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Review Article: the Norton anthology of world religions

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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/95m595z1>

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Publication Date

2021-06-27

Peer reviewed

Review article: *Norton Anthology of World Religions*

Six world religions. Seven scholars, at the top of their games -- Hinduism (Wendy Doniger), Buddhism (Donald S. Lopez, Jr.), Daoism (James Robson), Judaism (David Biale), Christianity (Lawrence S. Cunningham), and Islam (Jane Dammen McAuliffe). Together with general editor, Pulitzer Prize winner, Jack Miles, they have collaborated in amassing the 4,329 page, two volume *Norton Anthology of World Religions* (hereafter NAWR). Whew! Luckily, for our sway-backed students, weighed down by their bulging backpacks, W. W. Norton and Company have promised paperbacks for each individual religion by winter 2016.

Some other reviewers have queried the need and rationale for what they see as yet another compendium of the great religious texts. We can answer this “why?” question partly by considering an answer to the “what?” question. *What’s* in the NAWR? Compared to typical anthologies from the past, this collection really exploits the tremendous progress made by religious studies scholarship over the course of the past generation. While this anthology was not meant to be a testament to the achievements of the generation of scholars come of age since the 1970’s, it is. Not your father’s coffee table standard “canon” of the world’s religions, NAWR is, instead, a virtual whirling Google Earth, spotting the many destinations religious folk worldwide have been visiting in their reading and writing across human history. In a word, there’s plenty new here, and good reasons for it. (What’s *not* here are religions without writing or who have not chosen or been able to write, religions without “literatures,” in the strict sense, without written texts.)

The “what” that is here is then easily enough glossed: thousands of chronologically arranged readings, many maps and handy timelines; all sorts of ‘literatures,’ ranging from the canonic scriptures, to extra-canonical

materials like epistolary prose, poetry, myths, legends or stories, secrets and apologies, petitions and regulations, journal and diary entries, folk materials to philosophical tracts, songs and chants, instructions how to meditate, recommendations about the right rituals, memorabilia and records of travel, explanations and expostulations, biographies, chronicles, legal briefs, piety of the high born and low born, women and men, sermons and sage advice, selections from novels, pop song lyrics and such of modern times, edited and painstakingly, and informatively introduced by among the best of this generation's most vigorous and authoritative voices on their respective religious literary traditions. All that.

Striking a signature note of novelty, David Biale, for instance, allots the Hebrew Bible only about 7% of Judaism's 680 pages. Likewise, only 12% of Lawrence Cunningham's chapter of Christianity's 636 pages is Bible, and that includes 25 pages from the Hebrew Bible to boot. Even Jane McAuliffe's treatment of the *Qur'an* only manages 7% of her 636 page chapter. Wendy Doniger's assignment of 30 pages to the Vedas and half that to the Upanshads make the same overall statement for this anthology. The balance of these pages offer glimpses of the lives of these great religions most students of religion may never have read, nor indeed, imagined existed. Women challenging rabbis, Muslim texts counseling men to beware of falling in love with their wives, the story of how eggplants became *lingas*, a half dozen renditions of and commentaries on of the story of Abraham's "binding" of Isaac, Gary Snyder's "Smokey, the Bear Sutra", Hildegard of Bingen's visions, St. Patrick's breastplate, a hymn to the importance of the *bhakta's* passionate gaze, the Dalai Lama's Nobel Prize address, an excerpt from Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, instead of *Genesis* beginning things, we hear from the *Enuma Elish* and *The Letter of Sargon*. While the debates among rabbis over biblical minutiae here may tax the patience of readers, their deliberations on using electricity on the Sabbath can be surprisingly useful: I once found myself alone with a *mohel* in a stalled

Shabbos elevator. Levity too has its place, as Biale ends with Philip Roth. All this variety is good, but, as those other reviewers have puzzled, *why?*

In answering the "why" question, the "whats" have a lot to say. Miles described the NAWR as his conception of a "first draft" of a "canon" for the study of religion, newly liberated from the religio-ethnocentrism of liberal Protestant intellectual hegemony. (xlv) That seems to me an excellent description of what NAWR tries to do, and why it can be recommended for students beginning their study of the religions. The study of religion needs to break from its familiar routines and reach out to a newer, more diverse and polycentric world. Further, in his general introduction to the NAWR, Miles identifies what he takes to be the underlying theoretical assumption of the collection - namely that "religion is as religion does" Religion as "practice," or reports of religious practices, hold the collection together. Thus, sermonizing, praying, having sex, finding reasons not to have sex, singing, meditating... and so on form the stuff of *the* main theoretical assumption lying behind the selections in NAWR. (6) That's notably novel, especially for a subject where "beliefs" have long held the stage alone. So much of what we meet in NAWR is preoccupied with the 'busy-ness' of being religious.

