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Charting the map metaphor in theories of religion*

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Abstract: The idea that scholars of religion produce ‘maps’ that represent the ‘territories’ of religion(s) is common and influential. This paper first discusses the role of the metaphor, with special reference to the work of J.Z. Smith, and some of the problems raised by the map metaphor (above all, its implicit reliance on a naive correspondence view of truth). It then draws two important distinctions: between different levels of representation; and between the representing and guiding function of maps (truth and use). It ends by comparing issues in the philosophy of science and the theory of religion in order to highlight some promising directions for more defensible semantic and epistemological groundwork in theory of religion.

This article suggests that ideas from philosophy can help make sense of some of the theoretical issues that inform Religious Studies. Specifically, we examine the idea that scholars of religion produce ‘maps’ that represent the ‘territories’ of religion(s). We argue that the use of this and similar metaphors is symptomatic of a simplistic epistemology and an inappropriate semantic theory.¹ Appeals to the map metaphor underline an implicit reliance on a naive correspondence view of truth, i.e., the view that language can be understood purely as a representation of something non-linguistic and that truth can be understood simply in terms of accuracy of that representation. Epistemological and semantic critiques strongly suggest that this view of language and truth are untenable. However, other views are possible, including more sophisticated accounts of truth and meaning that invoke conventional and pragmatic constraints without abandoning the field to an intolerable relativism. In this article, we review basic issues in epistemology and semantics in order to clarify the presuppositions implicit in the map metaphor. The core issue here is just how it is that the work of the scholar of religion represents the religious phenomena under study. We then draw on philosophy of science to further develop these ideas with more specific attention to relations between theory and data and to the nature and status of models and modeling. Our claim is not that the map metaphor is necessarily committed to a naive correspondence theory of truth but that its use in Religious Studies is

symptomatic of a marked lack of epistemological and semantic clarity. We focus on the use of that metaphor for two reasons; the map metaphor offers an especially effective means to diagnose these problems; and a more nuanced consideration of this metaphor raises issues essential to more productive theorizing in the study of religion. Most theories of religion are behind the times, and so behind the eight ball, in their neglect of current thinking on truth and meaning: superficial uses of the map metaphor are symptomatic of this; and more nuanced uses chart a potential path toward more defensible work.

Map is and is not territory

The study of religion abounds in references to maps. A selection of passages will illustrate the range of ways in which this term serves as a metaphor for different issues broadly related to reference: ‘the primary intention of much African religious thought seems to be just that

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mapping of connexions between space-time phenomena which modern Christian thought feels is beyond its proper domain’ (Horton, 1964, p.96); ‘We need to map the variety of Judaisms’ (Smith, 1982, p.18); ‘models play an important role in providing our map of reality and in shaping our understanding of what is real’ (Katz, 1982, p.270; original emphasis); ‘comparative terms such as “marriage” and “witchcraft”. were assumed to map out similar configurations of meaning in different cultural environments’ (Shaw, 1990, p.339–340); ‘this terrain [of subtle mutual seductions] is not clearly mapped; the interests and risks of opening the body are not articulated’ (Johnson, 1996, p.191); ‘the domain of the scholar of religion.. is where we etch and authorize the maps that not only guide our movements through history but also make movement possible to begin with’ (McCutcheon, 2001, p.173–174); ‘The defamiliarisation created by Bhairava’s god-image maps the politics of mediation surrounding Hindu god-images’ (Grieve, 2003, p.60); ‘elite – mostly male – adepts learn to map out the world of Krishna on their bodies through practices of meditation and visualization’ (Hawley, 2004, p.384); ‘the disagreement over the place of material culture in religious cognition can be mapped onto the logical geography of the insider/outsider problem’ (Day, 2004, p.244); ‘non-Melanesians map onto Melanesians their own fantasies concerning love, longing, and unrequited desire’ (Kaplan, 2005, p.1421); ‘what makes mapping ourselves into a public/private dichotomy especially difficult is the experience of modernity’ (Zwissler, 2007, p.54).

As these examples illustrate, ‘map’ means many things in the study of religion. It does the work of ‘describe’, ‘compare’, ‘refer’, ‘model’, ‘correlate’, ‘understand’, ‘inscribe’, ‘articulate’, ‘illustrate’, ‘project’, ‘make explicit’ and other terms. At the heart of all these uses is some relation between representations (maps) and the phenomena to which they supposedly refer (the territories of Religious Studies and of religions). As this range of uses indicates, clarifying exactly what sort of relation holds between map and territory is a complex issue.

The first issue needing clarification here is the epistemological status of the relation between claims in the study of religion and their objects. In addition, there is a logical distinction, discussed below, between different orders of representations: religious representations of religious realities; scholarly representations of such insiders' views; and scholarly representations of these secondary sources. The territories that scholars of religion map are maps themselves, and these in turn may serve as the territories of higher-order maps. Our first task then, is to draw attention to some of the complexities involved in making claims about religious phenomena. We make a case here that it is far from obvious how scholars of religion talk about religion.

The map metaphor is about representation and it has played an important role in discussions of comparison in Religious Studies. On the one hand, it is obvious that map is not territory: one represents and one is represented. The claim that map is not territory preserves a distinction that relativism threatens to collapse. If map is territory, then the difference between them has no significance, with clear implications for the study of religion: 'when map is the territory, it lacks both utility and any cognitive advantage with the result that the discipline which produced it, deprived of its warrants, disappears' (Smith, 2004, p.209).

The 'is' that relates map and territory in these discussions is that of metaphor. The task is to specify how the two are related, not to affirm or deny their equivalence. Korzybski's (1958 [1933], p.58, 60; original emphasis) claim that 'the map is not the territory' made precisely this point: 'A map is not the territory it represents but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness'. Maps are like and unlike the territories they represent, and this forces us to discuss complex issues of similarity and difference. Smith (2004, p.59) insists that the task of comparison forces us to be especially attentive to the latter: 'Maps are structures of transformation, not structures of reproduction. What is at stake is an issue concerning which students of religion have been notably shy, the cognitive power of distortion, or difference.' As Bateson (1972) emphasized in his lecture on Korzybski, 'What gets onto the map, in fact, is difference'. If scholars of religion want to talk of making and comparing maps of religious territories, they need to be clear on precisely on how their maps represent and what they are to be used for.

Smith's (1978) essay, 'Map Is Not Territory', provides the touchstone for the map metaphor in theories of religion. It argues that scholars of religion need to 'reflect on and play with the necessary incongruity of our maps before we set out on a voyage of discovery to chart the worlds of other men. For the dictum of Alfred Korzybski is inescapable: 'Map is not territory' – but maps are all we possess' (Smith, 1978, p.309). Scholars of religion have often interpreted this as a warrant for a radical, relativist constructionism (Engler, 2004, 2005). To this end, the claim that 'map is not territory' is often read in tandem with likely the most widely cited passage in contemporary theoretical work on religion, from the introduction to Smith's (1982, p.xi, original emphasis; see 1998, p.281–282) *Imagining Religion*:

there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study.

It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy.

A superficial reading of these passages can be paraphrased as follows: religion is nothing but a construct; scholars of religion invent the entire contents of their writings; there is no real world of religion to which scholarship of religion has any meaningful relation. However, such views are based on a false dichotomy: either (a) truth and meaning are rooted in a simple and direct correspondence between theory and object, language and world, or (b) no definable relation between language and world is possible (and, hence, for practical purposes, there is no world). This simplistic reading of the claim that 'map is not territory' is untenable.

Smith does not hold a simplistic view. His choice of 'map' 'as a substitution for terms such as 'cosmology' and 'world-view', themselves replacements for Eliade's 'ontology', was meant to emphasize the status of these patterns as 'constructs' (Smith, 2004, p.47, n. 59). Smith (2004, p.24, 31) is explicit that the concept of 'map' played a greater role in his earlier work, emphasizing the 'consequences of the juxtaposition inherent in comparison', but he remains insistent on the importance of the 'choice of the map over the territory'. He complicates the relation between scholars of religion and their putative objects of study, but he does not negate it:

What we study when we study religion is one mode of constructing worlds of meaning, worlds within which men find themselves and in which they choose to dwell. . What we study ... is the variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit positions of power through the use of myths, rituals and experiences of transformation. (Smith, 1978, p.290–291)

Smith's choice of words here reveals a position that is neither naively realist nor radically constructionist. Describing religion as a 'process of world-construction', implies a distinction between products, raw materials, and the process of construction (see Benavides, 1997, p.130, 2000, p.116, 2001, p.107; Hacking, 1998, p.56, 1999, p.49). If religion 'both discovers limits and creates limits', this implies not only a distinction between discovery and creation but also their relation as a core element of what scholars of religion study. This passage raises important theoretical and methodological questions: Where do scholars stand in order to identify these 'limits' or 'the bounds of the human, historical condition'? What comparative apparatus allows us to categorize the 'variety of attempts to map' that constitutes religion?

