader to begin to imagine the "other" through particular commonalities of human experience, these texts reinforce these liberal norms. These discursive practices also posit a pluralist morality; they assert appropriate and virtuous means by which to think about and respond to different religions. They tell the reader that religious diversity must be respected and valued. These discursive practices contribute to the work of "imagining communities." They form liberal subjects, shape self-governance, and mediate the liberal public sphere. They lay a foundation for liberal civic identities.

6.2.2 Religion and the American nation

Notable among the other texts, the Neusner text clearly and explicitly frames an argument for the importance of religion in terms of a narrative of the American nation. The other texts in this study describe their subject as global in scope. The Neusner text defines itself in terms of the American context, applying the world religions framework

⁵⁷⁰ Neusner, "Introduction," 5.

to religions in the U.S. In the introductory chapter, the author explains the significance of the textbook stating: “Such an introduction is important because to understand America, you have to know religion.”⁵⁷¹ Neusner takes the assumption that religion is a universal aspect of the human experience and applies it to the American context. He asserts that religion is central to the American imagination, and, thus, understanding religions is essential to the task of informed American citizenship.

The introduction makes several points about the significance of religion in the U.S. This includes section headings: “Americans are a Religious People,” “The Religions of the World Flourish in Today’s America,” and “America Began Because of Religion.”⁵⁷² Among the claims for the centrality of religion in the American narrative, Neusner lists:

Religion played a fundamental role in America’s development by Europeans. The eastern part of the country was settled by people from Great Britain as an act of religion. The Southwest was founded by people from Spain and Latin America as an act of religion.⁵⁷³

Claims that America was settled as “an act of religion” reveal discursive practices of recontextualization. Here, Neusner takes the complex events involved in the settlement and colonization of lands that eventually become the nation-state of the United States. These events, these “acts,” could be described by many terms, such as political, economic, social, cultural, military or imperial. In choosing to represent these events as “religious acts,” Neusner substitutes the actual social practices that took place with the ordering category “religious acts.” This discursive move also works to reinforce the importance of religion and legitimate a liberal social order premised on values of religious freedom and tolerance.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 1-2.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 2.

Many statements arguing for the importance of religion evoke sentiments of American exceptionalism. Here Neusner claims:

One cannot understand America without making some sense of its diverse religious life. The marvel of America is its capacity to give a home to nearly every religion in the world, and the will of the American people to get along with one another, with the rich mixture of religions that flourish here.⁵⁷⁴

Another example of American exceptionalism appears under a section titled, “America Is Different”:

Other countries have difficulty dealing with more than a single skin color, or with more than a single religion or ethnic group, and nations today break apart because of ethnic and religious difference. But America holds together because of the American ideal that anyone, of any race, creed, color, language, religion, gender, sexual preference, or country of origin can become a good American under this nation’s Constitution and Bill of Rights, its political institutions and social ideals. And while religions separate people from one another, shared religious attitudes, such as a belief in God, unite people as well.⁵⁷⁵

Through these two passages, Neusner argues that the American nation is characterized by a plurality of religions because uniquely American social structures allow this plurality to thrive. This diversity makes America special and exceptional. As Neusner describes the role of religion in American society, he simultaneously prescribes tolerance. He positions religion as a unifying common ground in the production of the American nation. Yet, his choice of an illustrative unifying aspect of religion, “a belief in God,” reinforces a normative Judeo-Christian model for what counts as religion.⁵⁷⁶

In this introductory chapter, Neusner puts forward an idealistic and sanitized version of American history.

From colonial times onward, many groups that joined in the adventure of building the American nation brought with them their religious hopes and founded in this country a particularly American expression of religions from all parts of the world.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁷⁶ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*.

⁵⁷⁷ Neusner, “Introduction,” 2.