I do not altogether disagree with this observation, although I have a sneaking suspicion that a deeper assumption lurks beyond preference for "practices." NAWR consistently presumes that religion itself is *good*. In pointing this out, I feel I am keeping faith with the invitation to dialogue Jack Miles himself issued: "The more vigorously our colleagues find fault with this first draft of a canon for their field, the more productive will be the future negotiation" (xlvii). While "finding fault" would not be my choice of words, I will try to show how NAWR could have told both a different, and, I think, *better* story, had that story been more troubled, *edgier*. By 'troubled' and 'edgier,' I mean religion 'warts and all.' I mean a franker admission of the *normal* place of violence, injustice, the embarrassing, lunacy, fanaticism,

irrationality, and so on in religion. I do not deny that religion can be “good”; but it can also be “bad.” Religion is like a family, complete with your favorite aunt, but also your uncle, the convicted embezzler. We want to see *the whole* family. No ‘family secrets.’ The religion in question is the religion in the midst of trouble and contestation, rather than accord and harmony: the councils and princes versus popes, as well as the lives of the saints; the uncomfortable and unsavory, as well as the comfortable and the agreeable, *varnas* and *jātis* as well as *moksha* and *bhakti*: driving out the Rohingyas, as well as “Mindfulness” meditation; occasions of religious violence, rather than only peace and love: the Crusades, as well as Dante, Islam’s militant history, and “Islam” as “peace.” I begin by taking issue with Miles about the real theoretical foundation of the NAWR. In a word, I think there’s a deeper “why?” to be found: religion is good.

- *NAWR’s Theoretical Base: Religion-Is-Good Discourse*

This anthology portrays religion, or what we *designate* or *single out* as “religion,” pretty much free of ‘warts.’ This is “religion” that we declare “good,” even when Christian nationalist, Timothy McVeigh murders scores of innocents. Likewise, the self-identified Muslim perpetrators of the 9/11 horrors misrepresented – *hijacked* -- the “real” Islam, a *good* “religion of peace.” Nothing fundamental to Islam could have brought those events about. Similarly, since Buddhism is a religion of enlightened non-violence, nothing about Buddhism dictated Japanese Buddhism’s utter prostration before the country’s WW2 military dictatorship. That was real Buddhism betrayed {Jalon, 2003 #3931} The same logic is applied over and over

again, and all to save religion from responsibility for violence, nastiness, injustice -- for being "bad."

So, perhaps unintentionally, NAWR closets the risky, edgy or even dangerous and unsavory sides of religion. As such, NAWR's working concept of religion fits comfortably into the mental space provided for it by American society and civil religion, including the American Academy of Religion. Perhaps, this explains the NAWR does not document influential but unpalatable 'red-neck' Evangelical fundamentalism, or New Religious Movements, or Southern Baptist Convention statements about women, gays and abortion, Papal encyclicals condemning "artificial" contraception? I wouldn't want a book full of these either. Now, I do not think an anthology like NAWR should preach something like Bill Maher's "religion-is-bad" gospel. However, we simply know too much about important episodes, patterns and structures - not mere random incidents -- of religious violence to purge it from the record as much as NAWR does. But, leaving them out is leaving out a tremendous amount of what makes up religion, at least, in today's USA. We don't have to *like* these influential expressions of religious piety and practice to *recognize* their importance, and thus the importance of including them in an anthology purporting to represent the whole. To put this point into perspective, what would we think of an anthology of key political thinkers that included Spinoza, Locke and Jefferson, but not Joseph De Maistre, Gobineau and Mussolini? I know I'd think the editor was covertly arguing a brief for *some kind* of politics, but not telling me the whole story.

In particular, in the Judaism sections, we search in vain for representations of Yahweh, as warrior god, clearing the land of Canaan by conquest, and not only as leading Israel into freedom {Greenspoon, 1983 #3929}. Palestinian Edward Said and Jewish Michael Walzer, for instance, once engaged in a heated exchange over the *Book of Exodus*. Walzer touted its liberating themes, Said spoke up for the Canaanites {Said, 1986 #3803}.

Reggae fans all know the Bob Marley hit, “By the Rivers of Babylon.” But, few know the whole of Psalm 137, especially its blood-curdling concluding lines, 8-9:

Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
 happy is the one
 who repays you according to what you have done to us.
 Happy is the one
 who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Biale does well to begin complicating the Zionist story by adding a reading from liberal Aham Ha’am to his list. Yet, we hear little of the official attitude of “polite indifference” to Arabs of colonizing Zionists like Zev Jabotinsky. He wishes an “iron wall” should forever separate Jew and Arab, a vision directly informing present-day policies of Israeli politicians like Benjamin Netanyahu. {Jabotinsky, #3924} To be fair, Biale does not shy away from what some would call Judaism’s ‘warts,’ as well. The teachings of the ideological hero of the Gush Emunim settler/colonizers, Abraham Isaac Kook, for instance, represent a substantial constituency, and deserves to be heard.