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Smith is working on three levels here, and different senses of 'map' are involved. First, he addresses the substantive issue of what it is that scholars of religion study. He argues against universalist and essentialist views, e.g., that all 'religious' phenomena are manifestations of a unitary core substance, such as the sacred. The objects of study are often purportedly universal religious claims, but,

from the proper scholarly perspective, 'this claim to universality is relativized by the situation' (Smith, 1978, p.300). Smith's approach is to emphasize not a static content (e.g., a core list of religious phenomena), but rather the relation between elements identified by the scholar: 'there is nothing that is inherently or essentially clean or unclean, sacred or profane. There are situational or relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift according to the map being employed' (Smith, 1978, p.291). Of course, this view only makes sense if we presume that scholars can position themselves in order to accurately describe both the falsely universal claim and the 'situation' that relativizes it. This raises the issue of the relation between theory and its object(s).

At a second level, Smith addresses the theoretical issue of the relation between the claims made by scholars of religion and their putative objects. For Smith (1988, p.235, 1998, p.281–282), 'religion' is, like 'language' in linguistics, a second-order concept, because it orders theoretical constructs rather than objective facts about the world. He implicitly compares the study of religion to science, drawing on the distinction between theory and data: it 'is only theories and concepts that convert facts into data, that render them significant as examples of larger intellectual issues which comprise the agendum, debated though it may be, of a field' (Smith, 1995, p.413). By distinguishing between 'facts' and 'data', on the view that theory translates the former into the latter, Smith clarifies his earlier claim, 'there is no data for religion' (Smith, 1982, p.xi). There are data for the study of religion, but these are not objectively, transparently significant 'facts'. On this view, Smith's often-cited claim turns out to be less a radical manifesto of relativist constructionism than a simple acknowledgement of a basic claim from Philosophy of Science: data are theory-laden.

At a third level, Smith (1982, p.15) addresses the methodological issue of how scholars of religion construct their maps. Much of his work has focused on types and methods of comparison. His account of this 'mapping enterprise' involves several discrete steps:

The first operation would be to select a single taxic indicator that appears to function within the tradition as an internal agent of discrimination and map it through a variety of the materials ... in order to gain some appreciation of the range of its application. The second operation would be to take a limited body of material ... and map out all of its taxonomic indicators. These would later be compared with other, different sets of ... data.... In neither case is the intention of the exercise a monothetic one. We are not seeking integration and definition; rather we are attempting to take an initial step toward the listing of all of the characteristics of [the religious tradition].. The final results would be in the form of a ranked but diverse and motley catalog of traits. At some later date, and with comparative materials, they would have to be grouped according to some quantitative technique of multidimensional scaling in the service of some theory. (Smith, 1982, p.9)

This initial step of representing the characteristics of a single religion is extended through a process of comparison between religions:

... it is possible to rough out a preliminary map, a set of characteristics centered [on one element] . which may be used as one cluster toward the eventual polythetic classification.... [S]tudents of religion need to abandon the notion of 'essence', of a unique differentium for [a given religion] ... as well as the socially impossible correlative of a community constituted by a systematic set of beliefs. The cartography appears far messier. We need to map the variety of [religious traditions]..., each of which appears as a shifting cluster of characteristics which vary over time. (Smith, 1982, p.18)

At the core is an analogy with set theory, in which 'map' is a verb, referring to the delineation of correspondences between the elements of one set and those of another. In this sense, a sub-set of the elements that make up the territory is mapped onto another set of elements, which we call a 'map'. Smith broadens and specifies the term, referring to (i) the act of collecting occurrences of 'a single taxic indicator' with a given 'function', (ii) the act of listing all such indicators, and (iii) the act of collecting various exemplars of these first two levels of mapping. This methodological tug-of-war between similarity and difference raises two important questions that we discuss in the following section. What are the criteria of a good map? And are these criteria preserved as we move across different levels of relations between maps and territories?

Problems with the naive correspondence theory of meaning

It is well known that 'the correspondence theory' has problems, but the problems themselves are less well known. There are numerous, now classical, arguments as to the formal inadequacy of the naive correspondence account of truth. Given that that our exploration begins with the idea that such a simple relation between map and territory is untenable, it is useful to rehearse at least some of them in broad outline. (Readers familiar with these critiques or willing to grant them for the sake of argument are invited to skip to the next section).

Truth-Conditional Theories of Meaning have found wide appeal. At base, such theories hold that the meaning of a claim is given by the conditions under which it would be true: one knows what a claim means if one knows its truth-conditions. This leaves completely unspecified, of course, what the nature of truth might be, but nonetheless points to a very important connection between truth and meaning.²

Under the correspondence conception, the truth-conditions of a sentence are specified by a 'state-of-affairs', a structured collection of external or non-linguistic objects, such as cats on mats, Othello's loving of Desdemona, etc. Corresponding to each meaningful sentence is such a 'state-of-affairs'; if the corresponding state-of-affairs obtains, then the sentence is true; otherwise it is false. The key elements of this theory of truth are that the parts of language mirror the constituents of reality, that 'truth' is ensured by the existence of states-of-affairs, and that those existent states-of-affairs ('facts') are thoroughly objective in the sense of being mind-independent. In other words, 'truth' is a robustly metaphysical notion: truth is correspondence to fact. The 'correspondence' is understood in terms of a pairing, a set of one-to-one

associations between the linguistic and the non-linguistic counterparts. This pairing relationship is, of course, reminiscent of the relation of a geographical map to the territory it purports to represent, and so the map metaphor of language seems a natural fit. Indeed, many correspondence theorists characterize the precise nature of the correspondence as an isomorphism, an expression taken from map terminology.

On this view, if we know what sentences an individual takes to be true, we can then determine their metaphysical commitments and how their ontology is structured. This maneuver does not require the actual truth of the claims of the native speaker, nor does it require the interpreter to believe as the speaker believes. As long as the scholar can understand the beliefs of the practitioner (by correctly interpreting their utterances or other behaviour) she can formulate an account of the underlying ontological commitments. For the study of religion, this formulation is tantamount to a theory of the given 'religious system'.³ It is no surprise that scholars of religion, above all those who take the stated beliefs of the practitioners as important data⁴, have naturally favoured such an account of truth and meaning.

The naive correspondence account of truth has great common-sense appeal. Why would we try to argue with what appears to be an obvious fact: the sentence 'the cat is on the mat' is true if and only if there is actually a cat on the mat? Moreover, it suggests an obvious way to approach the study of religion. A set of methodological steps for the scholar seems to naturally emerge:

1. Understand the beliefs of practitioners by interpreting their utterances.
2. Treat the categories implicit in the structure of those utterances as a 'legend' to begin to understand the conceptual religious 'territory' in which the practitioners dwell (i.e., develop hypotheses or theories about the content of the religion being studied).⁵
3. Test those hypotheses against further 'observation'; continue to modify, refine, develop the theoretical understanding of the religion.⁶

Despite its common-sense appeal and its apparent utility for the study of religion, this view has serious problems:⁷

1. The concept of a 'fact' as invoked in the 'correspondence to fact' relation is a difficult one. Russell's (1959 [1912]) logical atomism – which informs his classical presentation of the theory in *Problems of Philosophy*, i.e., that there are 'ontological atoms' which isometrically correspond in a one-to-one fashion with the 'logical atoms' from which sentences are materially constructed – is complicated enough when dealing with the simple 'The cat is on the mat' case. It becomes hopelessly muddled when dealing with even slightly more complicated cases. How are we to conceive of the 'ontological constituents' of the fact corresponding to 'Felines run from canines'? (What sort of object is felinity? A

Platonic form? A concatenation of individual felines? A reduction to collections of sense-datum?) Once we throw in difficulties in understanding the idea of an arithmetic fact, or a modal fact, or a moral fact, or a probabilistic fact, etc., the plausibility that mathematical, modal, moral, probabilistic, etc. claims are to be understood as true in relation to 'fact' is at least compromised.⁸ In the face of some of these metaphysical 'excesses', the Logical Positivists felt driven to regard such utterances as 'nonsense'. This was the basis of their critique of religious beliefs. A strong extension of this problem is to be found in Davidson's position that the concept of truth is much more basic than the concept of a fact, and so the latter cannot be used to explicate the former. At base, he argues that we can have no conception of a fact apart from sentences we take to be true (e.g., Davidson, 1984b [1969], 1990, 2001 [1983]).