In his brief narrative, Neusner describes religious diversity in the U.S. as born out of a great voluntary and hopeful adventure in nation-building. Yet a critical reading of American religious history reveals that not all religions making up this plurality arrived through the willful agency of their adherents. A great diversity of cultures, now referred to as Native American religions, already occupied the space that became the U.S. Other religions were brought to the U.S. through slavery. At one point, Neusner does acknowledge that “the first religions of America were those of the Native Americans.”⁵⁷⁸ However, he does not acknowledge that the story of religious diversity in the U.S. is not just one of hope and opportunity, but also imperialism, colonialism, and coercive power. Instead, Neusner’s depoliticized version of American religious history offers a cohesive pluralist narrative. It effectively conveys the notion that the American nation is founded on the values of religious freedom and tolerance. It constructs and reproduces liberal norms.

Neusner argues that studying and understanding religion is crucial to good citizenship: “In America, there is no ‘other.’ Everyone is one of us. That is the message of this book: we all belong. Therefore, all of us bear the same tasks and responsibilities to make this a better country.”⁵⁷⁹ He declares that the purpose of the textbook is cultivation of good citizens.

The goal of this course is to help you better understand the world you live in, which means understanding the people you meet. America is a huge and diverse country, and the secret of its national unity lies in its power to teach people to respect one another, not despite difference but in full regard of difference. We like one another as we are, or at least, we try to. And when we do not succeed, we know we have failed our country. A good American is a person who cares for the other with all due regard for the way in which the other is different.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 5–6.

Neusner's argument here brings to light the tensions and illiberal tendencies of tolerance and pluralism. For Neusner, particular religions are an aspect of individual identity, while the affirmation of religion in general, and, subsequently, religious diversity is a core feature of the collective identity of Americans. He argues that religious diversity and tolerance are fundamental to the well-being of the American nation—"the secret of its national unity." Thus, good American citizens respect and work to preserve this diversity. Neusner contends that those who do not respect diversity and difference have failed their country, essentially marking them as deviant from norms of good American citizenship.

Here lies the illiberalism of pluralism and tolerance, which is rooted in liberal universalism. Pluralism requires everyone to be a pluralist. Everyone must affirm a liberal conception of religion as a private, chosen belief and essential right as well as a civil society that protects its free exercise. Yet, this inclusivism has boundaries. Those who believe that some individual religions are better than others, and would then discriminate against these religions, fall outside these normative boundaries. Those who hold that religion should not be freely chosen but imposed by a collective also fall outside these boundaries. To be clear, much of U.S. history has involved discrimination against non-Protestant religions. Thus, Neusner's narrative here marks a more progressive turn toward pluralism and respect for difference. Nevertheless, it comes with illiberal undertones. Moreover, if all differences require respect, how then should this intolerant, failed citizen receive respect from good citizens while being labeled as marginal and deviant? I suspect that Neusner would argue that this deviant person should be tolerated and, ideally, better educated.

6.2.3 Pluralism and civic identities

While the Neusner text is singular among the textbooks in this study in its focus on norms of American citizenship, other texts still make claims that construct notions of citizenship framed more broadly. The Brodd text makes a case for the importance of understanding religion in terms of citizenship on a global scale. He argues that modern processes of globalization have increased diversity and subsequently require that this diversity be engaged and understood.

Today more than ever before, we live in a global village... This unprecedented variety of interactions offers an abundance of opportunities to enrich our lives, by connecting us with people who think and live differently than we do. But it also poses challenges. For one thing, it is more difficult than ever to be adequately informed about one's community—now that 'community' includes the entire world. And part of meeting this challenge is gaining a sound understanding of the world's religious traditions. As the global community grows ever more close-knit, the relevance of religion in our day-to-day lives will continue to increase, not only at the level of international affairs, but locally as well.⁵⁸¹

Brodd also uses the constructive strategy of building a “we” group. By recontextualizing disparate populations as a unified “global village,” Brodd emphasizes sameness and encourages the reader to both identify with “others” and understand a timely justification for the study of religion. In a later chapter on “Religion in the Modern World,” Brodd makes a similar argument as he frames the study of religion in terms of multiculturalism: “Multiculturalism makes it impossible for followers of a particular religious tradition to regard that tradition as the one and only. Educating ourselves about other religions is a means for getting along with our neighbors in today's multicultural world.”⁵⁸²

The passages here also reflect liberal arguments for cosmopolitanism. Martha Nussbaum defines the cosmopolitan as “the person whose allegiance is to the