Similarly, Donald Lopez’ editorial choices lead him naturally to highlight some of the most sublime religious literature ever written. Much of this, dealing with traditional subjects of meditation and transcendence, will be well known. Any introductory Buddhism course will be well served by what Lopez has put together. Less well known, but significant in the present day are also readings from modern Buddhism, certainly a topic students will want to explore. Leaders of the Buddhist revival, such as Anagarika Dharmapala are heard loud and clear. Lopez features Ambedkar development of the influential theme of the affinities between Marxism and Buddhism that was so potent in the early years of revolution and struggle for independence for the Buddhist states in South and Southeast Asia (1: 1439-43). What finally makes so much of what Lopez collects delightful is

his affinity for a Buddhist tenderness and insight into the human condition. One that stood out was the Chinese story of a paralyzed, dying monk, one day visited by a young woman offering to nurse him in his last days. After some time, and many evasions, she reveals her true identity as his illegitimate daughter, the existence of whom he had no knowledge. The narrative concludes, “The invalid, impressed by such devotion, was unable to wipe away his tears.” (1: 1331)

As agreeable as Lopez’ collection of texts may be, however, in line with the prevailing tone of the NAWR, the troubling, more uncomfortable or disturbing side of the Buddhist project fails to find much voice. I fear that students will pick up on this imbalance, and raise questions – but questions for which teachers using the NAWR will be unprepared. For instance, we don’t hear about the rabid nationalist hatred of modern-day Buddhist political monks. Nor, does the NAWR document the fierce invectives against Buddhism’s historical enemies, voiced in the Chronicles, which, for some, “justified” Singhalese atrocities against the Tamils. And, what of recent Burmese Buddhist brutalities against their hapless Muslim Rohingya neighbors? Is it enough to merely mention the devastation of Buddhist universities, like Nalanda, during the Mughal conquest of India? Then, what of the shocking collapse of the Buddhist spiritual formation of the young Cambodians who became Khmer Rouge mass murders in the 1970’s? Why were Buddhist institutions so powerless in stemming the genocidal violence let loose on one of the most Buddhist nations on earth? Where, as well, as are the Buddhist equivalents of the Western “New Atheists”? Is everything sweetness and light in the Buddhist world? Again, I am not urging that we obsess about these sorts of things. But, to fail to recognize and confront them, seems to me to be avoiding a good portion of what Buddhism has been and is.

- *In Search of a "Strange" Christianity*

Largely because readers of this journal will know Christianity best, I am going to devote more critical attention to Lawrence Cunningham's selection of Christian documents. Further, I am reminded of one of Ninian Smart's more intriguing, and unfulfilled, interpretive projects: that Western students and scholars should work toward looking on Christianity as "strange" - if mainly for the sake of acquiring perspective. I never got all of what Smart meant, but it would take little persuasion to start with mind-bending doctrines like the Atonement, Incarnation and Trinity. Christians take these in like their mother's milk, but folk from other religions are dumbfounded by them. Judaism and Islam keep it simple in respect to the relation of humanity to divinity. Beyond that, Smart wanted to shake people out of their comfort zones - a task at least in the spirit of the "edgy" approach I have been trying to pursue.

How about Lawrence Cunningham's take on Christianity? I learned a lot from Cunningham's move beyond Biblical materials, and into intriguing accounts of the lives of early Christians, such as female pilgrim, Egeria. In the late 4th century, she undertakes an arduous journey from Constantinople to Jerusalem. En route, she records some of the only extant details of varied Christian practices of that time (2: 869f). Selections from Augustine's *Confessions* and *The City of God*, marking, in their own way, the end, of the Western Empire never fail to impress. Pascal, Thomas Aquinas, Roger Williams, John Donne, Julia Ward Howe, Simone Weil, Desmond Tutu, Rigoberta Menchu and many, many others, in effect, testify to the creative vitality of Christianity. But, what do we make of Cunningham's reference to the residence of the popes in Avignon, as something that the popes just "chose"? Did they really like living under the thumb of the French king (2: 750)? And, how to justify total silence from one of Christianity's signature

“practices”-- the Crusades. Pope Urban II’s call to crusade still bears reading. BTW, only 5 pages on the whole of the Eastern Church?

A series of key conciliar creedal statements from the early church show how a scheme of beliefs took form, as well as too many items to list here. Yet, Cunningham omits the more *problematic* but, nonetheless, *pivotal* later medieval and early modern councils, like Constance (1414-6) or Trent (1545-63). Unsettling late medieval and early modern struggles between papal and conciliar or imperial authority, receive no attention, despite their absolutely central relevance to the course of Christianity. Some responsible historians have argued that part of the rationale for the Reformation’s challenge to papal supremacy lay in the issue of the authority of councils; part of the quarrels between heads of states, such as Henry VIII and the papacy turned on questions of relative sovereignty. The Council of Constance ended the scandal of there being three popes at one time (one in Avignon), by asserting conciliar authority over popes. Besides ending the Western Schism, the conciliar principles enunciated at Constance were much in the minds of the Puritan Parliamentary party who brought about the “Glorious Revolution” and the English “Bill of Rights” - which Bill became the model of our own. No less an authority than John Neville Figgis called the council’s *Haec Sancta Synodus* “Probably the most revolutionary official document in the history of the world,” precisely because of its affirmation of conciliar, and thus constitutional, principles over autocracy. {Figgis, 1998 #3537@28; Oakley, 1962 #3623; Oakley, 2003 #3611} Not too shabby, but apparently not important enough for the NAWR. Reference to these profound theological conflicts would not only have made more sense of the Reformation, but also would have helped make sense of current Catholic theological debates about “high papalism” sparked by the likes of Catholic theologian, Hans Küng.