2. The correspondence relation relies upon a 'picture' metaphor, that sentences are 'pictures' of reality. If real languages were rebus languages (i.e., where each word bore some clear and definable visual resemblance to a unique object), this might be a plausible account, but there is no 'pictorial' similarity between the word 'cats' and those fuzzy things that run from dogs. Wittgenstein's (1961, 1963) reliance on the 'picture' theory of meaning in the *Tractatus* is severely critiqued in his own *The Philosophical Investigations*.

3. There is no way of guaranteeing that the relation between word and object is one-to-one. The claim 'London is in England' is ambiguous precisely because there are at least two possible referents for 'London' (the original metropolis and the home of the University of Western Ontario), and hence there is similar ambiguity over its truth-conditions. The usual response to this problem is to suggest that the intended meaning will be, or at least could be, cleared up by its context. Besides there being no guarantee of this, this maneuver rests upon an idea that we can distinguish between 'intended' and 'unintended' interpretations, but this has proven an enormously difficult

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distinction to make clear: no clear, non-question-begging criteria for differentiating between these interpretations have been provided. Putnam (1981, 1983 [1977]) provides a strong argument, based on model theory in formal logic, that no such distinction can be drawn.⁹

4. Related to the last point, Quine offers compelling arguments that there is no generally reliable way to understand the nature of the 'object' relation in the word-object relation that underlies the naive correspondence account. In his famous example, if a speaker utters the expression 'gavagai' only in the presence of a rabbit, the interpreter will still be unable to determine the speaker's ontological commitments and categories: does she mean 'There is a rabbit', 'Look, another rabbit', 'Lo, Rabbithood manifested!', 'We are in the presence of undetached rabbit parts', or something else? All of these are possible and non-synonymous translations, and all are equally well supported by the evidence. While further

evidence might rule out some as ineligible (or ‘unintended’), as a matter of fact (actually, as a matter of logic) there will still remain an infinite number of other possible non-synonymous translations. This ‘underdetermination of theory by data’ leads to an ‘inscrutability of reference’, and potentially to ‘ontological relativity’.¹⁰

5. Although they are not objections to the formal adequacy of the naive correspondence theory of truth, perhaps the oldest challenges have been to question what value truth might have for us if it were merely understood as correspondence to objective fact. By making the criteria of truth completely independent of any ‘mental states’, it is difficult to understand why we would care about it. There is an epistemological spin on this: if truth is objective in the sense that the constitution of ‘facts’ are completely independent of our beliefs (and hence knowledge claims) about them, then it is possible that we have no reliable access to them. In this case, it is possible that our beliefs about reality are completely and radically erroneous. Cartesian skepticism, in other words, appears a logical consequence of the correspondence theory of truth alone. Placing epistemic constraints on the concept of truth would address the skeptical challenge, but would be tantamount to rejecting that account of truth. Are we more committed to this account of truth, or to the intuition that genuine knowledge is possible?

In the last 30 years or so, these sorts of objections have become well entrenched in the philosophical consciousness of those who work in these areas. A great deal of philosophical work during this time has explored other avenues of conceiving truth.¹¹ The clearest opposition in these debates has been between two groups: (i) ‘realists’ who continue to insist that truth be understood as involving a relation to an objective world, and most commonly express this by holding that truth is a metaphysical or ‘radically non-epistemic’ notion, but are considerably more sophisticated in explicating the word–world relation, and (ii) ‘anti-realists’ who argue that truth-claims are only coherently understood within certain conditions of ‘verification’, and hence that truth is an ‘epistemic’ notion. These latter theorists include pragmatists of various sorts as well as new-style verificationists.¹² There have been defenders of a middle position, some of whom have tried to soften the dichotomy between ‘metaphysics’ and ‘epistemology’, and some who have tried to eschew the dichotomy all together. (It is in this middle ground that we place Davidson.) Finally, there have been relatively recent challenges to the whole idea that truth is a substantial notion, or that it can play any significant theoretical role. Moderate sorts include Wright (1992) who has argued that as long as a proposed conception of truth conforms to certain ‘platitudes’ (which includes such things as that to assert is to present as true, that a sentence can be justified but not true, that truth is preserved in deduction, that it is reversed in negation, etc., and, most interestingly, that truth is ‘correspondence to fact’, suitably de-metaphysicalized, of course), then any further metaphysical assumptions about it are unnecessary. The more radical views – called ‘minimalist’ (e.g., Horwich, 1998) or even ‘deflationists’ (e.g., Field, 1994) – hold that truth is simply a theoretically unnecessary notion that we are

best rid of it; to say that the sentence 'Snow is white' is true is to say nothing other than to simply say that snow is white. Each one of these rival theories of truth would have profound implications for the study of religion, and at least some of them provide promise for allowing Religious Studies out of some of the impasses we note in the rest of this article.

Naive correspondence and maps

Behind the metaphor of map's relation to territory lie complex issues of semantics (philosophical theories of meaning) and epistemology (philosophical theories of truth and knowledge). Such views are presupposed by any account (however implicit) of how religious language relates to its putative objects and how scholarly accounts of religion relate to the religious phenomena that they study. In this section of the article, we review some of the relevant philosophical issues, issues often ignored by scholars of religion.

It is important to distinguish between insider representations of religious phenomena, scholarly representations of particular religions (first-order theories), and a meta-scholarly theories about the nature of the study of religion itself (second-order theories): e.g., between religious talk, talk about religions, and talk about religion in general. In naive readings of the 'map' metaphor, meaning is captured by an isomorphic relation between the terms of the language and extra-linguistic 'data' which the language is presumed to intentionally grab hold of. If the metaphor is exhaustive of meaning itself, then it should apply equally to all three of these levels. In other words, if the map/territory metaphor really captures what, and how, scholars of religion mean when they write about religion(s), scholars are forced to consider three sorts of maps and three sorts of territories. The first map consists of the religious beliefs of the members of a given religion, and the first territory consists of the beings (ontological entities) that they believe in: gods, orixás, souls and hells, etc. This is a 'zero-order' map, the insider map of believers. Smith (1978, p.290, 308) draws attention to this level of maps when he notes that religion itself is a 'mode of constructing worlds of meaning'; myths and rituals provide 'a locative map of the cosmos', aimed at overcoming incongruity, or a 'utopian map of the cosmos', 'which perceives terror and confinement [rather than reassurance] in interconnection, correspondence and repetition'. (Of course, these are 'but two "maps" among many' (Smith, 2004, p.18).) This 'zero-order' level does not involve the study of or theories of religion. However, as soon as the scholar of religion tries to read that initial insider map over the shoulders of believers, as soon as she forms an impression of, contemplates the meaning of, takes notes on, or writes about that insider map, she produces another map. This second

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map consists of what scholars say or write about the religions that they study, and the second territory consists of the statements, beliefs, practices, etc. of the members of the religion under study. This is a 'first-order' map, a map of a religion. The third map consists of what scholars say or write about 'religion' in

general, including their representations of the work of other scholars of religion; and the third territory consists of first-order maps of different religions. This is a 'second-order' map, a map of religion: 'the classification of religion itself is ... [a] mapping device' (McCutcheon, 2003, p.6). The marks on first-order maps represent the particular phenomena of particular religions; those on second-order maps represent religious phenomena already framed and re-presented in general, abstracted, comparative, theorized terms. Religions draw zero-order maps; studies of religions draw first-order maps; the study of religion draw second-order maps.

Making sense of these different levels of meaning is (or should be) a central task of theories of religion, and if the map/territory metaphor fails to capture what is going on at these different levels, then it must be abandoned. If the map metaphor is a good one, then first- and second-order maps should map out their respective territories in the same way. That is, they should both relate the map and the territory in the same way. This relation could be the same in a strong sense (transitive) or a weaker sense (isomorphic, where only the relations match up). Only the second seems to hold for the study of religion. In general, transitivity implies that if map A is like map B, and map B like map C, then map A must be like map C. This doesn't seem to work for religion: religious beliefs differ so widely between religions that first-order maps (studies of religions) do not match up neatly, making it difficult, if not impossible, to move from a first-order map of religion A up to a second-order map (a theory of religion in general) and down to a first-order map of religion C. The specifics don't match up. However, more general relations might well be preserved. If the map/territory relation were isomorphic, first- and second-order maps would all work in the same general way, even though they did not fit neatly over one another. The core of our argument is (i) that this distinction between first and second-order theories in the study of religion further undermines the idea that truth is best characterized as a correspondence between our statements and the world and (ii) that this also undermines naive appeals to the map/territory metaphor. (Of course, as we clarify below, that metaphor can be read in more nuanced and helpful ways).