⁵⁸¹ Brodd, *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, 12.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 269.

worldwide community of human beings.”⁵⁸³ Cosmopolitanism asserts that the bounds of the nation and national identity hinder or limit liberal universalism and that liberal values of egalitarianism, freedom, and tolerance require that one identify as a citizen of the world. Yet as cosmopolitanism suggests that the liberal subject ought to yield local and particular identities in favor of a global, universal “human” identity shaped by liberal values, it ignores that liberalism is not, in fact, universal, but a particular cultural position. Thus, these discursive practices also work to further naturalize liberal norms. This imagined global community reinforces the universalism of liberalism.

Smith also explains the motivations of his book through a narrative of a progressive global social order and ideals of citizenship. His narrative describes a new reality of globalization, in which a new global connectedness—“lands across the planet have become our neighbors”—brought about by advances in transportation and media technologies, calls for religious diversity to be taken seriously. He calls this post-war global age “the time when the peoples of the world first came to take one another seriously.”⁵⁸⁴ He argues that this “new situation” requires “world understanding” and calls us to be a “world citizen” and “Cosmic Dancers” whose “roots in family and community will be deep, but in those depths they will strike the water table of a common humanity.”⁵⁸⁵ This narrative represents a transformational discursive strategy, an emerging post-war narrative of equality and cosmopolitanism that signaled a shift away from an older dominant narrative that valued homogeneity and viewed “others” as threatening.

⁵⁸³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 4.

⁵⁸⁴ Smith, *The World's Religions*, 7.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

A closer look at these world religions textbooks illuminates the ways in which they engage in this work of imagining community, at times a specifically American community and at times a cosmopolitan, global community, but always a community rooted in a liberal social order. As they elaborate a picture of the greater community, the nation or world, in which these diverse religions are found, they also tell their readers how they should interact in this community. They situate their readers as citizens, undertaking the study of religion for the purposes of a greater common good. Thus, these studies of religion work to mediate the liberal public sphere.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Huston Smith's explanation of the purposes and benefits of the pluralistic study of religion provides a clear view into the regulatory nature of pluralism. In the first edition of the textbook, published in 1958, Smith offers an anecdote of an occasion in which he was asked to give a lecture about "other" religions to U.S. military officers:

Recently I was taxied by bomber to the Air Command and Staff College at the Maxwell Air Force Base outside Montgomery, Alabama, to lecture to a thousand selected officers on the religions of other peoples. I have never had students more eager to learn. What was their motivation? Individually I am sure it went beyond this in many cases, but as a unit they were concerned because someday they were likely to be dealing with the peoples they were studying as allies, antagonists, or subjects of military occupation. Under such circumstances it would be crucial for them to predict their behavior, conquer them if worse came to worst, and control them during the aftermath of reconstruction. This is one reason for coming to know people.⁵⁸⁶

Here, Smith's anecdote points to legacies of knowledge production as means of subjugation and domination as well as justifications for colonialism and imperialism. Yet, in the emerging pluralist narrative he offers, he eschews this overt wielding of power and dominance as a motivation for learning about religions. He goes on to write:

It may be a necessary reason; certainly we have no right to disdain it as long as we ask the military to do the job we set before it. Nevertheless one would hope that there are motives for understanding more elevated than that of national security. President Eisenhower moved into these when he remarked, 'With everyone a loser in any new war, a better understanding than ever before is essential among people and among nations.' These simple words give expression to world impulses, world dangers, world destinies. Here the motive for understanding is not military success; it is to make military action unnecessary. In a word, the motive is peace.⁵⁸⁷

Smith walks a careful line here to avoid criticizing the U.S. government and its military while gently offering an alternative. He acknowledges the security function of modern government, and the knowledge production it requires. With the introduction of nuclear weaponry, World War II increased the stakes of warfare, and in the Cold War

⁵⁸⁶ Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1958), 8.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

world that followed, the policy of “mutually assured destruction” presented the danger of everyone losing. Thus, Eisenhower and Smith argued that understanding was necessary for peace in a modern world where the stakes of misunderstanding could be so high.