Greater attention to the violent politico-religious *practices* of the Christian middle ages might also have led us to appreciate perhaps the

most consequential pontiff of all time -- Hildebrand of Sovana, Pope Gregory VII (pope, 1073-1085)? We have him to thank for declaring that only the pope could appoint bishops, for conceiving the Crusades, inventing the modern calendar, championing the doctrine of Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, institutionalizing papal sovereignty, firmly establishing the concept of the freedom of religion from secular control (in our day, arguably the historical basis for our “speaking truth to power”), enforcing priestly celibacy and prosecuting simony, and many other reforms. Historian Harold Berman put the radical changes effected by Gregory’s rule -the “Papal Revolution” -- into the same class along side the French, Russian, American or English “revolutions.” {Berman, 1983 #3846} Not too shabby, either.

Finally, to pick up again the issue of religious violence, I want to turn attention to the too often neglected Jesuit literature that Cunningham includes. Notably, Cunningham paints a sympathetic account of the horrific execution of English Elizabethan Jesuit poet, Robert Southwell (1561-95). Barbaric, indeed, it was. But, again, it might have made more sense if Southwell’s death had been ‘troubled’ by noting that the Jesuits were often rightly suspect as regicide assassins in early modern Europe, especially Elizabethan England. Southwell had been smuggled back into England after receiving his Jesuit training on the Continent. He was arrested for suspicion of treason, leading to his execution, because of his association with Jeremy Bellamy, party to a Catholic plot to restore Catholicism by replacing Elizabeth I on the throne by the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots.

The situation in Tudor England was tense and unstable. Protestant Queen Elizabeth had been declared a heretic by Rome. According to the Papal Bull of 1570, issued with her heresy in mind, she was classified as a “tyrant,” and thus candidate for assassination. Southwell’s death, appalling as it was, may thus not have been simply some gratuitous act of Tudor despotism. But before we denounce the principle enunciated in the Bull of 1570, it might be well to recall that this 16th century Catholic doctrine of the

right to violent opposition to tyrants has informed Liberation theology's rebels in their 21st century struggles against tyranny and injustice in Latin America. Bringing forward such 'troubling' episodes in the history of religions like those involving papal Bulls justifying rebellion against tyrants, Jesuit poets like Southwell, and nervous Protestantizing Tudor sovereigns, Liberationist Catholic rebels in Latin America can teach us a lot more about the nature of religion, 'warts and all,' than the sweet "good" religion of Robert Southwell's poetry alone. It can teach at least that religion can cut two ways - "bad" Jesuit assassins, "good" Liberationist rebels -- but only if we see how 'troubling' religion can be.

- *Daoism: From Huainan to Heidegger to Hip-Hop*

The chief "why" question of all is raised by Miles' preference to anthologize Daoism but not Confucianism. Miles tells us how much he fretted over this. His decision was based on two considerations. First, the Peoples' Republic of China does not recognize Confucianism as a "religion," while it does so recognize Daoism. Second, the NAWR should include Daoism because it has come back from near extinction, and is in the process of revival (1: xlix). Implicitly, NAWR's anthologizing could play a role in aiding Daoism's revival. Far fewer of Daoism's major texts are to be found in English translation than Confucianism's. Thus, for these two, very different, reasons, Miles believes the NAWR should prefer to include Daoism over Confucianism.

I confess knowing only the basics about Daoism, although my work in Buddhism and on Maoism have led me to engage Confucianism. Yet, I must confess that Miles' choice is worth reviewing. First, deferring to the PRC for a definition religion - the same people systematically destroying the ancient Buddhist culture of Tibet, hollowing out Catholicism in China, or liquidating

NRMs like Falun Gong – seems acutely offensive. What exactly are the PRC’s credentials for defining religion? What is its track record in recognizing and/or negotiating with religions? Further, in overlooking Confucianism, Miles betrays his being guided by one of those pernicious, but unconscious, deeply hidden “Western” biases in defining “religion.” “Religion” is about our relation to the gods or a transcendent principle. It is an inward, private matter of personal piety – in other words, more like Daoism than Confucianism. But, Confucianism suggests a different conception of religion entirely, where the notion of *li* rules, not relationship to some mysterious force or person. This was laid out some years ago quite elegantly by Herbert Fingarette. {Fingarette, 1998 #3935} His notion of Confucius teaching a religion in which the secular was sacred is akin to the Hindu idea of living the *dharma*, that, as I shall argue shortly, seems to animate Wendy Doniger’s chapter on Hinduism. Second, if Jack Miles chooses Daoism because doing so would help it revive, I’d want to ask why an anthology of the world religions ought be in the business of *promoting* a religion, any religion? Isn’t this unfair -- like a referee ‘picking sides’? Couldn’t other religions line up seeking the same perks? They might well feel that their scriptures needed translation and broad publication, too. Wouldn’t they have a just complaint?