There is a fundamental 'ambiguity' or at least bifurcation in the concept of a map that is very relevant: that between the representational aspects of maps and their guiding function. A clearer separation of these issues would offer great potential to theories of religion. In terms of a metaphor for the concept of truth, the predominate focus is on the representational aspect of 'maps' – just as the truth of a sentence consists in its corresponding to (i.e., being structurally isomorphic with) objective reality, the faithfulness of a map consists in a similar isomorphism of its pictorial elements to the geographical features it purports to map. A map is good from the perspective of representation to the extent that its pictorial elements are isomorphic with the relevant geographic elements. However, maps are also intended to guide – to efficiently and effectively assist persons in achieving desired goals. If one's goal is to travel quickly between two cities, the pictorial elements of a map should be so constructed as to allow users to make wise choices (e.g., demarcate straight from windy roads; windy roads are to be avoided if the desire is for speed, but to be chosen if the desire is for

scenery). A map is good from the perspective of guidingness to the extent that its pictorial elements enhance the chances that users will make decisions most conducive to their achieving desired goals. 'Correct' is about representation; and 'usefulness' is not necessarily the same thing.

While these elements or functions (representation and guiding) are not unrelated to each other, they are separable. Some maps, such as the well-known schematic representation of the London Underground, minimize geographical accuracy in favour of ease of use. Furthermore, these two features can compete: what makes a map good from a representational view might actually make it poor from a guiding point of view. Indeed, the guidingness of a map actually requires a lack of representational faithfulness: a map that was completely representationally accurate would be indistinguishable from the territory it purports to map, and as such would be completely unsuitable as a guide to assist one in accessing or moving around the territory. Nevertheless, it is possible to overstate this independence or competition between values. A map for which there was little or no structural isomorphism between the pictorial and the territorial elements would not be an effective guide (as for example a treasure map that counted off paces from a tree that no longer exists).

This factor has played a central role in recent controversies in Philosophy of Science. Many scientific realists (e.g., Brown, 2002) argue that the success (.guiding usefulness) of a scientific theory can only be explained by its truth (.accuracy of representation). Certain scientific antirealist positions (e.g., van Fraassen, 1980), on the other hand, hold that for at least some terms (those which the realist would hold correspond to unobservable entities), there is no reason to suppose they correspond to any entities whatsoever; as long as the theory is 'empirically adequate' (i.e., accounts for all of the observed phenomenon) there is no need to postulate a referent for them. Their semantic value is to be understood entirely in terms of how they are instrumental in aiding scientists in making new discoveries, fashioning successful experiments, constructing working technologies, etc. The success of science is to be explained in other, less metaphysically extravagant, ways. The debate continues (see Wray, 2007).

There are, of course a wide variety of types of maps: e.g., geological, biological, topographic, demographical, political, physical and various thematic maps. This very fact raises a quandary if we rely on superficial appeals to the map metaphor, i.e., those that emphasize only the representation aspect of maps and that do so in terms of a naive correspondence between map and territory. On this view, the existence of so many maps raises a set of misleading questions. How can such widely varying representations correspond to the same territory? Are there 'really' a whole set of different territories? Or should we simply take the relativistic alternative and assert that there is no territory, that reality consists of maps all the way down? Our claim here is that a more nuanced appreciation of the map metaphor moves past these sorts of misleading and specious questions; if we highlight the distinct functions of maps and address the more nuanced epistemological and semantic issues that this metaphor raises, we can move toward more defensible theories of religion.

Given the 'map' metaphoric account of language, with its representational

and guiding functions, we should expect a similar bifurcation of function in language, and indeed we find this. A 'good' answer to the child's question of where a pile of presents under a Christmas tree came from will depend on whether we want 'truth-preservation' or 'wonder-preservation' to be our predominate aim. It is for such reasons that many semantic theorists postulate a distinction between a theory of 'sense' and a theory of 'force', and indeed 'truth-conditional' theories of meaning are most commonly opposed by 'use' theories.¹³

[6<pp.>7]

This 'bifurcation' between truth and use takes many forms. The accuracy of a map depends on the objective faithfulness of its representation, but whether it effectively guides depends on the choices and desires of the reader. 'Truth', under the correspondence account, is a metaphysical notion; truth or falsity depends upon the existence or non-existence of objective states-of-affairs. The appropriate use of a sentence, on the other hand, depends upon the underlying subjective intentions of speakers, which are often embedded in cultural or conventional contexts. They presuppose the reader/speaker has certain values, and hence they have a normative dimension. They allow the reader/speaker to acquire knowledge which enables them to achieve their goals, and thus falls broadly in the category of the epistemological. Realists favour truth-conditional theories of meaning; pragmatists favour 'use' theories.

Much meta-theorizing in Religious Studies reflect the variety of ways in which these central aspects might be related. Some subordinate one to the other, some are reductive, and some simply eschew a theoretical role for one or the other.¹⁴ In a closely related vein, Lawson and McCauley (1990, p.22) argue that many meta-theories of religion can be demarcated on the basis of how they relate 'interpretation' and 'explanation' of religious systems: some are exclusivist in that they either reject one or the other aim, or at least attempt to reduce one to the other; some are inclusivist in that they attempt to subordinate one to the other; and some (i.e., theirs) are interactionist, which 'neither excludes nor subordinates'.

In our view, assuming truth and use mark completely autonomous and independent categories is theoretically dangerous, though seemingly naturally suggested by supplementing a truth-conditional theory of meaning with a correspondence account of truth. Such an assumption has been commonly, though usually implicitly, made in the study of religion, and has led to a number of insurmountable problems and obstacles. Many theorists of religion have been mired down in issues of whether the religious entities that believers talk about really exist. This has led to two problems that have had long-lasting effects on the field: (i) ignoring the conventional dimension of religious beliefs, what they do, how they are used, how they guide; and (ii), in our view the cause of the first problem, confusing the two issues of use and truth, above all assuming that if religious language can be shown to not refer to any existing religious reality, this is sufficient reason to discount it altogether. A greater appreciation for the conventional aspects of religious language, on the other hand, makes for a much more palatable, and also more complex, understanding of the objects of study for

the religious scholar. It also leads to a more nuanced understanding of the very nature of the discipline. The assumption that scholarly maps retrace religious territories is rooted in a more basic assumption that religion stands or falls on the issue of whether religious beliefs actually refer, in the naive sense of corresponding, to religious entities. The remainder of this article calls these assumptions into question by drawing parallels between theories of religion and the Philosophy of Science.

(Theories of) Religion and (Philosophy of) science

Science and religion are often contrasted starkly.¹⁵ Moving past such overly black and white contrasts, in order to emphasize epistemological and semantic issues, reveals enlightening comparisons between the two realms.

In common parlance, the object of scientific investigation is ‘material reality’. Science is characterized by such terms as objective, modern, knowledge-generating, rational, factual, realistic, about the natural world, literal, truth-seeking, progressive. Its chief interests are both metaphysical (postulating an underlying ontology) and epistemological (seeking explanations through a particular methodology). A scientific theory is a theory about that ‘reality’. Philosophy of Science, on the other hand, offers theories about the scientific endeavour. A theory in the philosophy of science is a theory about science.

Science often introduces novel terminology or offers more precise definitions of familiar terms. The philosophy of science is often interested in the nature of these linguistic maneuvers. Recall the debate between scientific realists and anti-realists concerning the best understanding of ‘electron’. Realists tend to treat the term at face value, holding that it at least purports to refer to objectively and independently existing constituents of ‘material reality’, whereas some anti-realists have urged instead that the term is not straightforwardly referential – either the term is postulated for purely heuristic reasons, or else its meaning reduces to a complex set of observations. Scientific realists, then, tend to treat the language of science as a ‘map’ – its terms are purported to be representationally isometric with constituents of ‘material reality’, and a scientific theory is true, in turn, if the objects named by its terms really exist. Scientific Realism is a theory about the nature of scientific ontology (its terms refer to real things) and the nature of scientific methodology (it provides genuine knowledge – i.e., of the truth – of the real world).

There are, to be sure, many who hold a similar view about religion. Catholics (of the normatively orthodox type), for example, when asserting belief in ‘one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all there is, seen and unseen’, take their belief to be true in the sense that it literally corresponds to reality. An atheist, denying the existence of such an uncaused cause, will regard the stated belief as simply false (the purported entity fails to exist, and so ‘God’ fails to refer). One way of distinguishing between science and religion, on this model, is to hold that the referents of the terms – the ‘reality’ purporting to correspond to the claims – varies in each case. The subject matter of science is ‘material reality’, whereas for religion it might be thought of as ‘sacred reality’ (analogously chemistry is distinguished from, say, biology not on the basis of

difference in aim, but simply in subject matter). Religious discourse, on this view, is discourse about the nature of the supernatural world. In virtue of this, many of the adjectives which are also used to describe science would apply to religion (e.g., objective, literal, factual), though some of course might not (e.g., natural, reductive, etc.). Others will be contested. The categories expressed by all these adjectives, though often lumped together, do not stand or fall together. For example, there is no particular reason why an objective study of non-natural phenomenon is impossible, or why rational methods might not apply to subjective questions.¹⁶ Views on the applicability of this or that adjective for a given subject matter have to be individually argued for and not taken for granted.