For Smith, pluralism could offer a means for social cohesion. However, Smith did not view this notion of pluralism-as-governance as pluralism at its best. By the second edition, written in 1991, after the end of the Cold War, Smith’s anecdote about lecturing at a military base was simplified, and this statement was edited to “It may be a necessary reason, but one hopes there are others. Even the goal of avoiding military engagement through diplomacy is provisional because instrumental. The final reason for understanding another is intrinsic—to enjoy the wider angle the vision affords.”⁵⁸⁸ While Smith distinguishes “instrumental” from “intrinsic” motivations for pluralism, both serve a regulatory function. This “wider angle” offered by pluralism is a cosmopolitan ethos, a kind of self-governance that reproduces liberal norms.

There are many ways in which Smith’s book seems like a post-war relic, full of such generalizations and oversimplifications that are unavoidable in trying to present entire religions in the course of 70 or so pages. Careful analysis might lead one to conclude that it ought to be more of an artifact of a point in time in the study of religion than a current text. Yet, it continues to be a popular best seller. It has an appealing message: there are many different kinds of people in the world and these differences do not threaten us but make the world a better, richer place, and hence they deserve to be appreciated. Moreover, the many religions of the world are essentially perennial sources of wisdom and truth. By studying them, we can become better individuals, gaining insight into ourselves, our own traditions, and the complex

⁵⁸⁸ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 7.

world around us. Smith's book offers a cosmopolitan moral path and promises of global citizenship. This promise was ground-breaking when it first appeared in America in 1958. At that time, Americans had begun to believe that Catholics and Jews could be included alongside Protestants as authentic Americans. Smith wanted to push this notion of legitimate American religion beyond Protestants, Catholics and Jews to include Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Confucians, Taoists, and indigenous religions.

This pluralist message still resonates today with a good many people engaged in the introductory study of religion. Yes, the book does offer a cursory introduction to many different religions that can be accessible and revealing for students new to the study of religion. However, the book also promotes a broader worldview and a seemingly more open way of living. It offers a particular view of what it means to be a good citizen in a complex modern world. I argue that this message is the crux of the book—religions and religious diversity are good. While many critics find this book parochial and quaint, arguing that it is time to move on to more sophisticated texts, they miss the core message and function of the text, and hence its appeal.

The other five textbooks in my study reflect more current scholarship in the study of religion. Yet, they offer a similar message. They contend that religion has an important, largely positive place in the world. It deserves respect, and the cultivation of this respect requires knowledge and understanding. It requires the study of religion. This is the task of these textbooks.

At the same time, these textbooks implicitly privilege a particular model of religion that is belief-based, private, voluntary, and liberal, which in turn situates this conception of religion as legitimate and all others as marginal. They aim to take a global or "world" approach to religions that involves presenting a view of an interconnected world, largely shaped by contemporary modern processes of

globalization. Yet these textbooks are written by American scholars, primarily for an American audience. They seek to universalize, but they carry a particular, contextual view of the world, that is, the world of religions viewed from an American perspective of organizing collectivities. These textbooks reproduce the dominant American discourse of religious pluralism, which is embedded in the world religions model, as I have argued along with Masuzawa, McCutcheon, and Fitzgerald. Most of these textbooks also assert that by fully engaging in their task, the reader is not simply fulfilling a course requirement, developing critical thinking skills, or learning about an academic discipline. Rather, the reader is contributing to the mission of social cohesion and engaging in an act of citizenship. These textbooks discursively work to reproduce cultures, maintain boundaries, and form citizens. They take diverse religions and cultures and recontextualize them to assert what counts as legitimate American religion and legitimate religion more broadly.

Using Fairclough's discourse analysis reveals this pluralism as a liberal discourse that works to legitimate a liberal social order. In Foucault's terms, it is a discourse of governmentality. To view pluralism from this perspective allows for a better understanding of how the liberal public sphere is continually reproduced. Liberal governance does not always— or even often— operate through a top-down imposition of power and authority. Rather, it functions most effectively when it is woven into the fabric of what counts as common sense and take-for-granted “knowledge” of how the world is or ought to be. The production and reproduction of liberal civil society takes place through these unseen practices. Liberal governance becomes naturalized and appears seamless. Uncovering these practices presents an opportunity to question their assumptions and the norms they reproduce.