Whatever the qualms here, the best moments in Daoist literature are some of the best in the NAWR. It is the hard to beat the names of classical Daoist scriptures for sheer transcendental *frisson*. Starting from the familiar early Daoist writings, such as the Huainan’s (2nd century BCE) talk of “The most exalted Way” that “gathers and collects, yet is not any richer for it.”(1: 546), Robson leads us through hundreds of pages of frankly difficult, and studiously obscure, materials. But, this is only the beginning, and by no means, necessarily typical of the whole chapter. Over against these finally ponderous philosophical texts are other titles and passages that thrill with their raw beauty. Titles like “The Wondrous Scripture of the

Upper Chapters of Limitless Salvation” (1: 1733) or one directed at “The Lady of the Southern Peak, Primal Worthy of the Purple Void, concurrently Supreme True Mistress of Destiny” make “Leviticus” or even, the “Book of Revelation” (1: 1824) look pretty lame by comparison. Similarly, the sublime poetic images of Daoist texts are hardly matched elsewhere, either. A short poem by Daoist nun, Yu Xuanji (9th century CE), “Early Autumn,” speaks of

Tender chrysanthemums carry new colors,
As distant mountains idle in the evening mists....

Or, continuing

The longing wife: brocade on the loom
The man on campaign: sky beyond the border.... (1: 1868)

Wonderful and distinctive, capturing something special in its sympathy with nature, a change of seasons, and everyday human emotions. One can hardly think of another literature so keenly observant of nature, outside Zen, to compare with Daoism’s – certainly nothing from the West. Others snap us to attention about the stark, unsentimental limits of human life. From Zhang Boduan (10th century CE), a poem simply named “Poem 2”

Yesterday you were on the street
riding on horseback.

This morning in your coffin

You are already a sleeping corpse (1: 1897)

Something about the direct address to the reader, loaded with a brutal message speaks to the distinctiveness of the Daoist perspective – incidentally confirming the wisdom of Miles’ choice to conclude volume one of the NAWR with Daoism instead of with the relatively more prosaic Confucianism. Further, to commend Robson, his chapter does not indulge the Counter-Culture’s appetite for paradox. How many times, over how

many centuries, by how many ‘sages,’ is it necessary to repeat or produce variants on phrases like the following before tedium sets in?

The whole world recognizes the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly (1: 1515)

Therefore existing arises from the non-existent; Real emerges from him (1: 1551)

It is empty without being exhausted: the more it works more comes out. (1: 1516)

Much speech leads inevitably to silence. (1: 1516)

If one acts non-action to do nothing sets inertness in motion (1: 1581)

Paradoxical talk there is indeed. But, even more are the lengthy medical and ‘alchemical’ texts spelling out practical procedures for healing illness, injury, sexual dysfunction and such by using “elixirs” or balancing the polarities of ying and yang.

Robson devotes a surprising final 100 pages to modern, including Western, appropriations of Daoism. On the one hand, some of these recall standard romantic Western critiques of modern, liberal, industrial society. Thus, we find that Oscar Wilde and Alfred, Lord Tennyson are each enamored of Daoism. Who knew? Tennyson’s long narrative poem, “The Ancient Sage” (1885), typifies stock Western appropriations of Daoism. We and Tennyson see in Daoism everything we think, deep down inside, that we are not – the mystic sagacity of the founder, a millennia earlier than Jesus, preaching the source of our busy, differentiated material world from a primordial, undifferentiated transcendent unnamable reality. (1: 2082-5) In like fashion, Oscar Wilde reviews Herbert Giles’ 1889 English translation of *The Book of Master Zhuang*. In his review, “A Chinese Sage” (1890) Wilde latches onto Daoism for “being the most caustic criticism of modern life I

have ever met....” (1: 2086) It says “No!” to all the competitive, wealth-mongering, institutionalized, meddling, prearranged, hyper-active, routinized, interfering, self-important, dutiful do-gooder enterprises that Wilde thinks draw us away from the simple life of confident unmoving, contemplation of natural existence. Summing up what he has learned, he cites words of Chuang Tsû: “The perfect man ignore self; the divine man ignores action; the true sage ignores reputation.” These are the principles of Chuang Tsû.” (1: 2091)

The critique of modern society inspired by Daoism becomes more problematic, however, when it comes from a Nazi-sympathizer like philosopher, Martin Heidegger. An admiring student of Heidegger’s, the Chinese philosopher, Paul Shi-Yi Hsiao, reports Heidegger’s intense interest in Daoism in a recollection of a visit made to Germany in 1946. Heidegger’s engagement with Nazism, his concerted attempts to cover up, and Hsiao’s eagerness to join in the dissimulation, are surely more cause for concern than celebration, here? (1: 2128-34) Yes, there is the signature Daoist sensitivity to nature. Heidegger’s own rustic way of living and working in his mountain cabin in Todtnauberg speak to a Daoist sensibility. His collection, *Holzwege* (1950) – his rustic wooden ‘way – speaks in Daoist terms of a process, and never completed, James Robson tells us. But, alongside this is Heidegger’s immersion in Nazism, and along with it, his deep affection for “Volkisch” irrationalism, extensively documented over the past generation. {Farias, 1991 #3933;Faye, 2011 #3934} Here was a professional obscurantist, finding a reflection of his own often ponderous and clotted thinking in an elusive distant Asian mirror.