[7<pp.>8]

Religions are often characterized in very different terms, starkly opposed to science, i.e., as subjective, traditional, cultural, conventional, faith-based, emotional, value-laden, mythical, supernatural, metaphorical, eternal, etc. This seemingly diametrically opposed attitude can also be illuminated by adherence to the same underlying ‘map’ metaphor. Whereas there is considerable diversity in views about the nature of ‘material reality’, few doubt its existence. In terms of religion, however, we find not only very diverse views of the nature of ‘sacred reality’, but serious doubt about its very existence. Atheists abound, but there are few a-scientists. This phenomenon perhaps goes a long way towards explaining the differences in the adjectives that are often applied to science and religion respectively; it is easy to understand the temptation behind this problematic inference: if literal truth is correspondence, and the purported referents of religious claims do not exist, then either religious claims are false or religious truth is non-literal. The alternative to castigating all religious discourse as ‘nonsense’, it would seem, would be to embrace a robustly conventionalist and subjectivist interpretation. With this, the other adjectives seem to naturally fall into place. Naive appeals to the map metaphor lie behind both the literalists (who view religious language as analogous to scientific language) and the non-literalists (who view it quite differently).¹⁷

Standard conceptions of science and religion both manifest themselves in realistic forms of discourse. The map metaphor is one important metaphor, among others, that expresses this (e.g., “fitting”, “pointing to”, etc.). On a realistic reading, the claims of science are about a ‘reality’ independent of human practices. Most have little doubt about its existence, despite some doubt about the nature of that ‘reality’. Thus, scientific claims are typically judged on the basis of verisimilitude – the more correspondence between the theory and the ‘reality’, the better the theory. As the ‘reality’ is independent of the theory, science is objective. Those who doubt the rationality of its method are thereby constrained to doubt the objectivity of science, and must either hold that its claims are false, or else that they must be interpreted in non-literal ways. Similarly, on a literal reading, the claims of a given religion appear to be about a ‘reality’ independent of the religious tradition. As only proponents of a given religious tradition are committed to believing this about its own particular claims, people outside of the religious tradition will be predisposed to view the claims either as false (the

likely view of members of other religions) or else as having a significance (meaning) not given in terms of correspondence to reality, but in subjective, cultural, conventional, ideological ways (as is prevalent in the academic study of religion).

So much for science and religion per se. Let us now turn to parallels between the Philosophy of Science and Religious Studies. There is a strong affinity between many of the black and white characterizations of science vs. religion noted above and the bifurcation between truth and use. On these superficial views, science is comparable to the ‘representational’ half (telling us the truth about reality) and religion to the ‘guidingness’ half (producing effects in our spiritual lives). Comparing the Philosophy of Science and Religious Studies in light of the issues we have been discussing allow us to point toward a middle ground. The representational dimension of religion is often discounted on the basis of claims that the referents of religious language do not actually exist: i.e., it is claimed that religious language is not true, as it does not correspond to real entities, and that it is not ‘scientific’, because its maps fail in their representational function. Once we leave behind a naive correspondence theory of truth, adopt a more robust model of scientific representation, and recognize the guiding function’s complex relation to representation, the road lies open to a more sophisticated account of religion and its study.

In Fig. 1, we see the parallels we have been tracing. A literal reading of (A) is in terms of a particular correspondence to (C). Many of the positions within the Philosophy of Science and in Religious Studies are demarcated over how they view the relation (B) between them.

Fig. 2 provides a more complicated model. Religious Studies, like Philosophy of Science, has meta-theoretical concerns in addition to its interest in first-order theorizing. Religious Studies and Philosophy of Science (D) ask questions not only about the nature of their subject matters (A) (which is, in part, understood by reference to its relation (B) to its subject matter (C)), but also about the nature of itself (D), often by offering theories about its own relation (E) to its subject matter (A).

Fig. 2 raises an important question alluded to above. Are the academic fields at (D) constrained to interpret their own claims in the same way that they interpret the claims of (A) – that is, must scholars of religion view their own theories as maps purporting to correspond to the ‘reality’ of religious systems? We argue that holding a naive correspondence theory of truth together with promising basic constraints on any account of meaning forces a positive answer to this question. As a result, two distinct, but interrelated, problems of considerable substance emerge. Clarifying this point necessitates a brief discussion of some technicalities.

First, we need to define more clearly just what is at stake when we talk of ‘meaning’ and ‘theories of meaning’. In its most technical form, following Davidson’s (1984a [1967]) ground breaking ‘Truth and Meaning’,¹⁸ a theory of meaning is a formal theory seeking to generate (correct) meaning-specifying theorems of the form ‘sentence *s* means that-*p*’, where ‘*s*’ is any possible sentence in a given language. For example, “Der Schnee ist weiss” means that snow is white’ would be a possible meaning-specifying theorem generated by a theory of

meaning. Typically, the aim of the theorist is to explicate the meaning of sentences from one language by means of sentences of another,

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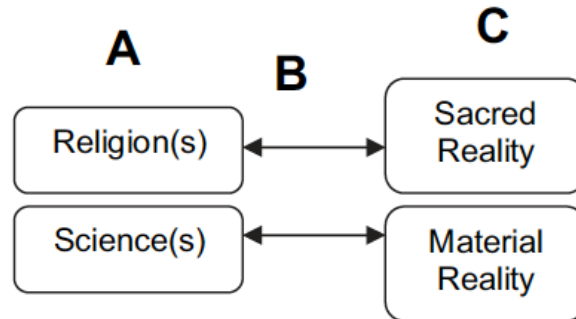


Fig. 1. The correspondence view of religion and science.

as in the example from German to English, and so ‘meaning’ and ‘translatability’ are closely aligned concepts. Davidson’s full proposal collapses any potential distinction – the meaning of a sentence is exhausted by its conditions of translatability.¹⁹

In terms of Davidson’s meta-theorizing about what the basic constraints must be on a theory of meaning, ‘meaning’ is a single univocal concept. The theorems delivered by such a theory presuppose this concept in its most basic and fundamental sense. A consequence of this is that there cannot be different ‘types’ of meaning: a theory that postulated different ‘types’ of meaning would be committed to there being different meanings of ‘meaning’, and hence the meaning of ‘meaning’ would be forever removed and ultimately inexplicable. Use, Davidson would say, presupposes meaning; we can use sentences in particular ways partly in virtue of the meaning that they bear.²⁰ He recognizes, however, the vagueness of the expression ‘means that’ in the proposed meaning-specifying theorems. He proposes it be replaced with an overtly precise concept – namely truth – and in that way he is able to avail himself of the technical apparatus of defining truth that Tarski (1944) had already established. In this way, the meaning-specifying theorems of the theory would take this form: ‘sentence *s* is true if and only if *p*’. His proposal for how a theory of meaning might actually be constructed, then, turns out to assume a truth-conditional form. However, he is adamant that the concept of truth in the theory plays a purely formal role and carries little metaphysical weight. In particular, it does not commit itself to a correspondence account of the truth-relation (whether naive or sophisticated). Truth, like meaning, is a fundamental concept within thought and theorizing, and is not explicated by reference to other, less fundamental, notions.²¹ In sum, for Davidson, there is only one meaning of ‘meaning’, and the issue of ‘truth’ plays a purely secondary and formal role.