At the same time, this language of pluralism represents a transformation away from both more exclusive language that overtly privileges Christianity over other religions and the language of secularism that has declared religion as fading and irrelevant. As Fairclough argues, in liberal societies, this is how social change is enacted—through shifts in discursive practices, through the articulation and rearticulation of discourses.⁵⁸⁹ Pluralist discourse aims to foster and support a liberal social order that embodies the highest ideals of freedom, equality, and justice. For many non-Christians who have historically been excluded from full participation in a civil society that only recognized Protestant or Judeo-Christian identities, this represents a real move toward a more open and participatory society. Yet for all its inclusive goals, pluralism still engages in practices of exclusion.

To use Albanese's vocabulary, pluralism advocates inclusivity and the celebration and protection of "manyness." It also promotes a kind of social unity, a shared narrative, a "civic we." Yet, this diversity can only be understood and realized through the "oneness" of a liberal framework. Ironically, this is an exclusive and coercive form of plurality that can only be protected through the liberal rule of law and the liberal conception of freedom. Moreover, this unity requires participation in the liberal public sphere. Religions that do not value and protect the liberal conception of the free and autonomous individual, the liberal conception of diversity and plurality, or the liberal concept of pluralism are not given a place at the proverbial table. These communities are marginalized, either rejected or tolerated while marked as deviant and dangerous. From a utilitarian perspective, one might argue that these limitations placed on religions and religious freedom are necessary and reasonable, that they ensure the greater good and protect the foundational values of our society. Many

⁵⁸⁹ See a more detailed discussion in Chapter 2. Also Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*.

might ask why illiberal religions should be protected and not pushed to embrace liberal values of equality, autonomy, and freedom.

My argument here, however, is that the politics of liberal pluralism comes with costs. Frequently the limitations of pluralism are veiled and its intolerant aspects are hidden. In fact, pluralism is most often seen as not political at all. Conversely it is seen as political but only having the political agenda of expanding freedom and tolerance—all understood as self-evidently good. When the politics of pluralism and tolerance are veiled, the student of religion cannot see how power is constructed and enacted. They cannot imagine why these dynamics should be questioned or how to do so. It becomes normal to take for granted that pluralism is only good and benevolent without carefully considering the implications of its exclusionary practices.

The American discourse of pluralism celebrates a uniquely American social arrangement of religious freedom and diversity that is said to result in the flourishing of American liberal democracy. The history of religious diversity in America is a story of many different people, bringing different cultures and religions, occupying the same territory and needing to find a means for social cohesion and stability. It was the result of a true plurality; no one group was large enough to impose its will on the rest of the population. It was also the result of empire. The migrations that have brought so many different peoples to what is now the United States came as the result of British and European imperialism, settler colonialism, and the transatlantic slave trade, among other formations and processes of expansion, contact and exchange. Moreover, historically, the study of religious diversity under the discourse of pluralism, as the passage from the Smith text at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, justified a strategy of imperialism that maintained a “certain kind of transnational order” and

served “as an intellectual instrument of international trade, military conquest, and political administration of alien subjects.”⁵⁹⁰

Yet, pluralist narratives, both in academia and in the broader society, tend to ignore histories of violence and domination (with the notable exception of Islam). Instead, they emphasize a progressive historical evolution toward harmony and social cohesion. Moreover, these narratives with their calls for understanding assume that each of us ought to know the other, that one has the right to know the other in the liberal pursuit of self-actualization. This assumption presupposes that the construction of this knowledge will take place on a level playing field or on some kind of neutral ground. It does not recognize the power and politics involved in the construction of knowledge and the complex dynamics of representation. By pushing for an easy and cohesive narrative of religious diversity, pluralism can lead to what Karen McCarthy Brown calls “premature resolution of differences,” which she points out “somehow always ends up being a resolution on our terms.”⁵⁹¹ In his critique of discourses of pluralism, Russell McCutcheon also laments the tendency toward the easy resolution of differences. He asks whether these discourses might serve more as “a means for distracting attention from material difference (such as economic plurality) by disengaging it from the historical and resolving it on a cultural or spiritual level.”⁵⁹²

Thus, how might the American discourse of pluralism emphasize respect for religious diversity and differences while fully acknowledging the histories of imperialism and colonialism that have shaped this social arrangement? This is a

⁵⁹⁰ David Chidester, “Global Citizenship, Cultural Citizenship and World Religions in Religion Education,” in *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*, ed. Robert Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29.