Robson moved to rack up some cool street “cred” by bringing in the Daoist influences upon leader of hip-hop group Wu-tang Clan, RZA, (1: 2173-5) or Beatle, George Harrison, (1: 2141-2). But, these left me a little cold. Why would Robson cite, with apparent admiration, the fatuous ramblings of RZA such as this? “The Tao means basically ‘The Way.’ It refers

to the flow of life, the way nature expresses itself. Taoism teaches you to unite your actions with the flow of the universe. You want to be spontaneous and free from outside influences like social institutions.” (1: 2142)

Regrettably, the chapter ends on this rather low point. Otherwise, it is packed with many sublime expressions of the Daoist spirit.

- *Doniger, Dharma and a Million Dramas*

Perhaps without intending so to do, NAWR exposes two tendencies – each pulling from opposite directions. At one end, is the theistic and phenomenalistic. Here, “religion” tends to be defined in terms of the way it *looks* – worshipping a god, supreme being or beings. Anything upon which both the hyper-scientific Cognitive Science types and Christian conservatives agree – religion is the worship of a supreme being – must have merit! (sic) At the other end, is what I would call the *dharmic* or *sacral* perspective on religion. Typically, when we read “dharma” through the lens of “religion,” as usually understood, we reduce it to morality, a list of ‘duties,’ and such. Here, the existence of gods or a supreme being and such is a secondary aspect of establishing a *dharmic* or *sacred* state of affairs. Instead, I want to reverse the ends of ‘telescope,’ and look at the belief in gods from the point of view of dharma or the sacred.

What do we see, then? To bring *dharma* to human existence is to see human existence as constituting *a life*. I mean something like what we here on the streets as the often angry reproach, “Get a *life!*” or leaving anger aside, the sense that when married couples or friends reflect that they have achieved something of inestimable value when they recognize that they have “really *made a life together.*” It is also what Fingarette’s conception of Confucian *li* suggests, and one of the reasons I might have preferred to have included Confucianism instead of Daoism , although its loss would have

come at a great price. From the *dharmic* point of view, Confucianism fits better than Daoism because, at least, it explicitly projects its ambitions to found a viable structure for human life and society. Daoism may do so too, but since Confucianism does so explicitly and in a well-ramified way, it branches out into fine details of how humans should behave to one another in harmony.

But, here is where Wendy Doniger's chapter on Hinduism comes in. Anyone accustomed to standard anthologies of Hindu texts will be faced a seemingly endless stream of stories, with the insanely varied reality of Hindu *life* or *lives*. Doniger wisely gives up trying to find some central *belief*, shared by all those who may accept the denotation, "Hindu." {Doniger, 2009 #3930} But, that doesn't mean all this life is a meaningless flux. At least, from the point of view of 3rd to 1st centuries BCE, *dharma* held all this riot of stories together. Indeed, for Hindus, *dharma* broadly comes to mean *religion*, but religion seen from that *other* end of the telescope. So, about Doniger's endless story-making and poesis, when we ask "what is this incessant story-making about the gods and people really *about*?" Doniger's answer is that they are about *dharma*. But, beneath all this buzz of activity, is nothing else getting affirmed? Maybe not. Perhaps because it is only briefly separated out sharply as a term in play by Doniger (1: 138), *dharma* is being affirmed. Notions such as a meaningful, lived and experienced 'way of life,' replete with occasional flashes of transcendence, sacrality, moral structures, ritual order, social institutions and so on, come to the fore. And, when they do, *dharma* steps forward, not just belief in superior or supreme beings.

Linked with this intellectual pluralism, come its attendant social virtues -- an easy-going, live-and-let-live tolerance and generous acceptance of difference. As such, I would urge us to see Doniger's pluralism against the backdrop of the present rise of its opposite -- a violent, self-righteous assertion of monism. And, with an irony too deep for the "*Hindutva*" (Hindu-

ness) partisans themselves to grasp, their oddly Abrahamic insistence upon monistic orthodoxy professes loyalty to a common core of Hindu belief and practice! These so-called Hindus – Hindu nationalists, in fact – have actually abused Doniger for her pluralism, verbally and, with less skill, physically. During one of her lectures in India, Doniger ducked an egg ineptly flung at her. Decrying Western intrusions and constructions of their ‘faith,’ they reviled Doniger and other Western scholars from daring to speak for Hindus. On the other hand, the peculiar reality of gods, spirits and the like seems to be that they make palpable narrative realities out of the value of pluralism. The Hindutva nationalists only speak the sterile strident language of ideology, a tongue notable for its ‘warts.’