Second, we need to go farther in clarifying the implications of this discussion of truth and meaning where different levels or orders of reference come into play. Tarski shows that (i) ‘truth’ must be understood as ‘truth-in-

language-L', where 'L' is a place-holder for particular languages (and hence there will be a unique definition of truth for each language) – i.e., there is no global or absolute notion of truth; and (ii) the definition of truth for a language L cannot be given in language L, but must rather be given in L's meta-language. In the previous example, the analogous meaning-specifying theorem: “‘Der Schnee ist weiss’ is true-in-German if and only if snow is white’ explicates the meaning of the (object language) German sentence ‘Der Schnee ist weiss’ in terms of the (meta-language) English sentence ‘Snow is white’. Thus, in this example, the predicate “truth-in-German” is defined in English. Failing to recognize these two constraints will leave any attempt to define truth open to the semantic paradoxes²² and, hence, be formally inadequate. In terms of the second constraint, the linguistic resources of the meta-language must be at least as rich as those of the object language – i.e., anything that can be said in the object language must be expressible (with suitable translation) in the meta-language, otherwise it could not guarantee that any sentence in the object language will be associated with the appropriate metalinguistic theorem. In other words, the meta-language must be capable of generating a sentence that (correctly) translates any sentence in the object language. A translation is correct, of course, if it preserves meaning. Thus, the meaning of the metalinguistic sentences which purport to translate the object language ones must be the same. The meaning of ‘meaning’, then, must be preserved across the levels of language. That is, the claims of a meta-language must be understood in the same way as the claims of the object language. But of course ‘truth’ cannot be defined for a meta-language in its own language, but only within another language – i.e., in a meta-meta-language. In the example, English cannot be used to define “truth-in-English”. Such a definition would have to be given in another language, say L_n . L_n is a meta-meta-language in that, if adequate, L_n would be suitable for defining both ‘truth-in-English’ (making it a meta-language) as well as ‘truth-in-German’ (as ‘truth-in-German’ is a predicate of English, and L_n is capable of specifying the meaning of any English sentence; this would make L_n a meta-language of a meta-language).²³ This result is perfectly general; a meta-meta-language must be capable of generating a sentence that correctly translates any sentence in the metalanguage (which potentially contains sentences synonymous with every possible claim in the original object language). Hence, the meaning of ‘meaning’ must be invariant between the meta-meta-language and the meta-language. This will guarantee transitivity: there must be sentences constructable in the meta-meta-language which agree in meaning to any sentence in the object language. These Davidsonian/Tarskian constraints on any theory of meaning may serve as the backdrop for evaluating theories of meaning.

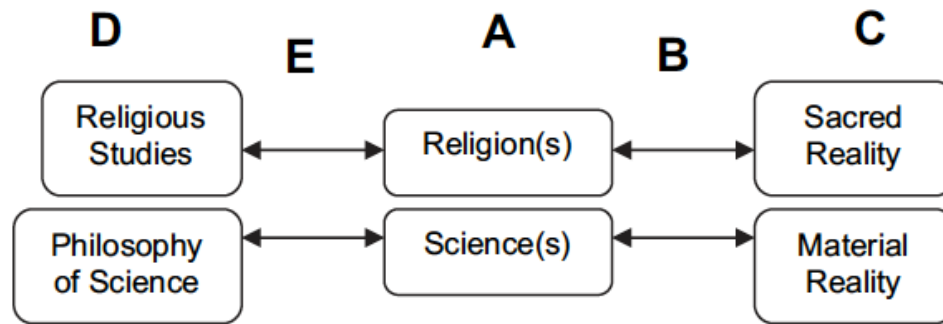


Fig. 2. The study of 'religion' and 'science'.

In other words, a series of philosophical problems with formally defining 'truth' led many philosophers to accept two sorts of limitations on the concept: there can be no universal definition of truth; and the resulting partial definitions need to be defined at a higher level and in a way that preserves meaning between these levels. Once again, this underlines that the issue of meaning is inseparable from the issue of truth.

Where does this leave us with respect to theories of religion? Above all, it means that accounts of truth and meaning need to apply in the same way to religious talk and to talk of religion, to insider discourse and to that of theorists of religion. Within the assumption of the Davidsonian/Tarskian constraints on any theory of meaning, the basic semantic constraints on both a first-order theory of a religion and a second-order theory of religion (not to mention the zero-order insider beliefs) must be the same. If the theorist uses a naive form of the correspondence view of truth – as is often manifested in the map metaphor – to the beliefs and practices of those within a given religious tradition in order to generate a theoretical understanding, then she must do the same in attempting to understand her own theory. The same goes for the meta-theorists who take these first-order theories as data. On the other hand, if a theorist takes the map metaphor as inappropriate for understanding her own second-order (or first-order) theory, then she must reject it as an inappropriate model for understanding the lower-level claims. As we alluded to above, this generates two substantial problems that increase the implausibility of the map metaphor as adequate for Religious Studies.

In the first place, the necessity of 'meaning' remaining uniform across levels of theory combined with a radical separation of 'map' (religion) and 'territory' (sacred reality) implies that religion is *sui generis*.²⁴ If we accept a naive correspondence theory of truth (or if for any other motive we exclusively emphasize the representational function of maps rather than the guiding function) then the truth of insider religious claims is defined in terms of their actually corresponding to sacred, *sui generis*, phenomena. But if transitivity holds, if meaning remains uniform as we move from insider views to the first-order theories of studies of religion and to the second- and higher-order theories of theory and meta-theory of religion, then each of these levels is also committed to holding the same view of truth as correspondence. This follows from the fact

that, on the 'map' metaphor, the map is not the territory; i.e., the 'territory' is independent of the map, as it is accuracy of representation that constitutes the sole criterion of 'goodness' in terms of truth. In other words, the map metaphor (where superficial appeals to it are rooted in the naive correspondence account of truth) smuggles in an answer to perhaps the greatest question in theories of religion.²⁵

Such a result seems clearly to beg the question in favour of those religious theorists who are committed to such a *sui generis* view over against the various forms of constructivism. The map metaphor, where its use embodies a naive correspondence theory of truth, is counterproductive because, once the constraints on 'meaning' are made clear, it presupposes what needs to be argued: that talk about religion and religious talk must make sense in the same way. This form of argument seems far too slender for the purposes of settling such long-standing and integral debates in Religious Studies and of understanding the important nuances of such views. In other words, simplistic appeals to the map metaphor take one of the most interesting and complex aspects of religion for granted (the relation between different levels of discourse); whereas more nuanced appeals to that metaphor (e.g., those that distinguish the representational and guiding functions of maps) help us to frame a series of hard questions about truth and meaning that theories of religion tend to avoid.

There is a hard lesson for constructionists here as well. The problem with constructionist views is that, unless they have an alternative account of truth and meaning, their rejection of the naive correspondence account, as it informs a superficial reading of the map metaphor, leaves a semantic vacuum that would call into question the very coherence of their claims. Insofar as they hold on to the map metaphor, privileging representation over use, theories of religion (including constructionisms) that discount insider views in order to propose radically different accounts of religious phenomena face two problems. First, they face the complicated task of specifying what precisely they mean by 'truth': what their territory is, what their map is, and how the two are related. Second, they run afoul of basic constraints on meaning mentioned. The move to discount insider views (while still holding on to the map metaphor) is either wrong, or it needs to be buttressed on a well-developed alternative account of meaning.

Our analysis suggests that many of the recent debates over constructionist vs. *sui generis* positions are missing the more basic issue. If the map metaphor, insofar as it embodies a naive correspondence view of truth, strongly implies that religion is *sui generis*, then the core issue is epistemological: those who support the *sui generis* view face the uphill battle of bolstering their conception of truth; and constructionists need to propose an alternative.

In the case of Philosophy of Science, this appears less problematic, as it is commonplace to think that science itself is to be conceived in *sui generis* terms – that Science Itself is a Platonic form, whereas science-as-practiced, with its cultural embedding, is at best a shadowy reflection of that ideal. Certainly, scientists *qua* scientists are predominately scientific realists, taking their theories at face value and

believing that they represent material reality. The scientific laity tends to be scientific realists as well, generally believing that science ‘proves’ things and tells us what the ‘facts’ are. And a good many (perhaps the majority) of philosophers are likewise scientific realists (though not so often using the naive correspondence account of truth). Indeed, the demarcation problem – the attempt to definitionally distinguish ‘science’ from ‘pseudo-science’ – only makes sense within such a context.²⁶

The second but related problem is whether the academic perspectives at (D) in Fig. 2 have any independent resources to study (A). Can Philosophy of Science claim to have knowledge of material reality using methods independent of those of science, drawing, for example, on perception, ontology and metaphysics? This prospect is implausible, nor do we know of any theorist advocating such a position.²⁷ However, in Religious Studies, scholars advocating *sui generis* and reductionist views both attempt to explain religious phenomena using concepts distinct from those of the religions they study, e.g., on the one hand, ‘the holy’ for Otto, ‘power’ for Van der Leeu, and ‘the sacred’ for Eliade, and, on the other, social and moral factors for functionalists or evolved cognitive mental constraints for cognitivists. This is a serious and sobering disanalogy. If Philosophy of Science, with its more robust view of representation, truth and meaning, recognizes its impotency to play any role in making sense of that which science purports to describe – a role it quite rightly recognizes rests predominately within science itself – then how does Religious Studies justify its attempt to make sense of religious phenomena using tools from outside of religion?