⁵⁹¹ Karen McCarthy Brown, “Religion as Language,” in *Teaching the Introductory Course in Religion*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 226.

⁵⁹² McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion*, 165.

complex matter that involves keeping in view the ways in which colonialism and imperialism have formed the American religious landscape as well as the lingering legacies that affect contemporary American discourse on globalization and the universal relevancy of American liberal values, such as religious freedom and human rights. Can a pluralist narrative be attentive to current dynamics of power amongst religions in this country, and ways in which the study of religion and regulation of religion in the public sphere reproduce neocolonial categories of classification and arrangements of dominance? Most accounts of pluralism offer it not as one possible acceptable perspective among many, but as a singularly universal and moral approach to understanding religions. The dominant discourse of pluralism presents itself as the only acceptable option. Yet a critical pluralism requires interrogating the power, privilege, and assumptions naturalized by this dominant discourse.

These obscured politics accompany liberal pluralism's coercive and totalizing tendencies. By insisting on a liberal monoculture, pluralism contains illiberal elements that contradict its own objectives. Moreover, the liberal pluralist narrative ignores or excludes voices of non-liberal religions, such as indigenous religions, for example, that promote liberty, equality, and rationality, but do so on their own terms. Often, these religions reject the liberal definition of the individual and instead recognize a relational individual, with an identity tied to larger communities. Yet, liberal pluralist narratives often remake and recontextualize these religions in liberal terms. In doing so, the liberal politics of pluralism suppresses perspectives that could provide a counterweight to and critique of liberalism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism. Accordingly, the politics of pluralism can limit the possibilities for engaging diverse social worlds. As pluralist narratives advocate for more equitable and just societies, they can simultaneously reproduce historic social arrangements of inequality and

domination. Moreover, pluralist discourse can unknowingly be used in the service of illiberal governmental policies. For example, by keeping the politics of liberalism out of sight, this discourse and its associative arguments for liberal, cosmopolitan citizenship could conceivably be used to legitimate American neo-imperialist foreign policies that call for interventionism in authoritarian states and the export of American-style democratic values.

7.1 Directions for Further Research

This textbook analysis raises a number of questions that do not fall within in the scope of this dissertation and present avenues for further research. In this study, I have analyzed textbooks as a discursive site. This analysis does not address how these textbooks are used in classrooms. The textbooks themselves do not necessarily shed light on the pedagogical rationales and learning objectives of the instructors who use them. Do instructors use a pluralist framework for their courses? Do they see limitations of pluralism and the world religions model? If they do, how do they address them? Perhaps some instructors problematize aspects of these textbooks. Perhaps they offer their own critical assessments of the construction of the category of religion. Do instructors teach the entirety of these textbooks? If they leave out certain sections, which ones do they leave out and why? Do they supplement these textbooks with other primary or secondary source readings? Do they supplement the information provided by textbooks by inviting adherents of the world religions into their classrooms or by organizing field trips to various religious communities? Do instructors see their world religions courses as contributing to a civic ethos? If they do, how do they address this ethos in their classes? These are important elements for understanding how these textbooks operate within religious studies classrooms.

Asking how the discourse of pluralism is actually delivered in American classrooms then raises questions about how this discourse is received by students. Do they accept or resist the discourse of pluralism? Is pluralism a new orientation for them? Does it reinforce or challenge previously held beliefs? Do these textbooks and the pluralistic study of religion affect their understandings of what it means to be a good citizen in a religiously and culturally diverse society? Moreover, how does the liberal construction of religion impact the lived religious experiences of readers? How do readers respond when they read about their own religion in a way that does not correspond with their own experience or self-understanding? Does it change the way they think about their own religions? These questions should be investigated through an ethnographic study involving interviews of instructors and students, as well as analysis of course syllabi and supplemental texts. This would be an important step in a larger project of exploring the ways in which religion is constructed and transformed through education as well as how these processes form norms of citizenship.