More Hindu ‘warts’? Doniger registers how Hindutva nationalists even go so far as to serve up bogus “alternative histories.” One of their leaders, Purushottam Nagesh Oak, seeks to enhance the universal stature of Indian civilization in what has now become a typical move made by such “alternative” historians. Oak’s claims would be just ridiculously comic, if not downright pathetic, were they not so consequential: people *believe* him! They swallow such nonsense as Oak’s claiming Sanskrit roots for key words in Western languages. Thus, “Vatican” is really derived from the Sanskrit, “vatika,” a “hermitage,” or “Christianity” from “Krsna-niti” – “ethics of Krsna.” (1: 701) Doniger’s appeal to Hindus – even Hindu nationalists – would then be to stop acting like narrow, Western monists, and start acting like Hindus – pluralistically!

- *If It’s Evolution, It Must Be Darwin*

Insuring that the first shall be last, I should like to conclude by addressing Jack Miles’ brave and informative attempt to account for the rise of the modern study of religion -- in the spare 45 pages of his General Introduction to the NAWR. Inevitably, specialists will find reasons to object

both to the details of such a compressed effort as well as to its larger strategic shape. I can think of many point to raise about Miles' sallying forth into this hotly disputed territory, but I shall restrict myself to two. The first has to do with Darwin and his purported influence on theory of religion, while the second has to do with a book that is supposed to have made the modern study of religion possible. My remarks are occasioned by the belief that it is important to get it right, when it comes to this story.

Does that matter, really? Well, yes, and here are two examples of what can go wrong, beginning with the case of Darwin and his influence on the study of religion. So great is the well-deserved reputation of Charles Darwin that whenever it's "evolution," we automatically think it must be "Darwin." Sometimes, alas, it is not. Thus, when Miles tries to splice Victorian evolutionary thinking into his narrative, he (and conventional wisdom) naturally assumes that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution *ought* to figure essentially in the story of how and why Victorian evolutionary thinkers looked on religion as telling a story of growth and development. (1: 38)

Yet, Darwin does not. None of the classic Victorian evolutionist theorists of religion - E. B. Tylor, J. G. Frazer, William Robertson Smith, and even Friedrich Max Müller or Durkheim in their moments of evolutionist thinking - *none* - were Darwinians. Nor, were their evolutionist ways of thinking about religion indebted to Darwinian theory. None. Darwinism did eventually trouble Biblical theologians who sought to protect *Genesis* - which may explain why conventional wisdom makes its predictable beeline for the headline, "Darwin." But, it falls far short of the mark, because several other models of developmental or evolutionist thinking dominated thinking about religious change.

Developmental thinking was already part of Enlightenment thinking about religion since the 18th century. The *Natural History of Religion* (1754) of David Hume (1711-1776) laid out a scheme of natural religious evolution up from its polytheistic origins. {Hume, 1992 #3031} Fancying himself

renewing these developmental theories of religion of Hume, that paragon of Victorian evolutionist anthropology, E. B. Tylor, posited the theory of the animistic origins of religion. Tylor's so-called "primitive" peoples reasoned from everyday experiences, such as the personal, "ensouled" character of human agency, to the view that everything had a soul or spirit that likewise accounted for its agency. Other animals and plants, indeed, everything - heavenly bodies, lightning and thunder, sacred mountains and springs, etc. - had its own inner personal spirit directing its action. Our so-called "evolved" or "higher" civilizations only differed because we explained the world as the result of the agency of one great Spirit, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph. But, none of Tylor's extremely influential and durable theory owed anything to Darwin. In Darwin's place, Tylor heaped fulsome praise on the evolutionist thinking of Auguste Comte. {Tylor, 1920 #3906 @19, 24} In fact, Tylor casually denied Darwin's influence, even a generation after *The Origin of the Species*. {Tylor, 1920 #3906@viii}

For much of the 19th century, and in cases, well into the 20th, so-called "evolutionist" thinking in comparative study of religion remained doggedly pre-Darwinian, or only superficially Darwinian - C. P. Tiele, Albert and Jean Réville, as well as the succeeding Dutch phenomenologists of religion. Even so thorough an evolutionist among those doing comparative study of religion, like William Robertson Smith, when considering the possible import of Darwin's thinking on the study of religion, could only manage a weary sigh, saying: "if there is anything in Darwinism..." {Smith, 1880 #540@532} If anything, Darwinism was itself more a *symptom* of something larger than an endpoint in itself. Victorian Christian theologians generally felt that so long as God came in at some crucial point, any number of different developmental theories of human history were acceptable. {Cashdollar, 1989 #3471@ Ch 5; Stocking, 1987 #553}

And, there were any number of options, ready for their appropriation. The field of developmental thinking was already well populated with such

notable evolutionary thinkers as Auguste Comte or John Stuart Mill, to name but two. So, even if conventional wisdom tells us that Darwin *should* lie behind the evolutionary turn of mind of classic Victorian comparative study of religion, doesn't mean that he does. Modern intellectual history's investigations into the evolutionary turn in Victorian comparative study of religion reveals, instead, a wisdom that is, I would submit, richer *because* unconventional, because it brings new knowledge. If not Darwin then, what is *really* behind the widespread affection of Victorian theories of religion for their conviction that religion changed in a systematic, developed way?