The two problems we just raised are distinct, but they combine to form a central dilemma. A superficial reading of the map metaphor forces scholars of religion to navigate between the Charybdis of naive correspondence and the Scylla of an alternative conception of truth. Given the strength of philosophical critiques against it, the first option threatens to drag the ship down with all hands on board. The second path involves traversing largely uncharted ground, and that journey would no doubt leave some casualties in its wake. Our hope is that recognizing this will motivate consideration of better theories of truth and meaning.

The view that religions are purely cultural constructs with no ‘reality’ behind them is a clear rejection of the *sui generis* conception of religion. In light of the two problems just discussed, this position can be explained in terms of (i) rejection of the naive correspondence account of truth and (ii) an inability to see any alternative account of truth. The *sui generis* view of religion, on the other hand, seems to rest on (i) the view that religious discourse and practice is meaningful and (ii) an inability to see any alternative account of truth. Exploring alternative conceptions of truth and meaning, views that are well developed in the philosophical literature, would presumably open up more fruitful ground. Specifically, theories of religion would seem well advised to seek more plausible accounts of truth and meaning, insofar as they hold both that religious discourse and practice are meaningful, and that, while there are at least some sort of objective points of comparison between different religions, they cannot be

understood independently of their social contexts. This would be consistent both with the emphasis on context that, in part, motivates constructionist theories and with the respect for insider views that motivates sui generis views.

Conclusion

The 'map' metaphor has played a role in both science and the Philosophy of Science (e.g., 'all theory may be regarded as a kind of map extended over space and time' (Polanyi, 1958, p.4)). However, two important extensions have emerged from the use of this metaphor in philosophy of science.

First, the metaphor of the map is often presented not simply in terms of a representation, raising issues of the correspondence between map and territory but in terms of the process of knowledge acquisition. That is, the map is not a representation of reality but a guide to research:

[T]he paradigm ... [in its role] as a vehicle for scientific theory ... functions by telling the scientist about the entities that nature does and does not contain and about the ways in which those entities behave. That information provides a map whose details are elucidated by mature scientific research. And since nature is too complex and varied to be explored at random, that map is as essential as observation and experiment to science's continuing development. Through the theories they embody, paradigms prove to be constitutive of the research activity. They are also, however, constitutive of science in other respects ... [P]aradigms provide scientists not only with a map but also with some of the directions essential for map-making. In learning a paradigm, the scientist acquires theory, methods, and standards together, usually in an inextricable mixture'. (Kuhn, 1996 [1962], p.109).

This more dynamic appeal to the map metaphor has the advantage of sidestepping some of the epistemological quandaries raised by the metaphor's simplistic use in theories of religion.

This emphasis on the guiding, not just the representational, function of the maps that believers and scholars draw has not been lacking in the study of religion, of course. Functionalist views, though problematic on many counts, took important steps down this path. However, much work in the study of religion fails to note the fundamental import of the semantic and epistemological issues that are being grappled with. The map metaphor along, read in terms of a naive correspondence view of truth, continues to inform the presuppositions of much work in the field.²⁸

Second, where epistemological issues are confronted in the context of this metaphor, philosophy of science has drawn a more nuanced lesson:

[11<pp.>12]

In the philosophy of science the metaphor that theories or models are maps of the natural world is often used to argue for a roughly deflationary account of representation, intended to allow for rapprochement between realists and anti-realists. Standard uses of the map metaphor assume that good maps represent in

a way compatible with a metaphysically modest but globally applicable realism The relationship between maps and what is mapped are various, some better described in realist terms, some in instrumentalist terms, and some in constructivist terms. The map metaphor should therefore lead us to deny that there is [any] single philosophical account of scientific representation. (Sismondo and Chrisman, 2001, p.338–339)

The map metaphor in theories of religion tends to prop up (and be symptomatic of) a naive correspondence theory of truth, even where the complexities of the metaphor raise complications regarding the implicit theory of representation. Theories of religion often hold onto the common-sense view even when the metaphor begins to unravel. In philosophy of science, however, the moral of the map metaphor's complexity has been taken to heart: representation is not as simple as the common-sense view of this metaphor suggests.

Religious Studies and, most crucially, theories of religion need to develop this insight by learning from philosophy's more robust analyses of representation, truth, and meaning. In our view, theories of religion face a difficult choice among three elements of an inconsistent triad: (i) Davidsonian/Tarskian constraints on meaning, (ii) the naive correspondence account of truth that informs the map metaphor, and (iii) a sui generis view of religion. One of the three must be abandoned. Dropping (i) is daunting and not easily achieved without a plausible alternative, so the more likely choice is over whether to reject (ii) or (iii), or both. All these options would necessitate scholars of religion to take advances in semantic theory more seriously than many have in the past.

The map metaphor need not be thrown out with the correspondence theory, but it needs to be interpreted with greater sophistication in light of three important lessons. First, the representational and guiding functions of maps are both important, and their relation to each other is complex and subtle. Second, the map metaphor is consistent with a range of views of representation, including overtly antirepresentationalist ones, holistic views that call into question the distinct nature of religious language, or pragmatic views that bracket the question of the existence of religious phenomena. Third, barring a well-developed argument to the contrary, these more nuanced understandings of representation, truth, and meaning apply in the same way at all three levels of the map/territory relation: between religious beliefs and religious phenomena; between scholars of religion and their subject matter; and between theorists of religion and the scholarly representations that they analyze.

Astute readers will have noted our own invocation of the map metaphor in the title of this article ("Charting."). We end by underlining that our goal has been less to represent the status of the map metaphor in the study of religion than to continue the process (begun by Lawson/McCauley, Godlove, Penner, Frankenberry, Jensen and others) of guiding theories of religion toward a more fruitful and responsible engagement with current theories of meaning.

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Notes

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¹ A number of works have been admirably attentive to the semantic dimensions of theory of religion, including Frankenberg and Penner (1999); Frankenberg (2002); Godlove (1989); Jensen (2003, 2004); Lawson and McCauley (1990). Highlighting the significance of these pioneering studies is a corollary of our main claim that the study of religion needs to pay more careful attention to issues of meaning.

² In what immediately follows, we discuss truth-conditional theories of meaning coupled with acceptance of a naive correspondence theory of truth. We again emphasize, though, that truth-conditional theories of meaning are quite independent of correspondence accounts of truth. Nonetheless, the association is common, even if implicit, and has contributed to many of the problems and issues we discuss below.

³ See, for example, Lawson and McCauley (1990, p. 5), who define a religious system as ‘a symbolic-cultural system of ritual acts accompanied by an extensive and largely shared conceptual scheme.’

⁴ Recent tendencies to reject the category of ‘belief’ as culturally relative or explanatorily impotent promise a very different approach. Lopez (1998, p.33) (see Asad, 1993; Bell, 2002, 2008), Jr., for example, claims that “Belief appears as a universal category because of the universalistic claims of the tradition in which it has become most central, Christianity”. Any such approach (almost certainly foregrounding ritual) would seem committed to setting out an alternative account of truth and meaning, something they have not done effectively to date. Godlove (2002, p.22) responds to this “new materialism” (as David Chidester labeled it) by arguing that “we are justified in seeing a piece of behavior as religious only when we can situate it in the right kind of discursive context”. BeDuhn (2000) discusses similar problems with historical interpretation.

⁵ Compare this to Smith’s ‘first operation’ of the ‘mapping enterprise’ quoted above (Smith, 1982, p. 9).

⁶ Compare this to the still popular view about scientific methodology that Hempel (1966) castigates as ‘narrow’ inductivism: (1) observe facts, (2) analyze and classify those facts, (3) inductively generalize from them, and (4) test the generalizations against further observation.

⁷ The problems we highlight are certainly not exhaustive of the difficulties the correspondence theory of truth faces, nor are we claiming that it is impossible that any of them be challenged or successfully overcome. Nonetheless, they form at least a core of formidable challenges to the formal adequacy of the model. Given these challenges, as far as any position has been abandoned in philosophy, this one has. Almost no philosopher working in these areas today accepts the naive account of truth. Correspondence theorists abound, to be sure, but they are almost universally of the 'sophisticated' variety.

⁸ Kolbel (2002) provides a very interesting, if ultimately not entirely successful, argument that the correspondence concept of truth commits one to holding that every truth-evaluable claim is related to an objective matter of fact, and that this is implausible with respect to at least statements of gustatory taste, morality, and probability. The solution to this 'excess objectivity', he argues, is to remove the criteria of objectivity from the conception of truth at least as applied to such claims (essentially, he offers a bifurcated notion of truth – classical 'correspondence to objective fact' for objective claims, and a revisionary 'correspondence to subjective fact' for subjective claims). This is tantamount to a rejection of the naive correspondence theory of truth.