I see my study as part of a growing body of scholarship that examines the often unseen political work that accompanies processes of education. It would be useful to compare the function of the discourse of pluralism in religious studies textbooks with other discourses of governmentality in American textbooks, such as those in courses of American history, politics and “civics.” Such a study would examine how the discourse of religious pluralism has reinforced, challenged, and paralleled the discourse of multiculturalism. Has multiculturalism faced the same obstacles as the discourse of pluralism? Has it achieved the same widespread acceptance? Does it suffer from the same myopia about its presuppositions? It would be fruitful to engage sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, and other scholars of multiculturalism in an interdisciplinary dialogue around these issues.

Finally, I hope that this study may lead to investigations into the practice of pluralism. As I have used a critical discourse analysis framework and the concept of recontextualization to analyze these world religions textbooks, I have simultaneously engaged in my own practice of recontextualization. I have taken texts which may have been the result of individuals organizing the knowledge they know best, in terms that are familiar to them and standard in their field, in ways they have deemed will be accessible to the novice student of religion, and I have argued that these texts represent practices of liberal governance. Perhaps these authors have not imagined themselves engaging in this practice. Yet, this is how liberalism operates. It is largely invisible and inescapable to those living in liberal societies. It is perpetuated and reproduced through discourses and practices so naturalized that we do not even recognize them as liberal practices.

My study, and the ways in which I have critically theorized and framed the discourse of pluralism, is also strategy of transformation. By reframing these taken-for-granted discursive practices in critical terms, I have attempted to shed light on how the regulation of religion in civil society is enacted and naturalized. As I have examined the manner in which these textbooks help to mediate and transmit the liberal public sphere, I have also tried to move the discourse of pluralism toward encountering and confronting the ambivalence and complexity involved in religious diversity in the U.S. By theorizing a critical discourse for negotiating the shortcomings of liberal hegemony, this study is a modest contribution to the larger project of cultivating more equitable and less coercive forms of knowledge production.

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Appendix A: World Religions Textbooks Survey

1. Thank you for your interest. This survey is part of a research study to identify five popularly-used world religions textbooks. This textbook study will provide data for a doctoral dissertation, which will involve analyzing the discourse of religious pluralism found within world religions textbooks and the ways in which this discourse asserts notions of American civic identities. If you choose to participate, you will complete a 5 - 10 minute survey that is completely anonymous. Survey questions focus on world religions textbooks used in your high school classes. You may decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and you can withdraw your participation at any time by not submitting your responses.

2. Name up to five World Religions textbooks you have used in your class.

3. Do you have a favorite World Religions textbook? If so, which one and why?

4. Do you have a least favorite World Religions textbooks? If so, which one and why?

5. Do you use other texts in your class, such as primary texts or articles?

6. What is the title and grade level of the course in which you use these texts?

7. How is your institutional setting best described?

public

private

other (please specify)

8. If your answer to the previous question was private, would your institution be best described as:

parochial/faith-based

secular

other (please specify)

Thank you for your time, thoughtfulness, and participation in this study. This survey is part of a research study conducted by Tiffany Puett as part of a doctoral dissertation, under the supervision of David Seljak, Department of Religious Studies, University of Waterloo.

The objectives of the research study are to identify five popularly-used world religions textbooks. These five textbooks will become the data for a textual analysis of the political discourse of religious pluralism. This analysis will examine the relationship between the discursive space of world religions textbooks and the material realities of religious pluralism in liberal society, with particular focus on how this discourse addresses civic identities and works to govern the role of religion in civil society.

Should you have any questions about the study, please contact either Tiffany Puett, tpuett@uwaterloo.ca or David Seljak, dseljak@uwaterloo.ca. Further, if you would like

to receive a copy of the results of this study or the final dissertation, please contact either investigator. This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes at 519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.