- *Did This Book Really Change Europe?*

Miles also makes much of the debt of comparative study of religion to an illustrated survey of ritual practices from the religions of the world edited by Bernard Picart and Jean Frederic Bernard, *Religious Ceremonies of the World* (1723). In their, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's "Religious Ceremonies of the World,"* Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mihnhardt, in turn, beatify Picart and Bernard's work. {Hunt, 2010 #3926} Not to disparage the delights of Hunt et al's excitement about this collection of exotica, but this is a "book that changed Europe" – that is, *until it didn't*. {Vardi, 2012 #3927@695} Guy G. Stroumsa sees Bernard and Picart as among the "real heroes" of the "*haute vulgarisation* of knowledge on religious phenomena." But, they were hardly alone, nor the first, nor was "bottom up" *haute vulgarization* finally critical to the rise of comparative study of religion. {Stroumsa, 2010 #3928@38}

Hunt et al even inadvertently, tip us off as to the shakiness of their when they puzzle that "we look in vain for the names of Picart and Bernard" in the "emerging disciplines of anthropology and especially the comparative study of religion." They are not there, because they did not have the influence Hunt et al imagine. Nor, do the "standard textbooks" such as in "Louis

Henry Jordan's 1905 groundbreaking overview of the newly emerging field of the comparative study of religion," do more than make minor mention of it in an "appendix." Frustrated, Hunt et al likewise are flummoxed that both Eric Sharpe's "firmly established textbook of" comparative study of religion, or David Pailin's survey of 17th and 18th century comparativists do not recognize Picart and Bernard as Hunt et al think they ought to have done.

It never occurs to Hunt et al that *they* may have just overestimated the worth of Picart and Bernard's book, together with basically playing down the two centuries of literature in comparative study of religion preceding it! No, that would not have fit Hunt et al's *Annaliste* cultural materialist orthodoxy that suspects snobbish cultural idealists of, basically, being out to get them, because the idealists systematically underestimate the role of the humble "artisan" in history. Perhaps so, although we cannot settle the matter here. We do, however, therefore, need to be wary of the generalizations that inform NARW's version of the history of the rise of comparative study of religion that depend on the reliability of Hunt et al.

Focusing on Picart and Bernard as if they had launched the revolution themselves, obscures the fact that when they set up shop in Amsterdam, the kind of religious openness they represented was *already* part and parcel of the milieu. They did not create it, nor *change* it. Rather, it was early modern and modern Netherlands that birthed serious efforts to reform education to include comparative study of religion. Such early modern liberal ferment already favored the new thought of Baruch Spinoza, as our own Sam Preus spelt out decades ago. {Preus, 1987 #52; Preus, 1998 #3023; Preus, 1998 #3024; Preus, 1998 #3025; Preus, 1998 #3026; Preus, 2001 #3027}

But, most important of all, when we come to our own age, Arie Molendijk showed that top-down governmental action in the Netherlands 'changed Europe,' or at least the Dutch end of it to begin, by bringing comparative study of religion, or what was *specifically* then called "phenomenology of religion," into the universities. The Higher Education Act of 1876 legislated

formation of departments, faculty appointments in what was, in effect, the beginnings of the modern study of religion. Along with the government, active approval of influential Dutch Protestant clergy secured the fortunes of the comparative study of religions. Here, the government counted on the small, but very influential, Remonstrant (earlier, Arminian) liberal Calvinists, for such theological 'cover,' even as the hardcore Dutch Reformed Church could/would not. In fact, it was Home Secretary, J. Heemskerk, (1818-97), himself a Remonstrant, who engineered the 1868 bill that established what evolved into comparative study of religion in Dutch higher education. {Molendijk, 2005 #3221@74} Would that Bernard and Picart's book had prepared the ground for popular institutionalization of the comparative study of religion. Alas, it did not. Had it done so, the state of comparative study of religion would not be as precarious as it is today. Picart and Bernard *participated* some in those developments, but did not *change Europe*, much less the Netherlands. What is critical to remember is that comparative study of religion, not only arose from rather small circles of specialized scholars - Remonstrant theologians in the Netherlands, later from among Liberal Protestant theologians in Paris, comparative historical linguists and mythologists, like Friedrich Max Müller on the Continent and in Oxford, but that *it still does*.

In telling the story of the emergence of the study of religion, it is vital to get it right: unlike the stirring populist story Lynn Hunt et al want to tell, the modern study of religion, Picart and Bernard did not bring it about. Despite the greatly more open religious environment that now exists than in fairly recent years, the power of religious conservatism is still immense. Liberal theology does not have much of a place in the churches. Nor, are religious studies departments still regarded as standing alongside say, the *major* departments like, history, English, anthropology, sociology, psychology, or even philosophy. Thanks to Supreme Court rulings such as Schempp, we have been fortunate to have established a beachhead in

higher education. But, we still yet to establish ourselves as an indispensable segment of the humanities - paralleling the present crisis for the humanities in laying its claim for relevance in the new age of advances in the biological and information sciences and technologies. Religious studies still has a great deal of work to do before it rates among the 'majors.'