⁹ See Gardiner (2000) for a critique of Putnam's 'model-theoretic' argument and its role in rejecting a metaphysical construal of truth. Davidson's project of 'radical interpretation' offers an interesting and important way around this problem, though it is not without problems as applied to the theory of religion (Gardiner and Engler, 2008).

¹⁰ Quine (especially 1960 and 1969) develops these ideas and arguments in a number of places. We view Davidson's project as potentially offering a way around this problem as well.

¹¹ See Blackburn and Simmons (1999) for a valuable collection of essays in this area.

¹² See Gardiner (2000) for a sustained examination and critique of the two most influential of these theorists, Dummett (1991) and Hilary Putnam (1981, 1983 [1977]).

¹³ Again, we note the independence of truth-conditional theories of meaning and correspondence accounts of truth. The main difference between truth-conditional and use-theories of meaning is whether there is an explanatory role for the concept of truth, however it is understood, in the account of meaning.

¹⁴ Much theorizing in contemporary metaethics can also be understood along these lines. We are currently working on another paper tracing some of these parallels.

¹⁵ In this section, we take 'science' to refer to the natural sciences. This is consistent with the themes from philosophy of science that we emphasize. Hence, it serves our purpose of showing that important similarities emerge, even given an overly stark contrast between the study of science and the study of religion. The recognition that the social sciences, and much of the study of religion, occupy a middle ground is consistent with our claim that greater reflexivity is required in considering the relations between distinct levels of discourse. For example, the philosophy of science, broadly conceived, would encompass aspects of the study of religion; at the same time, the study of religion, broadly conceived, would encompass aspects of the philosophy of science (e.g., ideological commitments).

¹⁶ Again, there is considerable debate in contemporary metaethics over just these points. For example, Moore argues that 'good' is an objective but non-natural property (Moore, 1968 [1903], pp. 1–36); and Blackburn (1984), argues that moral statements are essentially 'projections' of attitude, but that there is a logic strictly analogous to classical logic which governs their use and meaning. On comparable limitations of theoretical possibilities in the study of religion see Engler, 2004.

¹⁷ To be sure, there are many philosophers of science who have argued for non-literalist

understandings of science, and for pretty much the same reasons as we list here. Kuhn (1996 [1962]), for example, argues in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, that scientific ‘progress’ cannot correctly be thought of as a gradual increase of verisimilitude of successive theories, but rather that the history of science is punctuated by quite radical ‘paradigm shifts’ brought about often by non-rational means. So, there is no ‘progress’ in science, where ‘progress’ is increased correspondence between theory and reality, and so ‘truth’, ‘objectivity’, etc. are misapplied to the scientific endeavour. Feyerabend (1993 [1975]), in *Against Method*, argues that there is, in fact, no ‘rational method’ of science that has any claim to yielding knowledge of objective truth. The success of science is a ‘fairy tale’, and science is ‘much closer to myth’. Many sociologists of science, such as Karin Knorr-Cetina and Bruno Latour, point out that by observing how actual scientists actually go about their work, it will be discovered that they are driven primarily by conventional, cultural, and ideological forces, not by a ‘rational’ method which aims at truth. Longino (2001), in *The Fate of Knowledge*, quite nicely traces the ‘Rational–Social Dichotomy’ in the ways philosophers and sociologists have thought about science.

¹⁸ Readers familiar with Davidson must be careful to distinguish two distinct strands of his work. At earlier points of his career, he was concerned to understand what a theory of meaning must be like from a ‘formal’ point of view, i.e., the apparatus it must employ, the structure it must take, and the basic constraints it must conform to. A general discussion of this sort of meta-theorizing about meaning is what immediately follows in the paper. The formal constraints of a theory of meaning which he argues for, and which he regards as necessary and non-optional, potentially generate an indefinite number of particular theories of meaning for a given language. These theories are viewed as proposals for how to understand the sentences within a given language, and each must then be tested for ‘material’ adequacy, i.e., to ensure that the proposals they make conform to the correct meaning as understood by native speakers of the language. One key selling feature of Davidson’s approach is that these proposals can be tested empirically. Reflection on how the empirical testing will or must go constitutes the second strand of his work, and is where he argues for the need to interpret language holistically, and that the most promising empirical test will involve conditions implicit in ‘radical interpretation’. It is this second aspect of Davidson’s overall project that we have alluded to throughout this piece as providing alternative accounts to a truth-conditional account of meaning informed by the naive correspondence account of truth. See Lawson and McCauley (1990) for a foundational approach to applying a holistic theory of meaning to the study of religion.

¹⁹ It should be noted that, while we consider a Davidsonian account of semantics philosophical compelling, and believe that it has fruitful consequences for the theory of religion, it is far from obvious and faces a number of strong criticisms (thanks to an anonymous reviewer for clarifying this point). Nonetheless, for the purposes of this paper, we will, rather uncritically, assume its *prima facie* appeal in at least the sense of providing an example of how there are robust alternatives to traditional accounts of truth and meaning that seem to avoid the difficulties we are raising. In addition, a number of important theorists of religion have drawn on Davidson (e.g., Frankenberg, 2002; Godlove, 1989; Jensen, 2003, 2004). For critical discussions of work along these lines see Gardiner and Engler (2008) and Engler and Gardiner (2009).

²⁰ Perhaps the most perspicuous application of this insight is in Davidson’s (1984c [1978]) rejection of the notion of metaphorical ‘meaning’: metaphor is not a type of meaning which somehow stands apart from other, literal, types of meaning. All meaning is literal meaning, and metaphor is to be understood in terms of non-standard or unexpected uses of a phrase’s meaning. This has clear implications for theory of religion (Frankenberg, 2002; Gardiner and Engler, 2008).

²¹ This feature has profound implications for how a proposed theory of meaning might be assessed for adequacy. In trying to understand or interpret the speech of another – most strongly in the case where the interpreter speaks a different language from the speaker (which he calls cases of ‘radical interpretation’ following Quine’s notion of ‘radical translation’ (Quine, 1960)), the interpreter may construct a theory of meaning in the manner proposed. One advantage of Davidson’s proposal is that such theories of meaning are empirically testable. The interpreter

cannot test 's is true iff p' by determining if there is a one-to-one isometric correspondence between the terms of 's' and the constituents of the fact that-p. Rather, the interpreter tests it by seeing if the speaker assents to s when under the conditions that-p, and, in a sense, it is the interpreter herself who determines whether the conditions that-p obtain.

²² Most notably the liar's paradox: 'This sentence is false'.

²³ But again, L_n would be incapable of defining 'truth-in- L_n '.

²⁴ We take 'sui generis' to be an axiomatic stance to the effect that religious phenomena are best explained in specifically religious terms (see Pals, 1987). The relevant sense of 'specifically religious' generally places greater emphasis on the first word than the second: sui generis theories and explanations of religion tend to be defined in terms of contrast to types of explanation used for other phenomena (e.g., appeals to 'the sacred' vs. reduction to social function) rather than in terms of fidelity to insider discourses (e.g., taking religious claims, irreducibly, as adequate explanations in their own right).

²⁵ If we distinguish between two types of sui generis views – that which takes insider views as non-reducible and that which reduces insider views to 'the sacred', holding this to be non-reducible – then the former follows from the map metaphor, and the latter runs into problems with its non-uniform account of meaning.

²⁶ We are certainly not defending this conception of science, but are only showing how it is a natural extension of the 'map' metaphor.

²⁷ Save, perhaps, those at the origins of 'rationalism'. One reading of Descartes places empirical science on a purely a priori foundation, which could be understood somewhat along the lines that the techniques of metaphysics (properly constrained by a rationalistic and a prioristic epistemology) can yield knowledge of material reality. The problems with this approach are well known.

²⁸ As mentioned, there are a number of important but, in our view, under-appreciated exceptions – Lawson and McCauley, Godlove, Penner, Jensen, Frankenberry, etc. Part of our hope is that, by drawing attention to some of these issues, we can interest scholars of religion in this literature to a greater degree. To highlight one important theme from this work, the assumptions we discuss are comparable to what Godlove has called the "framework model", i.e., assuming a distinction between neutral content (the counterpart of 'territory') and organizing schema (the counterpart of 'map'). Godlove argues that this is "a near commonplace" in "recent religious studies literature," and he offers a number of compelling criticisms of that model (Godlove, 1989, p. 70). Penner (1999, p. 501–502; emphasis added) notes that the key element of "scheme" is its claim to represent "content", and he affirms the degree to which this model has informed theory of religion: "All theories of religions as world views, as a symbolic representation of the sacred, as ideograms of the numinous, as symbolisms of a transcendent reality, as models of and for reality, assume the scheme/content dualism. If there is any agreement about what religious are all about it is this – religions are alternative conceptual schemes, representations, of something". Penner similarly regards this widespread assumption as an error.